

November 6, 2016

I Want to Know Jesus

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."

Philippians 3:10-11

"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for awhile, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop."

Luke 8:1-15

Sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, with others can be a tough job. In fact it is so daunting that many never really do share the good news. Among the most common reasons for our failure to share is, I think, that we fear the outcome. We fear that if we don't share the gospel correctly then souls may be lost. I have fallen into this trap myself and I have known many who have succumbed to it as well.

Jesus tells us that, as believers, we are *"...the light of the world..."* and the *"...salt of the earth..."* (Matthew 5:13-16) What he really wants us to understand, I believe, is that we who believe in the good news of Jesus Christ, I mean really and truly believe, will have to share that good news with others.

In telling the parable of the sower that we are considering today, our Master wants us to understand two different aspects of sharing the good news with others. First, obviously we need to share the good news. Nothing can happen if we don't share what we know. But the second aspect of this message is for those who receive the word. While we are responsible to share the story of Jesus, we are not responsible for what those who hear it do with it.

Those who receive the good news of Jesus will, our Lord teaches, fall into one of four distinct categories. The first category are those who hear about Jesus, but chose to reject him. Like seed falling on a sidewalk, the message just bounces off. Those who have such hard hearts will ultimately be accountable for their condition.

The second category of those who hear about salvation through grace are like, our Master teaches, seed falling on rocky ground. The seed will probably start to grow, but because it can put down no root, when conditions get tough, it dies. A lot of those who hear the gospel we share are like rocky ground. They can be excited about what they hear and even respond to it, but in the end they don't last.

The third category are those who hear the word of God and accept it and it begins to grow in them. These folks however, are like so many, trying to live in two worlds at the same time. They want to follow Jesus, but they struggle to let go of the things of this world, and so while they are believers they never really mature.

The final category of those who receive the gospel are generally fewer in number, but their lives are deeply and irreversably transformed by their experience. Like the woman at the well in



John 4 or like the Apostle Paul, they receive the message of salvation and let it penetrate deep into them. They are never the same after they have accepted the salvation that Jesus offers. These are the heroes of faith who lay down their lives for Jesus day in and day out and change their world because God can work through them.

As those who share the gospel with others, we are accountable for the sharing; for getting the seed out there. We are not accountable for what happens next. We need to remember that. Those who receive the good news of Jesus are personally and individually responsible for what they do with it. If I let the gospel deep into my heart it will transform me. If I keep it only on the surface, I will either shrivel when trials come or, at the very least, never mature.

So, Jesus would ask us two questions in this parable, I think. Are we sowing the seed; are we sharing his gospel with a lost world? And, what can of soil are we? Are we hard hearted and rejecting? Are we shallow and barely committed? Are we trying to live in two worlds at the same time? Or are we open to the transforming power of Jesus?