

Russell Kelfer

Some Fell on Stony Places

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Series: The Parables of Scripture



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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

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He spoke to them in parables. That is what He did. The multitudes were gathered together on that sandy seashore that day to hear something profound from this carpenter turned preacher. Some were expecting theological gems of wisdom with which to challenge the Scribes and the Pharisees. Others, perhaps, were waiting for some great new exhortation on the value of keeping the Sabbath, or of attending the feasts.

We don't know for sure exactly what they *expected*. We do know, however, that what they heard was probably not what they came to hear. We know that for the disciples, these were not the kinds of sermons they imagined that the Son of God would preach on earth. These were childlike stories about seed-planting, leaven and the like. Why, *these were parables*. The disciples knew what parables were: they were simple stories of physical things that taught spiritual truth; but the truth was submerged in the message, and not everyone understood what was being said. Those who didn't understand might tend to get bored or impatient for some great new theological or philosophical nugget. After all, they must have surmised, *we need the crowds*. How can we develop a kingdom without numbers?

And there were, gathered along that sun-drenched seaside that day, the makings of a good-sized congregation. Yet, for the most part, Jesus did not speak to them. Oh, He spoke, and they were there. *But they did not have ears to hear*. They had physical ears on each side of their heads, but they did not have the capacity to process what they were hearing and turn it into understanding. God was on earth, speaking to those who *had ears to hear*.

So the disciples asked Jesus, you remember, just why He spoke in parables, and we read of His reply:

He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. (Matthew 13:11)

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To them it is not *given*. Pay attention to that statement. It means that the ability to discern truth is a *gift*, and it must come from God. At this time the gift had been shared with those whose hearts had antennas equipped to receive the mysteries of the kingdom. To them, Jesus had, in the process of telling an agricultural tale about different kinds of soil, opened the vaults of heaven and revealed deep secrets about the soil of men's and women's hearts. The soil was not all the same, because it had not all been prepared in the same way.

The Word would be One Word. It was the seed. It would not change. God had spoken and what He said would stand forever. Neither would the Source of that word change. The sower would always be God. No, *the variable in the equation was the condition of the heart of the hearer*. And that variable would run the gamut from hard to soft, from sensitive to impatient, from excited to bored. It was the condition of that soil that dominated Jesus' first parable on that shoreline that day.

He was sitting in a boat which had been pushed out from the beach just far enough for everyone to see Him, but not so far that they could not hear Him. And with that unusual seaside setting, the Master addressed those who *had ears to hear*.

In our last study we took a glance at the Master's first illustration. It was about the soil along the roadside. That soil was packed down and hardened, because it was the area next to the road where people walked. It was trodden underfoot. It was very difficult for seed to take root on such hardened soil. The soil needed to be turned, rotated, plowed, until there was room for the seed to be drawn magnetically down beneath the surface, rather than just lying on top where the birds of the air in the form of Satan and his demonic host just waited to swoop down and grab the kernels before they even so much as were swallowed up by the earth.

That seed seldom grew. And so it was to be with us if we do not tend the soil of our hearts. Truth learned quickly vanishes; commitments made quickly dissolve; promises made to God in a moment of sincere invitation or conviction are broken, and those waiting to see the fruit come up simply wait and wait and wait.

The seed must be watered quickly. The water is the word of God in the presence of the Person of God. Isaiah said it so well.

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven,

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and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10,11)

The word of God as it goes forth from the mouth of God is like the gentle rain of His Spirit upon newly planted soil. It waters the earth. It causes the earth to swallow the grain, then reproduce that grain, 30, 60, or even 100 fold. It gives seed to the sower. The preacher, the teacher, the disciple-maker *has no seed to sow but the word of God*. It is the only thing we have to share that can change a life. It also gives bread to the eater. The one being fed can only prosper, spiritually, from one kind of food: the Living Word of God. Other sources of education and information can nourish the mind, but cannot feed the soul. That is what the Scriptures say about themselves.

