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The Seed is the Word

988-B

Series: Let God Be God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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The Seed is the Word

Try to imagine, if you can, a field ready to be planted. The big machines have plowed the acres, turned the soil and treated the rich, red dirt with chemicals. The heavy rocks have been removed that so marred the beauty of the ground. It is a farmer's paradise. It is as though the soil is literally crying out to produce a luscious yield of crops. But wait. Where is the farmer going? Now that the land is ready for planting, he is...could it be? Yes, he is actually leaving the field *without planting anything*. Let's ask him what he's doing. "Hey, Mr. Farmer, why aren't you putting the seeds in the ground? How can you grow anything without the seeds? You what? You're just going to see what will happen if the soil is prepared, but never planted? But Mr. Farmer, anyone knows that won't work. Mr. Farmer? Mr. Farmer?" It's no use. He simply refuses to listen. He is convinced that if the land is tilled and ready, it will grow crops without seeds. Fool!

No, I'm not a farmer, but I know one thing. What that man just tried to do won't work...not in the physical realm and not in the spiritual realm. All of the *preparation in the world* is for naught if you *never plant the seeds*. Jesus, of course, knew that man would try something that foolish if left to himself. So He lovingly sketched on the backdrop of Scripture a story to remind us, among other things, that the power to give life rests in the seed. It is a story we must follow carefully if we are to understand the principles of moving on to spiritual maturity and of leading men and women to saving faith in Christ.

The title of today's lesson, then, is this: "The Seed Is the Word". Here is the outline:

- I- He That Hath Ears to Hear
- II- Do You Not Understand?
- III- The Seed Is the Word!

When last we left the Master, He had lovingly touched the casket of a widow's only son and speaking but a word, had turned

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the saddest occasion in life into a time of gladness and joy. He simply said, “Arise!” and death was swallowed up in victory. The word of what He had done spread like wildfire throughout the land; and wherever He went, crowds of the curious followed. It was then that Jesus went to dine at the home of a Pharisee, and the Scripture records an in-depth explanation of love by recording the worshipful response of one who had been forgiven much. (We will pass over that incident because we have studied it so recently.) Now we see the Son of God touring the countryside, city by city, accompanied by not only the curious, but also the converted, those whose lives had actually been touched by His.

It is at this point that our Lord gravitated back to the seashore where He had so effectively, you recall, used the visual reminders of the waterfront to teach the eternal principles of commitment. It is there that we take up our reading for this lesson. It will be found in Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8 as they are combined in a harmony of the Gospels, “The Life of Christ in Stereo”:

²And he began again to teach by the sea; ¹and having that same day gone out of the house, he sat down beside the sea. And great crowds were gathered together around him, so that he entered the boat and sat there ²upon the sea, ¹while all the multitude stood ²on the land close by the shore. And he taught them many things in parables, and in his teaching said to them.

(¹Matthew 13:1-3; ²Mark 4:1-2; ³Luke 8:4 TLOCIS)¹

I- HE THAT HATH EARS TO HEAR

Once again, we see the Living Son of God seated on a fishing boat, pushed out just a bit beyond the shore. We see seated around the edge of the sea, a sea of eager listeners. Great crowds were gathered. Attendance figures were still up at this stage of the Master’s ministry. They still liked the message. One reason was that many did not yet know what the message meant. The final sentence of that opening passage, however, introduces a whole new framework of evangelical instruction. It says this:

And he taught them many things in parables, and in his teaching said...

Jesus now resumes His teaching ministry to the multitudes at the “First Evangelical Seaside Saints Assembly.” But as the Master opened His mouth to expound the Scriptures, something

¹ The Life of Christ in Stereo: The Four Gospels Speak in Harmony; by Johnston M. Cheney; © 1969 Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon

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seemed to be different. Something was different. Jesus taught them *many* things, but He taught them *in parables*. And though the *message* was the same, the *method* was not. The end result was a blending of Truth and a blinding of Truth that, in some ways, set the stage for Christian instruction until the end of the age.

