

# The Seed Is the Word of God

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>4</sup>And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, <sup>5</sup>“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. <sup>6</sup>And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. <sup>7</sup>And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. <sup>8</sup>And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.” As he said these things, he called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

<sup>9</sup>And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, <sup>10</sup>he said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’ <sup>11</sup>Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup>The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. <sup>13</sup>And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. <sup>14</sup>And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. <sup>15</sup>As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience. (Luke 8:4–15)

### From Last Week to this Week

- A. Last time, when we were in this text, it could be said that we dealt primarily with that phrase that ends Jesus’ discourse with the crowd there up in v. 8b: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”
  - 1. And I made the case that God has to move on a heart in a profound and fundamental way if we, fallen and spiritually deaf people that we are, are ever to have these kinds of ears that can hear—in the voice of the Son, the voice of almighty God.
    - a. Only sovereign grace can give me that!
- B. So we’ve dealt with this text now at a fundamental level, but there is so much more we can and should say here, and so we are going to give two more weeks to it.
  - 1. This morning’s agenda is simply to focus in on the word of God as seed. You see that there when Jesus begins to interpret this parable for His disciples: “The seed is the word of God” (v. 11b).
- C. This imagery is so rich with implications. I’ll give you three: (1) The Word of God Engenders the life of God; (2) The Word of God Gets under the Skin; and (3) The Word of God Develops Organically.

# (1) The Word of God Engenders the Life of God

## The Word Is the Gospel

- A. Before I can really flesh out this first implication, we need to get a better sense of what this “word of God” really is.
- B. You see, in *Luke-Acts*, this phrase comes to take on almost a technical meaning. Certainly, it can stand for the word of God in general, but we find that it comes to refer, in particular, to the gospel.
  - 1. There’s evidence of this even in the immediate context. For we know that Jesus is ultimately the Sower referred to here in His parable, and He’s been sowing the word of God among these crowds of people. But what in particular has His word to these people consisted of?
    - a. Well, v. 1 makes it plain: “He went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.”
- C. This seed that is the word of God, therefore, before it is anything else, is the gospel—the good news of the kingdom of God that has arrived in Jesus Christ, which, in its fullest form, is the good news of the Son crucified and raised for sinful people.
  - 1. The seed is the word and the word is the gospel.

## Of Seeds and Dynamite

- A. Now, what do I mean by the word of God “engenders” the life of God? I mean to say that the word of God, the gospel, carries within its sphere the very life and power of God and it is God’s means of delivering such things to us.
  - 1. It’s like a bomb. Or like a seed. You drop a seed into the soil and you might as well have dropped in a stick of dynamite. For soon it will erupt with life and growth, shooting roots downward, and stems upward, and branches outward.
- B. The word is the bombshell of God’s power, the courier of God’s grace, the vehicle of God’s energy. We receive it by faith. But in the exchange somehow the Spirit comes and regenerates and renews and revitalizes us.
  - 1. It’s a lot like Day 1 of creation. The earth is formless and void and there is darkness over the face of the deep . . . and then the word of God rings out: “Let there be light” (*Gen 1:3*)—and the Spirit meets that word in the air, as it were, and, in a moment, the universe erupts with light.
    - a. Well, that happens in our hearts as the gospel is preached and the Spirit falls (cf. *2 Cor 4:6*).

## What about Days 2 through 7?

- A. But let's be clear. The gospel is not just for Day 1 of our Christian lives. The gospel is for every single day thereafter.
- B. The concern in our text is bearing fruit, right? Well, the gospel as seed should serve as helpful corrective for us here. Often we think of beginning with the gospel and then bearing fruit in our own strength. The gospel starts, but I finish.
  - 1. But this isn't right. This line of thinking contradicts the image Jesus gives us here. The seed and the fruit compose an organic whole. The latter cannot be separated from the former. Genuine fruit can always trace itself back to the seed.
    - a. Therefore, if in all my concern for bearing fruit, I neglect the seed, I actually cut myself off from the very thing I need most. From the seed comes the roots, from the roots, the stem, and from the stem, the branches, and through the branches flow life that allows me to bear fruit. But it's all vitally connected.
- C. So if I care about bearing fruit in my life, I need to make sure I'm grounded in, rooted in, the gospel—the person and work of Jesus for me. Am I resting in Him, am I trusting that His work on the cross is enough, that His grace is sufficient?
  - 1. Am I, in the language of our text, “hold[ing] fast” to the word (v. 15)?! Because that's the only way to grow and yield a “hundredfold” (v. 8).