I trust that by now you recognize something different about this passage. This word from Isaiah is an Old Testament parable. God is using a physical illustration to demonstrate a spiritual truth. The physical illustration is a picture of rain and snow falling from heaven. Look at the parallels and the truths:

1- Rain and snow only come from one place: heaven. Likewise, spiritual truth which produces spiritual growth can only come from heaven; it can only come from God. Only God's Spirit can produce fruit. He uses men. He uses women. But unless He is the source, nothing eternal can come forth. Nothing.

2- The reason it waters the soil is singular: so that the soil can produce fruit. Christians who think spiritual growth is an end within itself have missed the truth of the purpose behind God's leaving us on planet earth. If all He wanted was for us to experience salvation, the best thing He could do would be to drown us in the baptistry. But His purposes for saving us include using us, and to do that *we must have seed to sow*.

3- The rain and the snow represent the process of receiving the Word of God. "So shall my word be..." The point of the parable is the revelation of the nature of God's word and the necessity for God's word. So He used rain and snow and their capacity to loosen and water the soil, so that the seed could be freed to do

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its intended task. In Jesus' parable in Matthew 13, the emphasis was on the fact that the seed was the Word and the Word was the seed. It was the *portrait*. In Isaiah 55, the picture is of the *process*. The seed cannot multiply itself unless it flows from the heart of God to the heart of man. As it flows, it is like the rain and the snow which come down from heaven. It will, if the soil will receive it, produce incredible harvest.

4- The final truth of the Isaiah parable is this: God's word never fails to accomplish its intended purpose. It shall never return void. Underline that word "never". It means *never*. It means that not one time in the history of man has God's word ever been preached, taught, or simply read that God in heaven did not do something divine with it. We may not have seen it; but it happened. Man may have rejected the truth, *but God accomplished His purpose: that of exposing man to the reality of God.* God determined the purpose and God determined the persons in whom that purpose would be fulfilled. That's what His word just said, *and we can trust His word.* That, too, is what it just said.

Oh, beloved, come to see the Scriptures for what they are. You cannot exist, spiritually, without them. They are not a word about God. They are not a word from God. They are *The Word of God*. They are everything God has to say about everything man will ever need to know. Mark it. Bow your heart in awe every time it is read. Open your heart in humble submission every time it is spoken. When the Word goes forth, God is going forth. When you receive the Word, in whatever way you do, *at that moment God is speaking to you.* Not in general, casual terms. God has dialed your number, waited for you to pick up the phone, *and He is talking personally to you; as personally as if He were right there, which, of course, He is.*

Back now to Matthew 13. Jesus has told us about roadside soil. It is hard to produce fruit on roadside soil. But there *is a solution*. It involves preparing the soil in such a way that even the fact that it has been hardened for so long does not mean it cannot be softened by the rain of God's Word upon it. Jesus goes on:

But he that received the seed into stony places, the same
is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;
Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while:

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for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. (Matthew 13:20,21)

In Mark it is rendered this way:

And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness;

And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.

(Mark 4:16,17)

Stony ground. Shallow soil. Not trodden down by indifference so that it doesn't take root at all. But this soil responds, at least emotionally, to the Word and *receives it with gladness*. This is the "I love God's Word for what it does for me" soil. These people hear the word and *apply the parts that make them feel good or feel convicted or feel spiritual*. They rush forward to make a decision, and so long as the bloom is on the rose they prosper, spiritually. They receive it with joy. The short term prognosis is for bouncing, bubbly believers who are thrilled at what God is doing or has done, for He has answered their prayers, forgiven their sins, met their needs, and lifted their spirits. What a God. What a God, indeed.

But the soil is shallow. It is deep enough to receive the seed, but there is a layer of rock underneath it that keeps a giant tree from having enough depth for roots to grow. Little plants do fine there. They don't need a strong root system. So long as it rains enough, and there isn't too much sun or too strong a wind, it will do okay.

