

(Youth Bible School 2007) the Stony Ground Hearer

by Mose Stoltzfus

Mose Stoltzfus explores the concept of the stony ground hearer, emphasizing the importance of true conversion, repentance, and spiritual growth in the Christian life.

Duration: 1:20:38

Scripture: Psalm 1:1-3, Matthew 13:5, Matthew 13:20-23, Mark 4:5-6, Luke 8:13

Topics: "Heart Belief", "Public Confession"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of being honest before God and men. He shares a story about a young African man who instructs another person on how to become a Christian, using the phrase 'repent, believe, and preach the gospel.' The speaker is intrigued by this and later discovers that the young man got this phrase from Romans 10:9-10. The speaker emphasizes the need to not only believe in Jesus in our hearts but also to confess Him with our mouths. He suggests that if we are unwilling to bear testimony of our experience with the Lord, we may be like the stony ground hearers mentioned in the Bible.

Transcript

Hello, this is Brother Denny. Welcome to Charity Ministries. Our desire is that your life would be blessed and changed by this message.

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These messages are offered to all without charge by the freewill offerings of God's people. A special thank you to all who support this ministry. Greetings again tonight in the precious name of the Lord Jesus.

Good to see all your faces and hear your voices already increasing and lifting up and singing. I can tell a difference tonight. And that's normally the way it goes in Bible school.

Somehow we need to take a few days to kind of get rid of the cobwebs from home and not being enough involved in spiritual fellowship and activity. And we get in and the Word of God penetrates the heart and

the next thing we know our singing increases quite a bit. That's a blessing.

Well, we thank God for this Tuesday night, the opportunity we have to gather again here this evening for another message from God's Word. Shall we reverently pray before God? Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, we come to you in thanksgiving and honor and praise and blessing unto your most holy, holy name. Thank you, Father, for saving us from a life of sin.

Thank you for the plan of salvation and redemption that is given to us through Christ Jesus who went to Calvary's cross, shed his blood there for the remission of sins. Thank you for the resurrection and that resurrection power is available today, yet whosoever will lay hold of it by faith to overcome sin, the world and the devil. And I pray to your God this evening once again, give me grace in my words to make plain the way of God, to expound the scriptures on the authority of truth by the Holy Ghost, Lord.

The power of the Holy Ghost would come upon us and help us to plainly make known the scriptures according to truth. Thank you again for each student that you have with us this year and also all the visitors who have come our way this evening and those that may be listening from a distance by way of the telephone. I do pray God touch the hearts of all those that are seeking and searching for truth and may we find that which is so graciously promised to us according to the word of God.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Let us turn our Bibles back to our text in Matthew chapter 13.

Matthew chapter 13 again. We are going to continue to look at this text for another message here tonight. And tonight our message is entitled, The Stony Ground Hearer.

The Stony Ground Hearer. Matthew 13. We have again repeating the scripture.

I won't read all of chapter 13 again as I did last night through verse 23, but just going back to verse 5. Chapter 13, verse 5, Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth. And forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth. No deepness of earth.

And when the sun was up, they were scorched. And because they had no root, they withered away. The interpretation of the Lord Jesus over in verse 20, But he that receiveth the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it.

Yet hath he not rooted himself, but doeth for a while, then or for when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, by and by he is offended. The stony ground hearer. And it has been a consternation and I must say at times a frustration for me throughout my ministry and especially in counseling people through the years, how to determine whether an individual was converted or not.

And I know that I speak also likewise for many other counselors and ministers who have battled this same battle in an amazing way that just, you know, there is just not enough of evidence many times to know what to say or how to judge the matter. And you don't know whether the individual has light that has come into the soul or whether there has been a new birth or a conversion and the individual is just young and weak and needs the growing grace and wisdom and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That has been a battle and still is in my life as I spend time talking to young people and I am sure it is a battle for many of you or has been likewise.

Whether you are a personal worker or maybe even you are sitting here tonight and that answer is still not answered in your very life. Now it is not my desire to be a cloud to you tonight or a discouragement and to

undo a true commitment or a true conversion experience in your heart and life. And I hope I can make this plain enough that you will be able to determine very clearly at the end as to which side of a line you happen to fall in.

As I know that many of you are young and you are just beginning to walk and to live out the Christian life and I want to tell you from the onset here, we do not expect perfection in the Christian life at birth. Just like when a baby is born and it can't walk very well yet and wobbles and stumbles and falls sometimes in the natural life, yet the life is there and the birth is there but the maturity and the exercise of itself has not come to fruition to the point where it can walk straight and talk clear and be able to move about in a very mature manner. And we have the same thing in the Christian life.

And if you are only born again six months ago, a year ago, we do not expect full maturity or perfection, but we do expect life and the evidence of it in your experience. If there is no life there and no evidence of it and no fruit of it, you surely should not blame us for having the right to question where you are and to help you to a deeper experience and a real experience with God. But a questionable conversion is a major, major issue today.

A questionable and doubtful conversion. And the reason we often blame is, of course, the evangelical world and the blame is somewhat on them because they have given us what we often call easy believism. And I especially remember in my time as a young man of the whole Billy Graham crusade type of thing, you know, where I think once in my teenage years I got to watch it at a neighbor's television and, you know, they had this football stadium just filled with people and Billy, I thought, preached a pretty good message, you know, on accepting Christ as your personal Savior.