## Colossians 1

- A. This is the sort of thing Paul is writing to the Colossian church about. Listen to how he leverages this same metaphor: “<sup>3</sup>We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,<sup>4</sup> since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,<sup>5</sup> because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,<sup>6</sup> which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,<sup>7</sup> just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf<sup>8</sup> and has made known to us your love in the Spirit” (Col 1:3–8).
  - 1. The word of truth, the gospel of grace, is preached; the Spirit meets it with power; the words are heard, understood, believed, held fast to; and the fruit of love starts to hang from the branches of your life!
    - a. The fruit traced back to the root and seed of the gospel.
- B. Tim Keller speaks eloquently on this point: “We never ‘get beyond the gospel’ in our Christian life to something more ‘advanced.’ The gospel is not the first ‘step’ in a ‘stairway’ of truths, rather, it is more like the ‘hub’ in a ‘wheel’ of truth. The gospel is not just the A-B-C’s but the A-Z of Christianity. The gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make progress in the kingdom.

We are not justified by the gospel and then sanctified by obedience, but the gospel is the way we grow (Gal. 3:1-3) and are renewed (Col. 1:6). It is the solution to each problem, the key to each closed door, the power through every barrier (Rom. 1:16-17). It is very common in the church to think as follows. 'The gospel is for non-Christians. One needs it to be saved. But once saved, you grow through hard work and obedience.' But Col. 1:6 shows that this is a mistake. . . . '[H]ard work' that is not arising from and 'in line' with the gospel will not sanctify you—it will strangle you. All our problems come from a failure to apply the gospel. Thus when Paul left the Ephesians he committed them 'to the word of his grace, which can build you up' (Acts 20:32)."

## An Everyday Headline

- A. So what does this mean for us? It means that, before I attempt any change on my own, I come to Him. I listen again to the ancient heralds in the Scripture. I listen again to the good "old" news.
  - 1. It occurred to me that the gospel is the only news that ought to make the headlines every day. Almost everything else loses relevance in about a week—especially in our day of modern technology and information overload. But the gospel must be front page every day for me . . . or I won't bear fruit.
  
- B. This is why I preach the way that I do. If, after listening to me for a while now, you find yourself thinking: "Why do we always have to come back to the cross, why do we always, whatever text we're in make our way to the gospel? I know the gospel. I'm a Christian. Let's get on with it already."
  - 1. If that's where you're at, then you don't yet fully understand the gospel as you should. So I better double down and preach it all the more.
    - a. I'm with Luther on this: "The truth of the Gospel is the principle article of all Christian doctrine. . . . Most necessary is it that we know this article well, teach it to others, and beat it into their heads continually."
  
- C. The word of God, the gospel, engenders the life of God.

## (2) The Word of God Gets under the Skin

### Dead or Alive?

- A. But how exactly does the word of God, the gospel in particular, effect all of this in us? The picture of the seed again comes to help us here.
  - 1. The seed is placed inside, and does work there long before it ever comes out.
    - a. Well, in a similar way, the gospel gets under our skin, it is dropped like a seed in our hearts, it changes us there first, and then it starts to change what's going on in the branches.

- B. [Rom 7:4](#) is one of my most favorite verses in all the Bible. And it moves the discussion we had under the last point forward just a bit. You see, the Bible talks about two primary approaches we can take when it comes to bearing fruit.
1. One looks at self and the law of God and says: “I can do this. I can change. I can make this happen.” The other looks at Christ and His grace, and says: “I can’t do this, but He has done it for me and He can do it yet again little by little in me.”
  2. The one tackles growth by self-reliance and exertion. The other by reliance on Christ and grace.
  3. The one leads to death, the other to life.
- C. Let me read [v. 4](#) down thru [v. 6](#): “<sup>4</sup> Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. <sup>5</sup> For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. <sup>6</sup> But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.”
1. Try as we may, in our own strength, we only bear fruit for death. Even if we do “good” we end up with the Pharisee, looking down on those who couldn’t climb up to our level.
    - a. No! We only bear fruit for God if the gospel gets inside of us and changes us there. If we die with Christ and are raised up to new life in Him by His Spirit.

## Not by Exertion But by Regeneration

- A. So again, what does this mean for you? (I’ll just keep filling this out a bit more each time for us.)
1. Do you have those things you so wish you could change or grow in? Anxiety, fear of man, addiction, pride? “I’m a Christian, I should be over this!” What do you do? Where do you go?
    - a. Here’s what this text is saying: If you want to bear fruit for God, then stop it for a moment with all your effort, all your rules, all your strategies . . . and start here first with Jesus, with the gospel.
      - i. Die with Him, so that you can rise with Him. That’s the fundamental piece—the new nature and new identity that are given in Christ. That’s where true and abiding fruit comes from.
        - (1) You don’t keep beating yourself up with the law. You let Him resurrect you with His grace. You let the seed come in!
- B. Grace defines me. Grace fuels me. Grace keeps me. Grace changes me . . . from the inside-out.
1. The Christian gets his fruit not first by exertion, but by regeneration, by transformation. The word is not a bulldozer pushing at us from outside. It is a seed that gets under the skin, into the soil of our hearts, and changes us there!