When the floods come, or the sun scorches without relief, or a hurricane-force wind blows against them, however, they wither and die. No roots. Jesus describes the scenario in spiritual terms and makes the spiritual switch. He says, *They have no root in themselves (the soil is too stony) and when affliction comes or persecution comes they cannot take the heat*.

These people are drawn to a *God owes it to me* theology. They expect God to place them in a bubble of physical protection and shield them from affliction and persecution. After all, they are God's children. And if, by chance He doesn't, it's all because of their lack of faith. But the Bible has a different perspective on affliction and persecution. Look at what *it says*.

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Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
(Matthew 5:3,4)

Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.
(Matthew 5:10-12)

And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,

Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.
(Acts 14:21,22)

And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;
(Romans 5:3)

Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

(II Corinthians 1:3-5)

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory;

(II Corinthians 4:17)

Great *is* my boldness of speech toward you, great *is* my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.
(II Corinthians 7:4)

Those are just samples of the hundreds of verses which verify and amplify the principle that affliction and tribulation and persecution are not evils to avoid, but necessities to endure and grow through. Paul was *joyful in his tribulation*. God was comforting him in his trials. His persecution, he said, worked for God's glory and the good of all the saints, *even the guards who*

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stood by him, holding him in chains.

But those with hearts whose soil is thin, will sing praises to God *only so long as the sun shines, but doesn't scorch; only so long as the rain falls, but doesn't drench.* So long as God is meeting their needs on their terms, they are active, vocal, and often intense in their exhibition of faith. They receive the word with joy. They appropriate it. They make personal application of it. It's theirs.

Until...until the heavens turn black with ominous clouds of pain or disappointment or chastisement. Then, *because their roots are shallow, their faith turns to fear; their joy turns to bitterness.* This God whom they wrongly construed would create an immediate kingdom on earth where there were no problems has let them down. And they become spiritual dropouts, at least for a season.

It isn't to say they weren't saved. They were happy about what God had done for them. But, beloved, our salvation wasn't given to us to make us happy, but to make us His. It was not given to make us giddy, but to make us joyful. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. It is that constant state of confidence in God that is unaffected by circumstances. A raise in pay can make us happy. A demotion or loss of pay, however, need not affect our joy.

There is a day coming when there will be no pain, no suffering, no crying, no dying, *and it will be because we have been saved that we will be enjoying such a life.* But it won't be here. In this world, we shall have tribulation.

Oh, dear Christian, the word of God is not a band-aid to keep you from hurting. It is alive. It is powerful. It is sharper than a two-edged sword. It is able even to penetrate your motives and determine your thoughts. It is a Person living in a Book so His Spirit can take that Book and change you. But the process is often by fire. The secret is not fleeing the fire, but passing through the fire with joy. The question God asks all of us, I believe, is found in Jeremiah 12:5, and the answer is found in Isaiah 43:1-2. The question is:

If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and *if* in the land of peace, *wherein* thou trustedst, *they wearied thee*, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?

(Jeremiah 12:5)

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If you can't handle it when the skies turn dark, what are you going to do when it really begins to rain? If you grumble over little aches and pains, what will you do when the tough stuff comes? If you grumble when you can't buy that new car, what will you say to God or about God when you have no car at all? When the waters rise about you or the flames begin to sear you, *what should you do?* You should claim Isaiah 43, that's what. It says:

But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called *thee* by thy name; thou *art* mine.

When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

(Isaiah 43:1,2)

It does not say *if you pass through the waters*, it says *when*. It doesn't say *if you walk through life's fires*, it says *when you walk through the fires*. Now what is the promise? That God will cause the rain to cease? That God will put out the fire that is scorching your soul? No. It says basically two things:

1- I will be with thee. The God who made you will not forsake you. Part of the process of passing through deep waters is to remind us that He is with us. His very presence ought to be all we need. We know the waters cannot drown an omnipotent God. Therefore, if He is with us and He is in us, then they cannot drown us, either. But we forget to call upon Him with a desperate heart until we are in desperate circumstances. Sometimes, therefore, the Master lets us dip into the waters until we are eyeball deep, and with water sloshing into our mouths as we cry, *Lord, help me!* He knows we know He is with us.