And then he would give the invitation and the masses would come out of the bleachers and come down or sign the decision card, get a little packet of information or literature and would send on his way. And it was awesome, you know, we would watch those kind of things and think that the masses of people are accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. And I'm not here to say how, what percent that did, but I have heard statistics that it comes down to around 1% or less was considered back in the 50s and 60s when those crusades and campaigns were taking place here in the United States.

And I believe with all my heart we have stony ground here. When I came upon these four different types of soil, I realized all at once it seemed as I, and I didn't see this through my Christian life at all until I was in the ministry already and we began to look at these scriptures deeply, more deeply, and we were counseling young people and trying to help young people find the Lord and get a hold of reality in their life and lead them often in prayer to what we hoped would be a true conversion. This thing became a real living reality to us in our ministry here at Charity, our early ministry.

And we began to look at that and I began to read this scripture over and over again and I began to realize now this fits what the Lord Jesus Christ seemed to lay out in the scriptures in Matthew chapter 13, Mark chapter 4, and also in Luke when he talks about the different soils. And I believe what we have many times is wayside here's and stony ground here's and thorny ground here's and good ground here's. Now, so don't confuse this with a young Christian who is just weak in the faith and has just started out on their journey but is not sanctified yet.

That is the other thing I believe. You know, we are justified by faith in conversion and then the sanctification working process goes from there on the rest of our life and should never end and never be over. I do not agree with those who believe that they have an experience which simply seals and satisfies

all the sanctification requirements of the Word of God and an individual can kind of coast from there on.

The stony ground here. Now, in contrast to the stony ground here, we have next the thorny ground here. And I'm not sure how much justice I'll be able to do to all of these because the original burden on my heart for this Bible school and in this context was for the stony ground here.

Because I believe it was the key. It is actually the key that would help many of you to find your way through to an understanding of what is lacking and what has going wrong and what is not working properly in your life. There are those of you sitting here that I know personally and I've met throughout my travels and even here in the home church who have struggled to try to find their way and all of that and they have not found their way.

They have not come through to a clear walk with God and a clear experience. And I believe to all of you who are finding this way, consider with me tonight the fact of the stony ground here. Now, like I said, in contrast to the thorny ground here, what I would like to give in this contrast is, in this one there actually was a little bit of life that lasted, as the Bible says, it doeth for a little while.

But in the thorny ground here, it is very different in that there is no question. The thorny ground here was truly converted. It was planted in good soil.

There was no problem with the soil. It was not full of stones. The plant took root and it sprung up.

But then thorns and thistles came around later on, or thorns and briars, and found their way wrapping around that little plant that was doing great and choked out the plant, as the Bible would say. It choked out the Word and He becometh unfruitful. It is not the fact that He never was unfruitful, but He becometh unfruitful.

And He got into a state of unfruitfulness over time in His Christian life. But the stony ground here never attained unto fruitfulness in their Christian life and experience. The life that was there that actually happened got snuffed out or got withered away by the heat of the sun.

The Bible says the sun shone upon that plant and because it lacked root, because it had no root, as the sun beat upon it in the form of opposition and persecution and tribulation in their life, it withered away. Now, I am still at a loss to tell you whether with that actual happening of life bursting forth there for a short duration, whether we can call that conversion or not. I would tend to think not.

But I am not strong on that and simply want to suggest to you that what we call conversion should be a birth and a conversion. I like to put the word conversion to belong to the real experience where the change did take place and the fruit did come forth and there were actual effect and results from your Christian experience. Other than that, we water the thing down and weaken it up to the point where we hardly know what to call it.

I wanted to also say from the evangelical world, we do have a Phinney, a Charles Phinney in that evangelical world background and many others like that. And I read those accounts and the accounts of the conversion and accounts of repentance and some of the accounts of the revival meetings and they are amazing to me. And I know we are on a slippery slope away from that, but I especially have to refer you to the inquiry room which Phinney often had where seekers would come.

He would have a meeting like this and preach the gospel that night or preach the obedience to the Word of God and he often would preach the law of God and things like that in order to make men and women accountable for their sin. And then they would come forward and enter in what they called an inquiry room and they would be in there sometimes all night wrestling with the real issues of life, the human will and the counting the cost and those things and sometimes he would just say, let them lay there, they are doing fine and would go home or the workers would do that and let them lay there wrestling with the issues of life and of course when they come out the other side they got to know what is called conversion. But we don't have an awful lot of that today.

We have what is known today as getting saved on an elevator, on the way up the elevator, you know, where somebody witnesses to another and you hear these kind of things and by the time the doors open when you get to the top he has accepted Jesus Christ as Savior. And what that many times does is only inoculate you against the real experience. And the same is true if you have had one of those five and six and seven year old experiences where somebody made you fear hell and I don't know of any five or six year old or seven year old that would want to burn in hell and if it is put in the right way, it can pretty well scare any child, so to speak, into heaven with the right kind of words.