- a. He convinces us of His love, so our anxiety starts to melt away.
  - b. He shows us true acceptance so the acceptance of man starts to lose importance to us.
  - c. He fills us with His Spirit, we experience pleasure with God in places our addictions—pornography, drink, drug, food—could never touch.
  - d. He opens our eyes to His holiness, and our utter sinfulness. I just can't think I'm all that when I'm standing at the foot of the cross. I'm humbled.
- C. The gospel engenders the life of God, and that life is transformational. I die and I rise with Christ. I am new.

### (3) The Word of God Develops Organically

#### Seed or Silver Bullet?

- A. All I've said up to this point about the word of God might lead us to expect great spectacle here and perhaps immediate results. We're talking about bombshells going off, seeds like dynamite, we're talking about power and transformation, from death to life.
- 1. Yes. But we are also talking about a long time.
- B. The word of God as seed helps us here too.
- 1. Jesus doesn't say that the word of God is a silver bullet. You receive it and all your problems with sin and suffering are gone.
    - a. He says it's a seed. And I don't know if you've ever tried to plant anything and actually grow your own food, but it takes a long time.
- C. To be sure, the word of God will sometimes produce flashy moments of power and authority and transformation.
- 1. But we ought not think it must always move so quickly, so impressively, so extravagantly. Indeed, it often does not. Often the change, the development, the growth is subtle and slow. It's organic, like the growth from seed to stem to branch to fruit.
- D. Your growth in Christ will be like the growth of the garden we planted in our backyard. I mentioned the cantaloupes last time. But did you catch a little detail I shared? We planted this in the early Spring, months ago, and we're just now, I said, getting to eat a few of them. The watermelons are still not ready.
- 1. The development from seed to fruit takes time.
- E. This again is what makes the bulldozer, the law, self-exertion so appealing. We feel like we can move things along a little quicker. Maybe, but we won't get real fruit in the end.

1. Do you guys buy organic? Have you noticed the difference, not just in price but in the product itself? A lot of times you pay more, sure, and you actually get less. At least on the face of it.
  - a. I look at the organic strawberries—they've got bugs and they're pretty small, a little grayish in color, and then I look at those inorganic ones, the ones that have been pumped with who knows what and covered with who knows what kinds of pesticides and things. But they're as red and shiny as your grandma's lipstick and as big as softballs, and they're like half the price.
  - b. Same thing with those rotisserie chickens, right? Costco chickens? You can't tell me they're organic. They're like the size of a small dog. That's kind of gross. But they're huge! Fill them with steroids or whatever and you get it faster, bigger, better. But it comes back to get you in the end.

## Patience for Each Other and for Ourselves

- A. It was this sort of thing that I was talking about with Megs the other day regarding our kids. One of them gets in trouble at school, and it's tempting to think: "That's it. Let's get out the bulldozer, let's break out the additives, the steroids, let's make this child obey."
- B. The law can get conformity for a little while. You can shame them and get them to behave. You can scold them and get them to behave. You can punish them and get them to behave. You can incentivize them and get them to behave.
  1. Or you can preach the gospel to them and start working on their hearts.
- C. This doesn't mean we don't have rules, or rewards. But it does mean that whatever we do we do it all in light of the cross, we do it all in an atmosphere of grace.
  1. If they sin we lead them to the God who so loved them He died to forgive and help them change. If they do good, we teach them to thank the God who's grace is at work in their little hearts.
    - a. And it's slow going folks. But grace will win the race in the end. So we're just sowing seed, waiting on God for the harvest.
- D. And you know this holds true not just for those in your life you hope to influence for the gospel, it holds true for you as well! You might not grow as fast as you'd wish. But that's not a reason to condemn yourself, scold yourself, shame yourself. It's a reason to run to the cross . . . again.
  1. I think all of this is at least part of what is implied in the way Jesus ends our text there in v. 15: "As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience."
    - a. Isn't that a fitting way to close all this?! "Patience." "Stay with the seed. Keep trusting in grace. Don't settle for quick-fixes, silver bullets. Bearing fruit takes time. It takes patience."