2- The second promise is this: Not only will He be with us; the circumstances need not overtake us. The water will not drown us. It can't. Jesus lives in us, and if we go under, so does He. The fire may be hot enough to singe our hair, but no furnace is hot enough to take our souls. It may destroy our bodies, but God has an answer for that. He's already got a custom-made body ten-trillion times better than this one reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God unto salvation. That's us. Praise God.

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How do we know that promise is for us? Because it is for those whom He has redeemed. He has called us by name. We are His. Therefore, there is no fire hot enough to steal our joy, if we are truly rejoicing in Him. There is coming a fire that can take a soul, but believers will never see it or experience it. No, we are His. And He is indestructible. Therefore, in Him, so are we.

But many of us and most of us some of the time tend to forget those basic principles, and the result is: the seed falls on stony soil and does not bear much fruit.

We can get all excited about what God is doing or has done, but it becomes overshadowed by what we think He has left undone, or by the crises in our lives when the heavens appear to be silent. Oh, beloved, as we have learned before, *when the heavens appear to be silent, God is doing His most wondrous work of all.*

How about you? Do you tend to praise God when He answers prayer *your way*, but grumble or groan when He answers it *His way*? Does the Word take root in your heart, so long as it contains promises that you will prosper or be healed? So long as you think your present standard of living is as low as it will ever get again, are you willing for Him to be God, when His own Son had not so much as a place to lay His head?

Do you want a guarantee of a painless, trouble-free life while studying the life of Paul who was shipwrecked, beaten, tortured and jailed? Do you want to be sure you live a long and healthy life when God's own Son died at 33? Do you demand of God a chance to minister your way, while Paul had to minister in a dungeon? Are you okay with God so long as you are accepted, while Jesus was *despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*? What gives us those rights?

What was Job's problem? He had so much He assumed that God was blessing him because he deserved it. So God took it away. His first response was the right one.

...the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be
the Name of the Lord. (Job 1:21b)

Later he began to question God's wisdom and His sovereignty. He listened to wrong counsel and began to feel sorry for himself. Until God called His name and said, *Job, let's have a one-on-one talk.* Finally, Job quit talking and listened. And when He did,

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it all made sense. God wanted him to know Him better. So He took everything that made Him love God for what He'd done, and waited until He could love God for who He was. Then, and only then, did the light come on and Job repented in dust and ashes.

Make no mistake about it, beloved, the trials will come. Just after the great revivals in history, Satan has been freed to attack and assail the gates of the church and the hearts of men and women. Satan hates it when God is doing great things. So he pursues God's children with petty annoyances at first, then with major onslaughts. He says to God as he did about Job, *He just loves you because you give him everything he wants. Take it away and listen to him whine.*

Then, beloved, is when the greater victories are won. The great decisions are not the ones made in the fervor of corporate revival or personal conviction. They begin there. They take root there. But unless we pick out the rocks and dig deeper into the soil of our hearts, *and unless we prepare for the raging rivers and the flaming infernos of life, we will only be revived for a season.*

Transformation that lasts is transformation that anticipates not just the blessings of earth, but rejoices even in the fires of testing, with eyes focused on the life to come.