But I tell you that is not conversion. And it is not the new birth experience and normally there is no fruit that comes out of it. And that to a crowd of this size and where you all come from, I'm sure it's not your fault, but you may have fallen into something like that in your childhood and you have thought because of that somebody has told you, don't you ever doubt it.

That's good enough. That's all you're going to need. You are secure in your conversion.

Now you just go from there. And yet you have not had the fire of God burning in your hearts and you have never had the power, you have never had the joy of being a Christian and you have never been able to do anything effectively for God. No counting the cost.

Maybe you've signed a decision card somewhere or with everyone closing their eyes, you've quick raised your hand and put it right back down again to say that I accept the Lord as your Savior. Even in that, there's a possibility that a heart is clear enough and good enough and gets serious enough about it that maybe it works out for you. But for the most part, I don't believe it does.

Now I'm not trying to put conversion in a box and trying to say it as a certain format, a certain way that you need to get born again according to Charity Christian Fellowship preaching or you're not converted. I never want to do something like that. I remember my own conversion.

I didn't understand repentance, but I knew one thing, my whole heart was in that when I knelt down beside my bed after having been in a revival meeting at 15 years of age and I came home that night and fell upon my bedside in silence, I prayed, without a worker or anybody helping me, but I was sorry and grieved and I believe I would have been in remorse for my sins and I know I wanted the Lord Jesus Christ with all my heart. But I was just desperate for an answer for my soul. And it took without many things.

But if I would have only had someone to help me to confess and acknowledge my sin and to repent in an honest and open manner before God and an individual beside me maybe to kind of coach me and guide me through it in my ignorance, I was very ignorant of the Word of God at 15. I hardly knew one book from another, especially in the Old Testament. But God looks on the heart and if the heart is sincere, many of us have not had ideal conversions in that way, but yet something happened and we went from there and

God blessed it and we're here today because of it.

So I don't want to undo that. But the real problem seems to be there's a lot of wrong methods of evangelism and what I'm mostly concerned about is the fact that you think you are born again when only you have had light come into your life. See, there's a great difference there.

We are ignorant maybe or living in sin and actually some biblical truth and light does shed upon our hearts. And actually we are able many times through the human will or even just knowing that the Word of God says it, we are able to bring some kind of change in our life. But we are still a stony ground hearer.

A stony ground hearer. But tonight I would just like to take a closer look at this subject and I don't want to... I want you to be free in your spirit and examine your heart. As I mentioned last night on the wayside hearer, tonight again on the stony ground hearer, we want to look at the heart, at the heart of the matter.

Where is our heart concerning true Christianity, a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, a hatred for the world and a turning away from it, a repentance of all known sin and a yieldedness to Christ and the cross and all that that means. So many times, like I say, individuals are brought to Christianity out of a fear of eternal death or hellfire. We call it the fire insurance or fire escape method.

And nothing is ever mentioned, nothing is ever questioned on the matter of repentance and confession of sin. And that's a major issue in my mind here tonight. I know there's a number of you who have already heard that from me in times past, maybe by tape or in person, but I just want to reiterate it again.

I believe what is so necessary in our time, in our day, is that the gospel is preached so men are called to repent from their sin and to confess their sin and become naked and open before the eyes of Him of whom we have to do. Without hiding, without all the secrecy enshrouded around an individual's life who have been steeped in wickedness and iniquity and have never opened it up and never confessed it and never made it known to any other human being on earth. And not properly to God either, because as the Bible said, he that covereth his sin shall not prosper.

Remember those words in Proverbs 18, I think it is. He that covereth his sin shall not prosper, but whosoever confesses and forsakes it shall have mercy. And I would like to underscore the word forsaking for due to the false conversions or false gospel that is out there, there is little preaching today on the forsaking of sin.

But it seems like so many people are hearing the idea that you can be saved in your sin, not that Jesus came to save you from your sin. You know there is a vast difference between those two. Jesus did not come to save you in your sin.

He came to save us from our sins and deliver us out of them and make us be able to walk the straight and narrow way and to walk a holy life. Remorse for past sins. Restitution, being willing and able to make things right.

Humbling ourselves before our authorities. Sitting down with our parents and bearing our hearts as to who we have been and what we have done. Those kind of things is what we are talking about and becoming honest before God and men.

Now I was also interested just recently about within the last two weeks, I had a privilege of taking a trip with Brother Wes Limey through Alberta. Visiting the churches of Alberta there for a week and we had a

blessed time there and at one of the messages Brother Wes preached, I was just so intrigued. In his message he gave the account of a young African, I think over by Bun Bun where Daniel and Christy are, that he was listening to him instructing another young man on how to become a Christian.

And as Brother Wes listened, he said, repent, believe and preach the Gospel. And Wes thought, hmm, that's a little strange. I wonder where he gets that.

And later on he got to talk to him and ask him, where did you get that? Repent, believe and preach the Gospel. And the young man turned to Romans 10, 9 and 10. If thou confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in thine heart that God has raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

So it's repent, believe and preach the Gospel. You know what a change that would make in your life if you'd believe that? I say it's rather drastic. I know it just touched me because years ago I preached the message on the other half of God.

And that sounds a little strange. And it was. But it seems like that we want to believe in our heart the Lord Jesus, but are not willing to confess Him with our mouth.