He spoke in *parables*. As we shall see as this story unfolds, there was more than one reason for His unveiling this somewhat *veiled* approach to teaching. The word parable used in this passage comes from a combination of two Greek words. The preposition “para” means *beside* and the verb “ballo” means *to cast*. So the literal meaning is “to cast alongside, thus a comparison of two objects for the purpose of teaching.” The word is found some 46 times in the New Testament and its companion word surfaces at least 15 times in the Old Testament. We will not do an exhaustive study of the subject, but let’s do at least look at some of the things parables do.

1- Parables teach truth by taking something that is familiar and comparing it to something that is less familiar. An example is the parable of the laborers in the vineyard in Matthew 20.

2- Parables teach truth by using that which is physical or visible to dramatize or illustrate that which is spiritual or invisible. The parable of the fig tree in Luke 13 is an example of this.

3- Parables usually teach truth in such a way that the message is imparted powerfully without offense. The parable of the rich fool in Luke 12 is an example of this.

4- Parables in Scripture never overstep the bounds of that which is true. They are not far-out hypothetical situations, but everyday, practical ones. Look at the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15.

5- Parables are given in Scripture to expose a great depth of Truth to those who are ready to receive such truth. At the same time it gives the mind which is unregenerate or carnal an illustration it can relate to but not understand. The parable of the sower reveals this.

Parables, then, are stories told of familiar, physical situations that, to the mind that is attuned to understand it, offer, in their very simplicity, a rich storehouse of spiritual information. To those who have “no ears to hear,” however, the same words tell a

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totally different story. So it is that Jesus now begins to speak *in parables*. He begins to talk in terms really understandable only to those “with ears to hear.” Listen:

²“Hearken! Lo, the sower went forth to sow ³his seed. ²And it came to pass as he sowed, that some fell upon the roadside; ³and it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ²came and devoured it. ¹And some fell on the rocky places ²where it had not much earth; and it sprouted at once, as it had no depth of earth, but when the sun rose, it was scorched, and because it had not root ³and lacked moisture, it withered away. And some fell into the midst of the thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it, ²and it produced no returns. But some fell into the good soil; and growing up and increasing, it brought forth results, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundredfold.” ³And when he had said these things, he exclaimed, ²to them, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

(Matthew 13:3-9; Mark 4:3-9; Luke 8:5-8 TLOCIS)

Somehow you expect to see a crowd filled with people, only a few of them with ears. But of course, Jesus was speaking of the ears of the Spirit...that divinely-imparted mechanism implanted in the human spirit at the point of conversion when the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the believer’s life. Jesus was referring to a man or woman’s capacity to receive spiritual truth. Without the Holy Spirit indwelling the life, no one can understand the Word of God. No one. Not the most intelligent philosopher, not the most gifted genius, not the wisest sage or the most successful personalities. No one. Until Jesus Christ comes into a life personally to live there, you cannot...you cannot...you cannot...interpret, understand or appropriate spiritual truth.

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God:... neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.
(I Corinthians 2:14)

That is why the church has to discern when it is trying to reach out and when it is trying to build up. That is why Christian organizations need to determine if their study groups are designed to win the lost or to edify the saved. It isn’t that occasionally one group can’t do both, but it is imperative that they understand their objectives and teach and preach accordingly. Preaching nothing but the plan of redemption week after week will not build up the body of Christ, nor will heavy-hitting doctrinal teaching explain to unbelievers the simple gospel.

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Counseling centers, it would seem, ought never to forget that you can't impart spiritual principles to unregenerate hearts and expect a response. The principles are still valid, but the authority to receive them and the power to implement them are not available in the heart of the unbeliever. If someone wants counsel from you about their marriage or their drug problem or their lifestyle or their depression or anything else and they are not a Christian, the first thing you must do is tenderly and lovingly lead them to the Cross. Until their sins are forgiven, they can't forgive. Until their sins are forgiven, they can't comprehend the principles of unequal yoking or the roles of men and women or the body as the temple of God or the concept of authority and submission. Without the Spirit living in them to interpret the Word, you are only frustrating them...handing them tools they cannot use, giving them a vehicle that won't move.