We don't hear much about heaven anymore. It gets good play at funerals, but because man has become so obsessed with the here and now, pulpits are sometimes preaching to the audience, rather than the preaching the whole counsel of God. The whole counsel of God is this:

In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer;
I have overcome the world. (John 16:33b)

When we begin to grasp that, and the storms that assail us only multiply the joy we have as we anticipate heaven, we are beginning to till the soil aright. But if we receive it with giddiness, and dance in the aisles over our newfound freedom, only to crash and burn when the rains turn to floods, we are of little faith. Then, truly, having run with the footmen and become weary, *we shall not be able to contend with horses.*

I confess that even knowing this and teaching this, Satan moves into my life often and convinces me that I can't go on any longer. He whispers that a God of love surely could remove this trial or that trial. The answer is: He can. In a moment. In the

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twinkling of an eye. And whether He does now or not, *one day, in the twinkling of an eye, He will take care of every pain, every discomfort, every burden, every loss.* In a fraction of the time it takes to blink your eye,

The Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout,
with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God:

(I Thessalonians 4:16a)

I can remember being in Jamaica years ago in a tiny church in the hills far away from even electricity and running water. And I can remember sitting as a young man in that church one night, Coleman lanterns the only source of light, listening to them sing:

*“It’ll soon be done, all trial and trouble
It’ll soon be done on the other side.
I’m going to sit down beside My Jesus
I’m going to sit down and rest a little while.”*

Beloved, it will soon be done. The time is coming soon when there will be neither sickness nor sorrow, disappointment nor despair. It will soon be done.

But “Until Then”, as another song goes,

*“My heart will go on singing,
Until then, with joy I’ll carry on.
Until the day, my eyes behold the city
Until the day, God calls me home.”*

Until then, beloved, prepare for your commitments to be tested, your noble goals to be placed on the altar and heated to a temperature beyond your human capacity to endure. If you expect it, and crawl up into God trusting when it does, *then those commitments and those goals will blossom and grow, and the fragrance of them will be carried by the Holy Spirit into the nostrils of God who will multiply their aroma, and the fragrance will abound.*

Then, beloved, you will have experienced true revival. The seeds of transformation that so enriched your soul will have been tried by fire and found to be unto the praise and honor of God. Once God has done a work in your life, then, there are three things you can do.

1- Don’t ever stop tending the soil. Keep picking up rocks. Keep watering the ground with the tears of repentance and keep

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tending the soil with the Word of God.

2- Don't be surprised when the enemy begins his onslaught.

It is part of the process, and it is both proof of your decision and proof of God's love. If you really mean business, *ask* God to send you into the waters where you can be further cleansed and into the fire where you can be further purified. It's not an easy prayer to pray, and don't pray it if you don't mean it.

3- Finally, ask God for the grace, when the fires do come, to remember the parable of stony soil. Some seed *will* fall on stony places. Affliction and persecution *will* come. By God's grace, may we be ready when it does.

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A Challenge to Further Study

1- Reread Isaiah 55:6-13. See how many principles you can find in that one passage. What verse sets the tone for the whole passage? What is the theme of that verse? Why are verses 8 and 9 so crucial to our understanding the mind of God? How do verses 10 and 11 reflect the truth of verses 8 and 9?

2- In Matthew 13:20, Jesus says the believer who receives the Word in “stony places” receives it with joy. What do you think that means? Why can’t it find a good root system? Can you relate this to the natural world and the soil and roots in your yard?

3- What happens, according to verse 21, that causes the seed to stop growing?

4- Read the verses on pages 8 and 9 of this transcript. What do those verses have in common?

A Challenge to Further Application

1- Read Jeremiah 12:5. Rewrite it in modern terminology. Now pray it back to God using your own name and your own circumstances. What is the basic underlying principle? How can you use that verse to help prepare your heart for times of trial?

2- Read Isaiah 43:1-2 again. Try to find three basic principles in that passage that will help you respond to the fires and floods of life.

3- Has God called you to recent times of commitment or renewal? As you live in the glow of those moments, are you willing to prepare your heart for the eventual times when the flood waters will rise up near the door of your heart? Will that mean your commitments were not sincere? That God has not been faithful? What then, does it mean? Ask God to prepare your heart even today that the soil will be ready to retain the seed and make it grow.

A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize Isaiah 43:2

Optional: Also Memorize Jeremiah 12:5

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