And I want to tell you tonight, I believe with all my heart, that if we are unwilling to bear testimony before men of our experience with the Lord and of His power and grace in our life, I believe we are a stony ground hearer. Stony ground hearer. And we are too ashamed.

We are afraid of what people will think. We are afraid yet of being made a fool of or being some kind of a, whatever, a self-rejection at the hands of family and former friends. And that brings up another major problem in our time, that there's not enough of separation taking place from the old crowd.

Repent, believe and preach the Gospel. If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus. Sometimes you lead a person through to salvation and you encourage them.

Get up next week and share testimony with the congregation of what the Lord has done for you. Oh, I'm not ready for that. Well, be careful.

You would send the devil packing many times, I believe, if you would do that. You would send the devil packing. But so many times we kind of want to think this thing over and get settled in.

It's the same thing with baptism. I find people so reluctant sometimes to be baptized upon their confession of faith and make a public declaration for their faith. And they do themselves hurt.

And if they're not careful, they become a stony ground hearer. Now, there are examples of men in Scripture that I believe were stony ground hearers. I just want to give you a few of them.

I'm not sure. There may be a bit of a link here between the stony ground hearer and the thorny ground hearer. But at least hear me out.

I believe these men were stony ground hearers. Simon the Sorcerer. The Bible says that Simon was some great one, you know, and he was a very popular person involved in witchcraft and going around and doing all kinds of strange phenomena and was a pretty popular person in his day.

But when he heard the gospel, it does say that Simon believed also and was baptized. But then when he saw the power that the apostles had with the power of the Holy Ghost, then he also wanted that power.

And my guess was he had not departed from the power of his sorcery and had not renounced that in the name of the Lord Jesus and was going to produce some kind of a mixture.

And he wanted to be in the driver's seat with the most power whoever had it. I believe he was a stony ground hearer because I believe he never cleaned up and he never departed from his sin. But nevertheless, perhaps because of the profession he made, like so many times the mistakes we make in churches, we cannot always see what's in the heart.

And we do take a person at their word and let them be baptized and think maybe that they are truly making a change and going to go on with God, only to find out that they have not departed and they have never intended to depart their old life. And I believe that may have been Simon's problem. Simon the sorcerer, I believe, was a stony ground hearer.

And whatever he did, he believed in being baptized and there was just a little bit of something going on there for a little while. But as you read the story, he has a very, very sad ending and became an enemy of the apostles wherever he went, teaching and preaching against them and still continuing, as I understand, his sorcery. But I believe he was a stony ground hearer.

Ananias and Sapphira, another possibility, who had never come to grips with transparent honesty in the church, in the lives of the brethren. And so you know how it was. They agreed to come and lay their goods at the apostles' feet for the benefit of all the Christians that were in from countries scattered around.

There was just all kinds of people there. And this is what happened. They sold their goods in order to raise up money, I think, to feed all the visitors because the visitors had heard the gospel and parked there for a time and said, we're not going home.

We have really got something here. We have found the truth. And they didn't want to go home for a time.

And so there was a sharing of goods there, I believe, in order to relieve the need for food and lodging and what have you that they found themselves in that present time. But they agreed to make it appear like they had given everything and hold back some. And by it they show a dishonesty in their heart.

They did not have the conviction. They did not have the conviction of God that was deep upon their heart that would not have allowed them to do that. They deceived the people by wanting the honor perhaps that they brought everything to, you know, but they had kept back some of it privately.

And you know the story. They were smitten with death on the spot. And I believe they were stony ground-hearers.

Stony ground-hearers. Others we have like that are Hymenaeus and Alexandra. Hymenaeus and Philetus.

Demas is another one. Demas might have been a thorny ground-hearer who did all right for a while and then the thorns sprung up because of loving this present world. Paul said he went back, backslid, so that perhaps belongs more to that category.

Judas, I'm not sure what to do with him. But I look at him being active with the apostles. And, of course, he lived in that area, you know, before the power of the Holy Ghost had come at Pentecost where the whole matter of true conversion is questionable in that setting of the apostles because of Peter being told, after thou had converted, strengthen thy brethren.

And he too was flip-flopping around there. But I think in some cases there it appears like he might have been a stony ground-hearer. But the lusts of money and prosperity and dishonesty and all that were still lurking in his heart.

Now I just want to go through some Scripture and just substantiate some of these things that the Word of God talks to us about. Matthew 3, 10, I quoted this maybe in part last night, Now so as the axe is laid to the root of the tree, therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is what? It's hewn down and what? Cast into the fire and what is that? I don't know what else to do with it. The Bible says, John says there, concerning Jesus, He's going to thoroughly purge His floor.

He's going to bring a separation between professed Christianity and true Christianity. He's going to bring a difference there because He'll thoroughly purge His floor and He's going to gather the wheat into His barn and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire. And the only interpretation I can give it was hell fire.

The same thing is given in Matthew 7, 19. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. And that's why I believe I have to say that if no fruit has ever come forth from your life, you're not reflecting the fruit of true Christianity.

Tonight, I have no hope for you. I can't give you any hope. Humanly speaking, I'd love to.

