

# Parable of the Sower

by John Nelson Darby

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*The sermon explores the parable of the sower, highlighting the three reasons for unfruitfulness and the role of the Father in purging the branches to bring forth more fruit.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 13:19, Mark 4:19, John 15:1

**Topics:** "Fruitfulness in Christ", "The Condition of the Heart"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on the Parable of the Sower, illustrating the various responses to God's word based on the condition of the heart. He emphasizes that the natural heart is resistant to divine truth, likening it to hard ground where the seed cannot take root. Darby explains that without God's intervention, the seed of the word is easily snatched away by Satan or choked by worldly distractions. He concludes by affirming that true fruitfulness comes from being rooted in Christ, as God actively purges and nurtures the believer to produce abundant fruit. The sermon calls for self-examination and a desire for God's purging work in our lives.

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## Transcript

### PARABLE OF THE SOWER

#### MATTHEW 13

We have here three reasons why the seed of God's testimony concerning Christ is unproductive, described in the character and circumstances ; first, of those who hear by the wayside the hard rock, and the beaten path in which Satan ever watches to catch away that which is sown in the heart. In this he is compared to the fowls of the air, which immediately devour th scattered seed that remains on the surface of the earth.

Dear friends, what do we learn from this ? That there is nothing in the natural heart of man to afford root for divine truth. No, everything within us is entirely dissimilar to God and therefore to everything that is like Him ; and hence we must naturally hate and reject that testimony concerning Himself, which He has given in His word. The Word signifies Christ, through whom alone God is seen and known by sinful man, I say, dear friends, there is nothing whatever in the natural heart of man to receive God's revelation of Christ as a Saviour; therefore he ever must and will reject it, till God Himself imparts that vivifying power through which alone Christ is seen and valued. Everything in our hearts (I now speak of what we are naturally) is unlike God, as much unlike Him as sin is to holiness ; and therefore we cannot admit Christ into our hearts

any more than the Jews could abide Him in the world.

Dear friends, I say, By nature we are nothing but sin. Man might consider us amiable, but everything that is not exactly like God He rejects and abhors ; and, dear friends, when He looks into our hearts, what does He see there ? Everything, I say, that is the very opposite to Himself. Can a revelation from Him, can anything of which He approves, be received for a while in this state ? No, everything within us must dislike it, and therefore I say, until God Himself imparts power to receive Christ, our hearts will still remain the hard beaten path trodden by the devil, who will always destroy the seed which is there sown (as described in verse 19 of this chapter), " when any one heareth the word of the kingdom and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart." From this dear friends, we learn that God alone can give the seed of the word root within us, which, as the power of God, Satan cannot destroy. Observe, it is true and real seed that perishes after it was sown, not a false testimony, not something like it, which yet differs from it. It is truth, God's testimony concerning Christ, that is received in the natural heart and mind ; but unless God Himself give it root there, it lies like seed scattered on the surface of the earth, and is immediately caught away by Satan.

A second reason for the destruction of this seed is given us in the description of those who received it as on " stony places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth : and when the sun was up, they were scorched ; and because they had no root they withered away." Nothing whatever to afford root for it in the natural heart. Here the seed is not immediately destroyed by Satan, it endureth for a while. Natural feelings and dispositions give it influence : but observe, dear friends, it is nature still that which is unlike God-what is entirely opposed to Him ; and therefore the seed sown in such a heart cannot take root, and must wither away. Seed on stony ground might have some earth, grow, and produce a flower as beautiful as any that has root. But let a scorching sun or unfavourable weather affect it, and it will soon wither. Thus, dear friends, can the natural man receive the word by the exercise of his intellect, and have his natural affections so influenced by it as for a while to resemble those in whom the seed has a divine root.

I say, dear friends, the intellect and affections of the natural man, according to his particular disposition, whether more influenced by his understanding or feelings, may, for a while, be so moved by divine truth as to cause him to resemble those who receive the seed into good ground-no apparent difference between them. I speak of what they are in our sight. They rejoice in Christ ; they profess to love Him, and are outwardly separated from the world ; they present fruits so like those of God's planting, that I say to human observation there appears no difference between them, but they have no root, and soon wither away. The seed forthwith sprung up: why ? Because it had no deepness of earth, no solemn views, no serious sense of their past alienation from God and present distance from fellowship with Him. God can, and in some does, enable His people to rejoice in Christ with exceeding great joy, when they first see and receive Him. But these instances are few, and usually not followed by such good fruit as is seen in those who receive the word with strong affections of heart and mind at a sense of their past transgressions, the dissimilarity of their past lives to everything that was like God, and therefore to everything that He liked, and at their present distance from that fellowship with God, to which they are admitted through Christ.