That is the first and the primary meaning of that phrase, "he that hath ears to hear." There is, I believe, a secondary use of the phrase which has to do with those who have the Holy Spirit, but whose hearts are closed to instruction or rebuke. At any rate, Jesus determined to do something about the problem. He decided to preach and to teach to the crowds, using stories that would intrigue the lost while instructing the saved. He called them "parables." And while He directed His message to the whole crowd, He said lovingly as He did, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Then Jesus began His use of word pictures to articulate reality by launching into a story. It is a story that would appear to have little or no meaning to the mind which could not grasp spiritual truth. It would seem to be an almost trite tale about a careless farmer and the petty problems that would ensue if that farmer refused to pay attention to his crop. Were he just to sow seeds without caution, the bulk of those seed would end up either by the roadside as food for the birds or on rocky, unproductive soil where the roots could not form or in the midst of thorns and weeds where the enemies of fruitfulness would creep in and choke them off before they could grow. It was a simple little story, the sort of tale one would tell little children to teach them how to be careful with their lives. But it certainly wasn't profound, to say the least. Or was it?

Can't you just see the Master's eyes twinkling as He quietly addresses this band of inquisitive followers with what appears to

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be a children's story, and then, perhaps with a gentle pause, He looks around. Perhaps focusing His gaze on Simon Peter or one of the others, He then adds, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." I know what you're thinking, at least the twelve understood. Don't count on it. That next verse reads like this:

²Now when he was alone, they who were about him, with the twelve ¹disciples, came and ³asked him, saying, "What does this parable mean? And ¹why are you speaking in parables to them?"

And he answered and said to them, "Because to you it has been given to know the mysteries ³of the Kingdom of God, but to the others, ¹it has not yet been given. For this reason I speak ²everything in parables to those who are outside: that 'looking, they may see but not perceive,' and 'listening they may hear but not comprehend,' ¹lest they be turned back' and they should be forgiven."

(Matthew 13:36; Luke 8:9-10 TLOCIS)

Jesus then quotes Isaiah 6:9-10. He asks one of those penetrating questions that only God could ask.

²Then said he to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? ¹Hear therefore the parable of the sower; ³the message of the parable is this:"

(Matthew 13:36; Luke 8:11 TLOCIS)

II- DO YOU NOT UNDERSTAND?

That may be the most intriguing question in this entire story—Jesus asking His curious, but undiscerning team, "Do you not understand this parable?" It is strange, in a sense, because they had just asked Him two questions. They were: 1) What does this parable mean? and 2) Why are You speaking in parables anyway? They were, at least, honest questions. Now listen again to Jesus' reply:

Then said he to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?"

Could that statement mean that understanding this parable would unlock the treasure house of discernment that would allow them to explore the mysteries of the Kingdom as the Master unfolded rich spiritual truth clothed in the simplicity of natural stories? Perhaps. One thing is for sure, understanding this parable is key to understanding how parables work. It is for that reason that Jesus carefully explained every last detail of what He was saying. It is for that reason, then, that we will slow down

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our look at the Master's walk on planet earth long enough to take this explanation of His and hold it up as a pattern to follow in studying the rest of His word pictures in the Word.

III- THE SEED IS THE WORD!

Jesus said, "You cannot understand all the parables unless you understand this one. Now let Me explain this one. The message of the parable is this: The Seed Is the Word of God."

So the first key to understanding the meaning of the parables was to come to understand who and what the key elements represented. Now remember: the parables were given to explain the Kingdom. The Kingdom has certain elements always present. God is always present. His Word is always present. Satan is always present. Spiritual warfare is always present. The believer is always present. And in most cases, the world, or the unregenerate are always present. Those elements will be found in virtually every parable. So before we can understand what God is saying, we must always line up the cast of characters with the elements in the story. As an example, then, Jesus clearly outlines the first key element in this story. He says, "The Seed Is the Word of God." From that one statement, a multitude of principles arise. Let's look at them:

1- The Word of God is the necessary ingredient to conversion.