You look so nice on the outside. You look like Christians and you know you would just like to say, surely everybody's fine. But unless that fruit is coming out of our lives for the glory of God, we will be hewn down and cast into the fire.

Jesus illustrated it in a tremendous way in Matthew 21, 19. And when He saw a fig tree in the way, He came to it and found nothing thereon but leaves only. And He said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforth forever.

And presently the fig tree withered away. I think in one of the other Gospels, it says He cursed it. And that simply gives us a pretty clear picture that God doesn't like fruitless trees.

He has created us, and I'll have some more Scriptures that show all the things that He has done for us. But He has created us and made all the provisions for us that we would be able to bear fruit, but no fruit. And then what seemed to disturb Him greatly in that situation was because He had leaves and no fruit.

And you know that a fig tree forms its fruit first and then leaves. Now remember that. That's a pretty interesting analogy there.

Fruit first, then leaves. It seems like so many times we put the leaves on and then we expect fruit. But a fig tree is not like that.

And therefore He used the fig tree for that illustration. And I think it ought to be the same. There ought to be evidence of Christianity before we make ourselves look like one and deceive the people by hypocrisy.

Psalms 1, 1, 2, and 3. Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law does he meditate day and night. And he shall be, he shall be, if he's going to do that, he's going to be like a tree planted by the rivers of waters that bringeth forth his fruit in his season.

His leaf also shall not wither, but whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. But you know what the problem is today? We are trying to live the Christian life and hobnobbing around with people who are constantly sucking us and draining us out and influencing us with the world and evil communication which corrupt good manners. And we're trying to live our Christian life and can't draw the line and can't take a stand in family, friends, and neighbors.

It's not going to work. Not going to work. John chapter 15, verse 1 and 2. I think it is there.

Let me turn to it. I am the true vine, and my Father is the husband. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away.

And every branch that beareth fruit, he purchases it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now that's the sign of the Christian and the non-Christian. The professor of religion and the true Christian.

The stony ground here and the thorny ground here, or at least a here or maybe a good ground here. He's saying if he finds fruit, he will purchase it, that it bring forth more fruit. But if it doesn't have any fruit, listen to this.

And every good vine gardener will do it. Verse 5, I am the vine and you are the branches. He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.

For without me you can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered, and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. And I'll let you argue with the Scripture that the individual was never connected to the vine.

But the Bible says he was connected to the vine. So here we perhaps have a thorny ground here. And you see that connection, or the illustration fits a little bit there.

But somehow he got severed and there's only one thing that we know what happens to severed branches from the vine. When they get severed and cut off and withered and dried up, men gather them and take them to the end of the road and make a bonfire and burn them. And the illustration is that's what God will do with individuals.

And I didn't write the book. God did. And we want to say amen to it.

Hebrews chapter 6 verse 8, But that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected. Listen to this. That which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.

But beloved, we are persuaded better things of you. And I'll say that likewise. Now let us turn back to Isaiah chapter 5. We have a beautiful Scripture there that needs to be brought in to this whole situation.

Verse 1 through verse 7. Isaiah chapter 5, 1 through 7. Now will I sing to my well beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. And he fenced it.

And here we have the answer. And he gathered out the stones thereof. He gathered out the stones thereof.

And planted it with a choiceless vine. And built a tower in the midst of it. And also made a winepress therein.

And he looked that it should bring forth grapes. And he brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitant of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, I pray you, betwixt me and the vineyard.

What could have been done more to my vineyard than I have done in it. Or I have not done in it. Wherefore I have looked that it should bring forth grapes.

Brought it forth wild grapes. Now go to, I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will take away the hedge thereof.

And it shall be eaten up and break down the wall thereof. And it shall be trodden down. And I will lay it waste.

It shall not be pruned nor digged. And there shall come up briars and thorns. And I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel. And the men of Judah his pleasant plant. And he looked for judgment, but behold, oppression.

For righteousness, but behold, a cry. Very self-explanatory. Talking about Israel as a nation.

And he says, I planted a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. The soil was beautiful. And he said, I gathered out the stone.

And I don't know how many of you have ever gotten involved in stone picking, but that was a very common thing in the farms here in Lancaster County. It was kind of a thing that we all hated as children to go out and do nothing but pick up them hard stones, you know, in the spring of the year before planting was done. But that was just the way Dad wanted it, wasn't it? He wanted those stones picked out.

I even see some girls smiling here. I think some of them have been out picking up stones in fields and gardens. But that's just the way it was.

We planted and we found a good ground. And it's wonderful soil, but when you have a lot of stones, you see, the seed falls upon stony ground. And that seed slips down in there between the rocks.

And there's enough of dirt there and enough of moisture gets down in there that that seed actually sprouts and springs up. And there's a plant there. But because it's so stony, the root system cannot develop and will not push that plant up and bring endurance to that plant during the burning heat of the June and July months.

You get a little bit of a plant in April maybe when you plant it or when you seed your garden or what have you, but then later on when it gets hot and the sun shines down upon it, there's not no depth there, the Bible says, not much earth there, the Bible says, and the thing withers up and dies. And it is no more. But God is saying, I did that to Israel.

And He's showing that's what He meant in the Old Testament. I did that to Israel. I found them a very pleasant hill and I planted them there.