Those who receive the seed, as in stony places, know nothing of this ; they have no apprehension of the glory of Christ ; no fellowship with Him through the Spirit; no communion with God : the seed has no root whatever within them, and therefore, though it endureth for a while, it must and will wither away. Why ? It is declared in verse 21 of this chapter, " When tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by-and-by he is offended." All is well with such as receive the word with joy, but have no root, while they

live at ease in the world. They produce fruit as fair and promising as any that is seen in the church ; but when they are exposed to worldly loss and persecution for their profession of Christ, when trials and afflictions and the cross meet them in their path, they are offended. These are the scorching sun which withers the seed and all its fruits. It has no root which could assimilate the heart and mind to the mind and will of God, and hence they must prefer all that nature loves and God hates, to a knowledge of Him through Christ, and all the glories of His kingdom. This seed was soon received, had no root, and when tribulation and persecution arose, soon perished. This, I say, dear friends, ever must and will be the case where the seed is not planted and rooted by divine Power - a power entirely opposed to everything which is naturally within us. Unless God Himself give us deepness of earth, by leading us into a knowledge of what we are, and what He is, and an apprehension of the glory of Christ, the seed sown in our hearts will wither away ; there are things which are too deep for the sun of the world to reach and affect; without them we cannot endure. In obeying Christ, He may require us to act as though we hated father, and mother, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and our own life also ; and unless prepared for the sacrifice, He declares we cannot be His disciples. How can he be prepared for this, who loves nothing but sin and the present world? and therefore, dear friends, I again say, that unless God Himself plant and root the word of His truth within us by a power that assimilates us to Himself, we cannot endure or forsake all that He requires of us as followers of Christ and as His children called to communion and fellowship with Himself.

We proceed to the third cause, why the seed is unfruitful. "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up and choked them." What are these thorns ? They are particular] described in Mark 4 : 19: " And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful." Observe dear friends, the lusts of other things, not only the cares of this world, but the lusts of other things, are equally effectual in destroying it. What are these other things ? " Other " is here contrasted with everything of which the word testifies: it signifies everything but the word, all that is not the word - to be plainer, all that is not Christ. Yes, dear friends, the word, when described as choked, signifies the testimony concerning Christ; but Christ Himself is the word presented to us in this testimony. To reveal Christ, to bring us into fellowship with Him, to form Him within us, is God's purpose when He plants in us the seed of divine truth ; and therefore, dear friends, I again say, the lusts of other things signify anything and everything but Christ. No matter what it is, if the natural heart loves it, desires it, finds pleasure in it, it is a lust that chokes the seed.

" All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, are not of the Father." To human sight it may assume a very pleasing appearance, what is called amiable, or it may assume the form of lawful duties ; but if these proceed from nature, if nature feels ease and satisfaction in them, they are not Christ, they are opposed to Him, and as certainly choke the seed and prevent any fruit from it, as the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, or the most evil dispositions which we condemn. Everything that is not the fruit of the Spirit is flesh. The Spirit reveals Christ, and forms Him in the heart, and therefore everything but Christ is among the lusts of the flesh. All but Christ are the lusts described in Galatians 5, in which it is said, " the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other." Christ and nature are entirely contrary to each other, for nature is the flesh and its lusts, and it is declared in Romans 8, " If ye live after the flesh ye shall die, but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." I again say, that what the natural man calls his lawful duties are among his lusts which choke the seed of the word; they proceed from nature, they serve and please it a nature which is unlike God and Christ, and therefore what they must hate.

The Christian has lawful duties to perform, duties to parents and children, and other relations, and the Spirit of God will teach him to discover and fulfil them. These duties may then be called Christ, for they proceed from Christ living in him, are done in obedience to Him, and are the effects of His wisdom and power. I again say, everything but Christ is the thorns that choke the seed and render it unfruitful. It may assume the appearance of what is called amiable, or it might appear unamiable, it is seen in both forms, but I again say; everything within us and done by us which is not Christ, are the lusts of other things described in Mark 4; and are the thorns which choke the seed and prevent its fruitfulness, as much as any outward wickedness that is generally condemned. Here, dear friends, are the three reasons why the seed of the word is unfruitful: Satan's power; the natural enmity of our heart to God, to all that He loves and is like Him ; and the influence of things seen and temporal-usually and justly described as the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

We shall now notice the seed falling into good ground, in which it brings forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirtyfold. If all that is in the natural heart hates and rejects the word, why is it thus fruitful ? Our Lord Himself informs us, as declared in the beginning of John 15, " I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman." Here, dear friends, is the reason why the seed has a root in any heart and produces fruit. Such is God's value and love for all the branches of the true vine, that He Himself condescends to be their husbandman, first, to impart to them that power by which the seed has root and grows, and when it becomes a branch in Christ to purge it that it may bring forth more fruit. This power, as proceeding from Himself, is like God, and loves everything that He approves ; hence it is the very opposite of all that is in the natural heart-it brings into fellowship with Christ. Christ lives in and through those who experience this power, for, as we read in I Corinthians 6, " He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit " ; and according to their fellowship with Christ, and their separation from everything that is not Him, they bring forth fruit, thirty, sixty, or an hundredfold.

