

The Tragedy of Fruitless Christianity, Part 2

Luke 8:13-14

So the first reason for fruitless Christianity has to do with this superficial enthusiasm. And at its heart, down deep at the root, there is the failure to go deep to self-examine, the failure to work out true repentance, the failure to grow deep in roots of knowledge, and loving, and trusting, and fearing God.

But there's a second reason for fruitless Christianity. A second reason here in the text in verse 14, which we might summarize as temporal distraction, temporal distraction. And at the root of this heart problem is the failure to expose and repent of idolatry. At the root of the, of temporal distraction, that ultimately chokes out all fruit bearing, at the root of that heart problem is the failure to expose and repent of idolatry, I suppose that's why the apostle John, at the very end of his letter, first letter said, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

Idols are so pernicious and so deceptive, and they're ubiquitous. John Calvin called the heart an Idol factory, just pumping out idols, pumping out idols, always something else to worship other than God. When God created us as human beings, he created us to be worshipers. It's in our DNA, we cannot help it spiritually, but to worship something. So that means if we're not worshipping God, we are worshipping an idol. So don't be fooled.

Even the staunchest atheist of our day is an idolater and you can be sure of this, that the more fervent the atheist, the more fanatical he is in his anti-supernatural religion, because it is a religion. In our day, in our time, as in Jesus' day, there are so many idols. Jesus puts them all very simply, briefly, and comprehensively into three categories.

Three kinds, look at Verse 14, Jesus explains this second picture of fruitless Christianity, he says, "As for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear but as they go on their way, they're choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life and their fruit does not mature." So unlike the rocky ground people, those, these people with weed infested hearts,

they are able to develop some depth of root and grow up into what appears on the surface anyway to be a healthy plant.

One commentator described these people who said, quote, "They have no objection to the doctrines and requirements of the gospel. They even want to believe and obey them. But they allow the things of the earth to get such a hold on their minds, that they leave no room for the word of God to work. And from this, it follows that no matter how many sermons they hear, they never seem to benefit from any of them. A weekly process of truth stifling goes on within, and they bring no fruit to perfection." End quote.

"As they go their way," Jesus says, "As they go their way." That refers to them living out their lives, they are choked as they live out their lives by the cares and riches and pleasures of life. The word for life here is a word *bios*. It's not the word *zoe*, the word *zoe* refers more to spiritual life. *Bios* refers more to the temporal issues of life. So we're talking here about temporal distractions, the distractions of this current, temporal world. And these are pictured in the parable as thorns, that strangle the life out of the good seed.

Three kinds of thorn bushes here. Three idolatrous roots producing these thorn bushes, which you can jot down in your notes as three sub-points. First, you've got the cares of life, the cares of life, which refers to an anxious preoccupation people have with subsistence, how to make a living, how to get the daily bread, the idolatry involved here is a worry over biological life, anxiety over survival.

Now typically, these are not the struggles of the wealthy. But of those with less means, those who are anxious about providing food, buying clothing, having shelter, paying rent, paying the mortgage. Often these people, these are people who get themselves into debt, to get through these little stresses and financial stresses and that gives them something else to fret over. Not people of great means. Although there are some people with means who can act just like this.

Verse 14, go back to Luke 8 and look at verse 14, there's a second temporal distraction in verse 14. And it's called the riches of life. The riches of life. The idolatry here at work is

the worship of money, of stuff. I like Jesus' word for it, he calls it uh, with an idle name, *mammon*, *mammonos* is the name he uses. The riches of life, it refers to a preoccu, occupation with worldly goods, with accumulating wealth, with buying property, success in business, and then with pride in stuff, and in business, and possessions, and all the rest.

There are so many who strive to get rich or get richer or stay rich. And rich isn't just about the money. It's about the reputation. It's about the success of the brand. It's about the success of the endeavor, the project, whatever it is, but it is a temporal distraction. It is a sinful pursuit, that may be eternally damning. That's always been the way of the world, hasn't it?

We can see it clearly in Luke's Gospel, Luke's Gospel is replete with warnings to the rich. He records many of the Lord's warnings, in the Sermon on the Mount we already saw Luke 6:24. "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation." Luke 12:13 to 21, just before the section I read there, Jesus told the parable of the rich fool, the man who was self-contented, and yet he was greedy for more. And so he tore

down his barns to build bigger barns, this guy's always about building projects, right?

So God said to him "Fool, this night your soul is required of you, and the things that you have prepared, whose will they be?" So the one who, "so is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." Man, let that be a epitaph on our tombstone. "He was rich, she was rich toward God." Or the well known story of the rich man and Lazarus another, another warning from our Lord, look, Luke sick 16:19-31. This is one of the most harrowing portrayals of hell in all the Bible.