I gathered out the stones and I had everything provided for them that there would be able to be a real production, a good crop. But He said when I came back for harvest times and I expected a good crop of grapes, all I had was wild grapes. What's the difference between wild grapes and good grapes? They're so

small there's hardly anything to them, right? You don't plop a wild grape in your mouth and squeeze it a little bit like you do a concord grape and it pops into your mouth like that.

The thing is so small and so dry that what little taste you have to get, you have to take the thing and chew on it and all that and it's not big and plump and juicy and all of that that we know a regular and good grape is. And the Lord says that's what I have. And now we come over to the New Testament and now we have this stony ground here.

And that is something that needs to be done in our lives, in our soil. We simply have to gather out the stones, gather out the stones. Before we let that seed have the seed able to properly take root and be able to spring up and develop a good root system down into that moist soil and so when the trouble comes we are able to endure the heat of the sun.

Actually, you know, sunlight is what they call photosynthesis on a plant and without sunlight, plants don't grow. The sun on a good plant will really cause it to grow. It's what gives us heat units for corn to actually mature and produce a good year.

It has to have a certain amount of hours of heat units. The sun is a blessing to plants. But it has to have a good root system or it is not able to endure the heat of the sun.

But if it has a good root system, it only thrives in sunlight. Have you ever seen your fields where there was a tree by a fence row and you had seeded under it? And especially in a cornfield, if you ever see a cornfield, you know where the corn is about 11 or 12 feet tall. And you know you have this tall corn and here comes a tree and the height of the corn just goes way down and then it goes back up again and then that's tall right as soon as you get out.

And it's because, not just because that the root system of the tree is pulling the nutrients out, but it's because photosynthesis is not taking place. It's in the shade. It's not getting the sun.

There's nothing wrong with some sunlight on the plant. It means that. And I would like to say that is also true with some tribulation and opposition and persecution in our lives.

A time of temptation and persecution. Oh, let's see here. I wanted to look at the fact that it endures for a little while.

I would also want to just guard against a highly emotional experience. Even though we believe your emotions should kick in and I believe that there are too many dry-eyed conversions, but we also want to be careful that we don't just go along with the hype of a highly emotional experience, but make clear life-changing decisions. Don't just get caught up with hype.

That is very, very easy to do in protracted meetings sometimes and a couple weeks later, everything is gone and it's withered up again and there's nothing left. All right, a time of temptation and persecution. Let me tell you tonight, they will come.

They need to come. As I said last night, temptation is designed not to overcome you. In fact, you have the promise it won't overcome you.

You'll just be tempted with such things that are common to man, but God will with temptation make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it. It is not designed to crush you. It is not designed to overtake

you.

It's designed to strengthen you and make you grow. And that's exactly what I believe the Son does to a plant if it is well-rooted. And I think it will do the same thing.

Persecution and opposition will do it to a Christian if they are well-rooted in the Word of God and in a clear conversion experience and have gathered out the stones of their garden before they try to grow in grace and wisdom and knowledge of God. If you cannot stand up for the testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ, you know true Christianity is unpopular. It's getting quite unpopular right now.

We're in the minority and are getting more and more so day by day. The politicians of our day have broadened out the whole matter of who God is to the point where they want practically all the religions that are in the country to be included as to be part of the people who are praying to one God. But we don't believe that.

We believe that salvation is through Jesus Christ and in Him alone. They have put Jesus to the side and have made God their head, supposedly, but He's not their head. If you don't come to God through Jesus Christ, you can't come to Him.

And so we realize there's a major theological thing going on here and tonight it is not politically correct for me to say these words anymore. I would not win a popularity contest in Washington, D.C. or in many governments and capitals of the land by saying that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. But I want to tell you and reiterate that to you.

Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life and no man cometh unto the Father but by Him. But that will ultimately come back to bite us. That declaration and that proclamation and getting up to say that boldly, we are treading dangerous ground.

And I believe the time is coming when actual persecution will be meted out to those who boldly proclaim those kind of things in a public manner. In fact, there are certain cities in certain states where it's already that way. Canada is in trouble already beyond us.

And the same is true by getting up and speaking against the sins of the people. We can't do that anymore. That's not politically correct either.

But I wish I could take many of you into some of the religious settings that I'm acquainted with, very well acquainted with, both in my travels and also in my background where that is true. You know, we locally here have a very serious dilemma upon our hands. There were a couple of years ago a declaration or a rule was made that Bible study was outlawed.

And a number of couples were attending Bible study. And now they're in trouble for it. And they are brought before the council because of attending a Bible study.

And my concern is not so much usually for the one attending the Bible study. Usually they can stand. But my concern is the ones that have to be sitting on the benches when the individual is brought for judgment and we keep quiet.

Or else our necks are on the line and we'll be called before the church in a few weeks. And that is going on not only here, but we have the same thing happening in numerous other places throughout North and

South America. Our religious groups do not want you to have a Bible and get together with others and study the Word of God because they know they cannot handle you just blindly following them.

And I just want to say that provides a lot of opportunities for individuals to stand up and stand for truth. And it's amazing how many people can't do it for the fear of man. And one of the things that when the fear of man is so greatly in focus over the fear of God, I'm afraid at times we have a stony ground to work with.