That the vivifying power of the Father is engaged, when the seed takes root in the heart, is declared in two passages of Scripture, to which I shall direct your attention : James 1 : 18, " Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures " ; and also in I Peter 1 : 23 : " Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." Here, you perceive that it is the creating vivifying power of God that provides a root in the heart of man through which the seed abides there. " Begotten," " born again " ; a new birth by almighty power is needful, and effected in every heart where the seed has root. The resurrection life that is in Christ is imparted to all for whom He died. With Him they live again, arise, ascend, and sit in heavenly places ; they are rooted and built up in Him; He dwelleth in their hearts ; because He lives, they shall live also. The seed must remain in them, but He Himself declared, " Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up."

I again direct your attention to His words in John 15. "Every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit." Dear brethren, though we have fellowship with Christ, and sit with Him in heavenly places, our earthly nature is still in a defiling world. The world and Satan act on this nature ; these and its own sin (for it is still enmity to God and all that He loves) are continually drawing the believer to dispositions and objects that defile the conscience, hide from him the glory of Christ, and hinder the blessedness of fellowship with Him and communion with the Father. How is their influence prevented ? The Father purges every branch in the true vine. While the flesh lusts against the Spirit, the Spirit acts against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other. The Spirit Himself directs the believer to everything opposed to the flesh, it fills him with communion and earnest desires to enjoy his fellowship

with Christ and the Father: Satan, the world, and nature work against this. How is the flesh subdued that God's children may enjoy their precious liberty ? Precisely in this way: the Father purgeth them that they may bring forth more fruit. He sends afflictions and trials, to increase their separation from the present world, and to weaken the sin that works in their members ; then that word within them, which is Christ, has dominion, and by Him they bring forth more fruit. Thus does the Father purge every branch in the vine. He ploughs up their hearts to remove from them everything that prevents their fruitfulness ; He suits the affliction to the particular need for it, that it might root out of their hearts the lust of other things which tends to choke the seed. The other things, as I have said, are all and everything which is not Christ. Everything but Christ prevents our fruitfulness, the least contact with the world (for who can touch pitch and not be defiled ?) everything nature desires and loves. These causes destroy not the seed where God has given it root, for it is the incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever ; but, dear friends, they are the reason why we bring forth fruit, some thirty, some sixty fold, instead of that hundredfold which affords such blessedness.

I say again, the Father purgeth every branch in the true vine, that it may bring forth more fruit. Dear friends, let us notice His love and condescension in this ; just think what we are, and what He is; we, such guilty, weak, miserable sinners, and He so exalted and glorious, and yet He condescends to serve us! Yes, to serve us, for surely He does this when He undertakes and fulfils a service so important as purging us that we may bring forth more fruit. Such, I say, is His love for the vine and its branches, that He is their husbandman! Such are His purposes concerning all whom He gave to Christ, and are one in Him, that He is continually purging them from the influence of nature, and the world, and the power of Satan, who works through both; and again I notice His wonderful love and condescension in rendering them this service.

Dear friends, how are you affected by knowing that the Father will purge you, that you may bring forth more fruit ? - you from everything that nature loves ?-from all that assimilates you to the world ? Can you say that you desire this by whatever means He is pleased to use ? Since Christ Himself was not of this world, when He chose entire dissimilarity to it, God cannot suffer His people to be assimilated to it; no, He will purge them to draw them altogether from it, and then will they bring forth more fruit. But, I say, how are your minds affected by this ? Can you say that you desire to be thus purged ; that you love to have your hearts ploughed up, that God might remove from them everything that prevents you bringing forth fruit an hundredfold, everything that is not Christ and fellowship with Him ? Are you pleased with every trial and affliction, however painful to nature, that subdues nature, draws you from the world, assimilates you to God and to Christ, and raises you to the glory and blessedness of fellowship with them ? I inquire not, does nature love it ? This cannot be, because the trial is sent to mortify and subdue nature, and, therefore, must be painful. It is, and must be, as described in Hebrews 12: " Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous ; nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby." And observe the apostle's reasoning in the preceding verses, " If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not ? Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live ? For they verily, for a few days, chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness."

Dear friends, does this reasoning reconcile you to everything by which the Father purges you, that you might bring forth more fruit ? I say, I am not inquiring, does nature love it ? but I ask, does faith approve of it ? does faith desire it ? does the Spirit, who is opposed to all that opposes Christ, lead you to present

your hearts unto God, that He might plough them up and purge them, ready and thankful for anything and everything by which He will prepare you to bring forth fruit an hundredfold ? The Father is the husbandman who waits on you, that He might thus serve you. He ploughs, He waters, He purges every branch in Christ. Let us, I again say, admire and adore His love and condescension in this, and yield our hearts to Him with gratitude and submission, that we may experience His power in purging us, that we might bring forth more fruit.

To you who are strangers to this power, I address a few words. To you in whom the word of God has not yet taken root, I present Christ as a Saviour. Your sins are between you and the Father. Until these are removed, you cannot have any communion with Him. Christ can remove your sins, and present His blood in their place. Believe in Him, and He will do this ; then you will have fellowship with Christ and communion with God, and bring forth fruit unto Him! The Lord direct your hearts to this! May He reveal Christ to all among us who may not yet know Him! The Lord bless His word to all who have heard it! The Lord bless it to all of us, and to His name be praise and glory. Amen.

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