And contrary to popular belief, it was the rich man, not the poor man Lazarus, it was the rich man who is in eternal torment and unrelenting anguish in the flames of Hades. Terrifying picture. Rich Young Ruler of Luke 18:18-24. After hearing Jesus demands for discipleship that he part from his riches and follow Christ, what did he do? He walked away from Jesus, but "he walked away very sad and sorrowful, for he was extremely rich." Striving for wealth is not only an eternally dangerous pursuit, one that tiptoes around the perimeter of a

deep and dark abyss. But chasing money we know from Scripture is also an utterly futile occupation in life.

Proverbs 23:4-5 tells us, "Do not toil to acquire wealth, be discerning enough to desist. When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings flying like an eagle toward heaven." Look, ask any Christian man or woman, those whom the Lord has blessed with means, with abilities and avenues in providential circumstances to make money. And there are those godly men and women who have the ability to make money and those Christians are a blessing to the church. But those wealthy, godly Christian people are going to be the first to tell you the precarious nature of wealth.

They will tell you about the folly of trusting in money, they will tell you about this Proverb I just quoted from Proverbs 23. And then they will illustrate that with anecdotes from their own life, how they too fell into the trap of loving money, trusting in money, and found it gone in a heartbeat. The stock market took one point or points of difference, and all of a sudden, they're wondering what to do. They learn to trust God,

not money. They learn to be generous and kind and give and give and give. Listen to those people.

Look to the Scripture and do not succumb to the love of money. And listen very carefully, you do not have to be wealthy, or have a large bank account in order to be tempted with this sin, to be tempted by the riches of life because sometimes it is the poorest of the world who are most enslaved to wealth. I got two words for you, Colorado lottery. Black Hawk, gambling, Las Vegas.

Well cares and riches are two of the temporal distractions that can reveal an idolatrous heart is, which is never going to produce lasting fruit. There's a third temporal distraction that can choke the good seed. And it's the pleasures of life, the pleasures of life, which are widely available actually, to rich and poor alike in our modern world. These are some of the most damning distractions, temporal distractions of all, what's the idol? The idol involved here is the self. Whatever keeps the self comfortable, whatever gives the self pleasure, whatever makes the self happy.

In a country that's founded on the right to pursue happiness. I'm afraid we got a lot of these kinds of idolaters around us. In fact, I would dare say that this is probably a sin that we have all been delivered from rich and poor alike. Because pleasures abound in the modern world. You do not need to be a millionaire any longer to get what you want, to stay entertained, to stay pleasurablely distracted. Sports, movies, restaurants, vacations, activities, tours, travel, television with 500 channels and soft comfortable couches to sit in.

So prevalent are the pleasures in our day that millions are ensnared, taken captive, enslaved to this form of idolatry. People today are so sufficiently contented and so wholly and completely distracted. They are utterly uninterested in the salvation of their eternal souls. They'd rather see what's next on Netflix. What are the pleasures? Well, there are, in, pleasures that are inherently sinful. Pleasures also that are not inherently sinful, but can become sinful by excessive indulgence.

Hendrickson puts it this way, he says "The pleasures of life are of two kinds, A: Those that are wrong in themselves drunkenness, drug addiction, gambling, sexual vice, etc. And B: Those that are wrong when a person overindulges in them, games, sports, entertainments, etc." Here we are in Colorado, right? In the summertime. This is the time of the year when we're all reminded of the incredible beauty of the country, the area we live in. Many of us take time to partake of that beauty and enjoy it. There's nothing wrong with that, at all. It's what the Lord gave it to us for.

Our state has long been a tourist destination. In fact, many people move to Colorado so they can live close to where they can take advantage of all the closer proximity to all those outdoor activities, whether it's in the mountains or in the plains and all year round. But how disappointing it is to see Christians, professing Christians, especially older, retired Christians, who buy into that satanic lie that retirement from work means the opportunity for self-indulgence. One last chance to check off all those bucket list items.

One last chance to soak up all the pleasures of this life before kicking the bucket and ascending to the sweet by and by, where they can't get any of that stuff. Too often they abandon the joyful duties and privileges of their Titus 2 roles in the church. Their final opportunities to evangelize unsaved family members and friends before entering heaven.

Many of them become absentee Christians, having abandoned their posts at church, having abandoned our Lord's Great Commission to give themselves over to the fleeting pleasures of the world. Some like Demas, they reveal in their older age that they have all along been in love with this present world. Remember Demas, according to 2 Timothy 4:10? He proved to be in love with this present world, Paul said, "Demas has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica."

He went where the action was, he went to the urban center where his heart would find fulfillment. And sadly, I watch Demases in the church, young and old alike, but especially sad in the older times, older years. Especially noticeable here in Colorado, people who desert the Lord's commission to make

disciples and they're gonna go check more stuff off their bucket lists. So tragically sad.

Three different kinds of thorn bushes here, the cares of life, the riches of life, the pleasures of life, but all three of these with the same entangling, strangling effect, they all prevent the growth to maturity of spiritual fruit. And it's a damning condition, beloved.