When we fear men rather than fear God. Like I say, if you cannot stand up in America for the testimony of Jesus Christ when the persecution is still so light, what are you going to do when the real battle comes? And the Bible says in Revelation chapter 2 that it will come. A trial of our faith that will try us beyond anything, I believe, that we have known in a few centuries.

It will test and try the professing Christians as to whether they will stand for truth and for God or not. God will allow that, I believe, sometime before the end. And it's good for us to think about it.

But if in a time of temptation and a time of opposition and persecution we wither away and slink back and do not vindicate our brother or stand for him or the testimony of Jesus Christ and say, hey, I'm also a Christian. Count me in on the same thing. You know, I heard that happen here some time ago when they were coming in on a certain family or a certain brother and somebody just said, hey, I'm one of those too.

And just opened his heart and declared the same thing and defended the brother for the cause of the faith. And then they had a couple to throw out instead of just one. I love to hear that.

But I believe that's the kind of people we need to be. You know, I believe we ought to have such a love for one another in the body of Christ that we would stand for each other and defend each other and identify with each other in times of trouble like that. I love to preach that and to look forward to a time when I trust we will have the opportunity to do a lot more of that.

But I believe we need to defend each other when we are called before authorities because of our faith. So what will you do? Are you a stony ground hearer? A stony ground hearer? Or are you good soil and you have already gathered out the stones? I have to think of my brother Earl Fox, the course director here. He used to have a landscaping business.

He came to seed my lawn when I built the house back in 88 or 89, whenever it was. And he was well equipped. I had a stony lawn.

And you know, it was rough and uneven and a lot of stones. And he had a machine run by the power takeoff that just turned around at a slant and just kicked those stones off to the side. And in an hour or two's time, they had that thing looking like a beautiful seed bed with all the stones gathered up and kicked out of the way.

I had to think as I was studying for this, I wish, Brother Earl, you could invent a machine to do that for us Christians. But it's not like that. But we do have the answer.

We do have the provisions. We are able to gather out the stones that is prophesied to us or spoken of back there in Isaiah, that that's what God even did for us, is to gather out the stones. And I believe if you identify your stony and cold heart and that there are areas of sin, I think we are primarily talking about areas of sin and corruption and immorality that have been in your life you have never confessed, you have never acknowledged, and you are trying to go on and live the Christian life with a stony ground.

And you are wondering why it's not working. And you admit that you have no joy and that you have no power and you have no assurance. You know what I tell people that are stony ground hearers? Many times when they tell me that they don't have assurance or that when they speak about people who don't have assurance, it may be a gift of God that they don't have.

Because you shouldn't have assurance until you're born again, until you have... We just had that experience while having meetings a few weeks ago when a couple came forward and responded and they had thought they were Christians maybe and they had thought that they were living the Christian life, but that night in the message they discovered that they weren't. And they never really had it. And they came forward weeping that way and we were able to lead them through to acknowledge their unbelief.

They had never believed the record that God gave of His Son in a very true way and just, you know, reached out and believed the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. And they did that that night and were both born again and had the great experience and change that that brought in their life. But before that, a lot of times you want to live a Christian life, you make the human efforts, you try to quit sinning, and you try to be a better person, but like I said, there's no power and there's no assurance and there's no blessing.

No joy. No joy, no assurance and no power. Well, stony ground.

What are we speaking about? I already mentioned the fear of man, but I just had to mention yet your reputation. Many times that is a big stone in the soil that needs to come out. We are so fearful of what others might say about us.

There needs to be a willingness to bear the cross. You know, look at Matthew. Let's see where I have it here.

Yes, Matthew chapter 10. Matthew chapter 10, verse 32, Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth. I come not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

And a man's foes shall be they of their own household. If a man loveth father and mother more than me, he is not worthy of me. And he that loveth son and daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me. A stony ground here. And I find many in the throes of decision to stand up against family, reputation, old friends and acquaintances and so on.

Very difficult to bear the cross as a young Christian and stand for the Lord Jesus Christ. Another area that I see so much is the matter of rebellion and submission or lack of submission to authority. I'm not going to speak much about that.

I would like to devote more of that in another message here later on this week. But I'll say that's a big one. That is a major issue in young Christians' lives today is to grapple with the whole issue of submission to authority and to be able to bow their heart before parents, ministers, local police, any authority in their life.

They just don't like authority. And I believe it is the spirit of the age and has crept into Christian homes and Christian churches in a major way because the world is full of it. And we are at loss many times to know how to deal with it.

Stubbornness likewise. Whether we have it by birth or by first birth or by nature, I should say, but that is also a great difficulty with a stony ground hearer. He has such stubbornness in his life that when someone tries to counsel them or guide them or read Scripture to them, they are not able to submit to it just because they are plain stubborn and do not like to submit.

The Bible says here, he is offended. By and by, he is offended. And that means he backs off.

He had thought the Christian life was what he wanted, but apparently he thought, like many do today, that he could just add it to his already popular worldly life and everything would be all right. But when he finds out what the true cost of Christianity is, he never sat down and counted the cost. He just raised his hand and said, Yeah, count me in.