J.C. Ryle again, he puts this so well, and we would do well to hear and heed his warning. "The things of this life are one of the greatest dangers which beset a Christian's path. The money, the pleasures, the daily business of the world are so many traps to catch the soul. Thousands of things which in themselves are innocent become when followed to excess a little better than poison to the soul and a helping hand on the way to hell. Open sin is not the only thing that ruins the soul, in the middle of families, and as we follow our lawful callings, we must be on our guard. If we do not watch and pray, these temporal things may rob us of heaven and smother every sermon we hear." End quote. Every sermon, including this one.

And that's why, point three in your outline, there's only one end appointed for fruitless Christians, those who profess Christ, but bear no fruit originated by the Holy Spirit. Number three, the fate of fruitless Christianity, the fate of fruitless Christianity there in point three, turn over to John 15. John 15, and we'll close with this. John 15, this is the passage about the vine and the branches. And its imagery that goes back, way back to God's people as pictured as the Lord's vineyard. We see that actually in Isaiah chapter 5.

Love of wealth, riches, property, homes, love of pleasure, love of eye, the idolatry of self-indulgence, pursuit of self-fulfillment, all those same sins are there pictured in Isaiah 5 in prophetic, poetic language; those same sins brought judgment of God on unrepentant Israel in Judah. Assyria came in and carted off the northern army into exile, Babylon came in and carted off this southern kingdom of Judah into exile, ravaged the land, destroyed the land, and killed so many people, is a vivid picture of God's feelings and sentiment about fruitless Christianity.

And here in John 15, Jesus makes use of this same vineyard imagery, vines and branches and fruit, to remind his disciples about the importance of bearing fruit. Just as he's doing in the text we're going through in Luke 8. He's left the upper room with his disciples, he's near to his death. He's making his way to the site of his arrest, where Judas Iscariot who is the prototypical, professing disciple who bore zero fruit, he's about to betray Jesus into the hands of Jewish leaders, who are also fruitless religionists.

And as Jesus walks with his disciples on the way to that site, he wants to remind them of a few things, not the least of which in importance is the need to abide in him in order to bear much fruit. Look at John 15, verse 1, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

"Already you are clean, because of the word that I have spoken to you, abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the

branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." Stop there for a second.

The open secret about fruitlessness. The open secret about fruitfulness is that in order to bear fruit, we must remain in Christ. We must abide in Christ, you say for how long? To the end. Forever, vitally connected to him, just as a fruit bearing branch must remain vitally connected to the life-giving vine. Look at verse 2, though it says, "Every branch in Christ that does not bear fruit divi, divine vinedresser there takes it away." That's interesting. He takes it away.

You know what some of those commentators and exegetes and theologians who wanted to advocate for a carnal Christianity, I told you about at the beginning. You know what they used to say about that verse? Every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit, he lifts up. What? He's cutting 'em off? He's taking them away. How do I know that? Look down at verse 6. "If anyone does not abide in me," oh, that's the same people. "Anyone that doesn't abide in me." He is not lifted up, not lifted up to be cut off. Yeah, but "He's thrown away like a branch and he withers. The branches

are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned." Pretty clear, isn't it? And it's a harrowing reality.

Fruitless branches are cut off from their superficial, apparent attachment to the vine. Oh, yes, they may profess Christ. Oh, yes, they may come to church regularly. But they have no vital connection to the vine. You can see it in their lives. You can hear their speech. There's no vitality. There's no Christ-ness coming out of their lives.

There's no love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, produced by the Spirit coming out of their lives. They're cut off from that superficial attachment. They're cast away into the rubbish pile. And there they dry up completely, which just gets them ready for the only usefulness that they have, to be burned. To make a little heat before they turn into a pile of ash. Doesn't matter, Luke 8:13 that "They once heard the word have received it with joy, showing fast and eager growth on the outside."

It doesn't matter Luke 8:14, that they want showed signs of life, being somewhat rooted into the soil, sending up stock and branch perhaps even some green leafage. They don't bear lasting fruit if they're unproductive branches, those are as good as thorns to the vinedresser. They're stealing vitality from the true branches, so he cuts them off. He's pruning them off of the vine.

So look, don't be fooled by church attendance, beloved. Don't be fooled by verbal profession. Don't be fooled by enthusiasm, eagerness, emotion, religious activity. Those are not true and certain signs of true conversion, not in yourself and not in other people. What matters is a transformed life. What matters is a life that demonstrates the sanctifying power of the gospel and the increasing growth of Spirit produced fruit. Fruit, that by the way, genuine fruit that by the way, cannot be counterfeited. It can be mimicked for a time, but not counterfeited.

Only the Holy Spirit can produce true biblically defined love. True, biblically defined joy. True, biblically defined

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peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, only the Holy Spirit can produce that.