I also want to be a Christian. But by and by, when opposition, persecution and tribulation, difficulties, struggles came, and a Christian life does have struggles. Don't anybody tell you there is not? There is a struggle between light and darkness.

There is a struggle between Satan and God. And there is a struggle many times over our fleshly desires and lusts that have gone to fruit in our sinful lives. And there are struggles to overcome.

But God is able to help us. But here it says, he is offended because there is no deepness of earth. And I like that.

I have heard numerous ministers talk about it. And I have heard it a lot in our circles. Go deep, brother.

Go deep, sister. If you want to really get some mileage out of this Christian life, don't forget to go deep. Don't just skim over the top.

And take it lightly. As the scripture I quoted yesterday out of Isaiah, I think it was chapter 57 or 62, cast up a highway, gather out the stones, prepare the way for the people. Or as John the Baptist said, prepare the way of the Lord.

Prepare to be in business with God. Prepare to be serious in your Christian life. Prepare to set out for God.

Gather out the stones. Let God through His Holy Spirit put His finger upon the stony ground in your heart and life. If you are a stony ground hero here tonight, and I know there are some of you like that, you just can hardly serve God.

Or you cannot. You have made a few feeble attempts here and there, but your heart is still filled with rocks. You have a stony ground heart.

And the plant can't take root. Salvation cannot get deep-rooted down there. And so when you meet friends who mock Christianity, or your cousins laugh at you and make a fool of you a bit because you're a Christian, you're offended.

Oh, I didn't bargain for this. You find out there's a lot of restrictions, a lot of things you can't do. I'm sorry, many times you just don't understand the equation.

There are so many blessed things we get to do, and God takes the desires away for some of the things we used to like to do. And God does so many of those things for us and with us in the sanctification process and work in our hearts. Stony ground hero.

He just withers away, withers away and dies. Dishonesty. Pride.

And as I mentioned, unconfessed sin or unrepentant of sin. God has His finger on your heart and on your life. We have the love of worldly things, the worldly things of life, and the love of pleasure.

Unbelievable. We are living in the midst of a pleasure-mad society to fill up the good feelings of every appetite that exists in the human body. We can fill it a thousand ways, so to speak, especially in food and things to do that are easy and enjoyable and just entertain us and pamper us and make life so nice and easy and enjoyable.

But it produces a stony ground hero. Well, let us give an invitation again tonight. I don't know who I'm speaking to directly in a crowd this size, who all.

But I beg you tonight, if you are a stony ground hero and you have these things in your life and you're not sure you're born again and you have wrestled with where you're at, you have unconfessed sin in your life and have never dumped your bucket or told anyone who you are and what you are, you have no relationship with your parents and able to sit down with them and to open your heart and share with them and confess your faults, confess your needs and have them pray with you, come to the altar tonight, come and get help for your soul, the stony ground hero which is unfruitful, never has borne any fruit, is not going to make it. According to the Word of God, you're not going to make it if you stay a stony ground hero. You're not going to enter in with the rest of the Christians when that day comes.

So come to Jesus. Come to the Lord tonight. Deal with the issues that God reminded you of while you were sitting here and be honest and transparent and open with God.

Let Him gently work with you. He is not a harsh Master with a whip over you willing to punish you for the next ten years because of who you are and what you are. He delights in mercy and wants to forgive and cleanse you.

I see God is more interested in us than we are in Him many times. I saw Him lying in wait for me before I was searching for Him. I was able to look back later and I saw, oh, I remember.

I remember how He tried to get my attention here and tried to get it there. And I could tell He was probably chasing me for years before I responded to Him. And I think many others of you could say the same, couldn't you? So come tonight.

Shall we have an invitation in, brother? Number 228. 228. And as we sing, just come forward with a heart to go back to the prayer room.

Share with another brother or sister. And open your heart. Confession is good for the soul.

It is good to just open up and just say, here is where I am at. Help me find my way. I want to go home with power, assurance, and joy, and peace in my life.

Shall we sing? And you come. Just as I am. Amen.

You just come. Continue singing. Just as I am.

One moment, please. Shall we stand for prayer? We want to continue singing then, but I feel impressed to just pray. God, dear Lord Jesus, we don't know who all is in this group.

So many are here tonight from all around. Father, will You tenderly touch their hearts tonight? It's not right, Lord, that they go home in confusion and don't know where they're at. It's not right if they have sin in their heart and life and they have covered it and are not prospering today.

It's not right that they are confused and chased around by the devil. God, I pray tonight, touch those that we are speaking to and You know who they are. And help them to respond and to bow their hearts to God, gather out the stones tonight, and yield themselves to the Lord Jesus and come back tomorrow morning with a garden that is good ground, ready to receive the seed of the Word of God, ready for the roots to go deep down, and ready to spring up and bear fruit for God.

Father, I pray, especially touch those that may be in rebellion, may be stiffening their neck, hardening their heart, and chasing away the conviction right now, and help them to respond to the call of the Gospel and to yield their hard hearts to Thee. I pray it in Jesus' name, Amen. Shall we continue to sing? Just as I am, Will you come? With many a fear, Just keep coming.

Let us eat, Lingering in Thee, Just as we meet.

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