If the seed is the Word, and without the seed there is no life, then the message is that apart from the Word of God, nothing eternal can take place. Like that farmer in the opening illustration, you can plant, you can water, you can fertilize, you can treat the soil, you can do anything you like, but to no avail, because the seed, the ingredient that has life in it is nowhere to be found. Without the seed, the best you can do is grow healthier weeds, counterfeit plants that will grow for a while; but when the reapers come at the end of the age, they will be plucked up and cast into the oven to be burned endlessly. I Peter says this about our spiritual birth:

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible,
by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.

(I Peter 1:23)

Without the Word, there is no life. Without the Word, there is no birth. If you are concerned about sharing Christ with those who don't know Him, Beloved, lay the Word of God on your heart, that God may have the seed available to sow through you as you witness to others about who He is. It ought to be shared in

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love, but it must be shared. Your philosophies and even your testimony do not have the power to save. Only the word of God can do that. The Seed is the Word. Use it.

2- God's purposes will be fulfilled only when God's Word is sown, and it will always be fulfilled if it is. Isaiah 55 says it beautifully:

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven,
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 message is: sow the seed of the Word, and it will always accomplish its purpose! Sow anything else and you're on your own. If you want God to honor your ministry, then honor His Word. Nothing else will always reveal His will. Nothing. The reason? The Seed is the Word. That's the reason.

3- Therefore, you cannot grow without the Word. Just as there can be no life without the seed, there can be no growth without the seed. The Seed is the Word, and without it you cannot grow.

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word
of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you
an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

(Acts 20:32)

Nothing will cause growth in your life apart from the Word. Yes, things can keep you from growing. The parable explains that. But nothing else can cause you to grow but the seed. And... The Seed is the Word.

4- Ultimately, all fruit in your ministry is the result of the seed, and the seed is the Word. You may be so talented that all you have to do is stand up and open your mouth and crowds swoon. You may have such a charismatic personality that all you have to do is smile and people line up to do your bidding. You may have so much influence that at the sound of your voice, people march forward to do whatever you suggest. But in terms of fruitfulness, it will be to no avail because the Seed is the Word. Unless they "receive with meekness the engrafted Word which is able to save their souls" as we see in James 1:21, you are simply

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getting in God's way. You are sowing sawdust, pretending that it possesses life. Nothing possesses life but the seed, and the Seed is the Word.

We will continue our look at this parable in the next lesson. We will continue, as well, our look at the principles that make parables what they are. But for now, let us leave with one basic thought. That thought is, of course, this: The Seed is the Word. Many refer to this as the parable of the soils. I don't think so. I think it is the parable of the seed. Without the seed, it doesn't matter what kind of soil there is. Without the seed, it doesn't matter how many weeds there are. Without the seed, it doesn't matter how big the rocks are. Without the seed nothing matters.

That's why it is imperative the church teach the Word of God. All of the activities, all of the music, all of the fellowship in the world will not make you grow. Only one thing will make you grow: the Word of God. That is why you and I must stay in the Scriptures day and night if we are to stay in God's will. Only one thing always reveals God's will: the Word of God. It is a light to our feet and a lamp to our path.

Nothing else will feed us. Nothing else will direct us. Nothing else will convict us. Nothing else will comfort us. Nothing else will sustain us. Nothing else will defend us in our conflicts with the enemy. The Word of God is the central focus of all of life. It is the central theme of the Gospel itself. It is the central element in this, the pivotal parable of the ministry of Jesus.

It is the central element in our lives as well. Have you, like so many of us, purposed to spend more and more time in the Word, but little by little the time just disappeared? Have you, like so many of us, purposed to lay the Word on your heart day after day to equip you, prepare you and feed you, but somehow days pass and weeks pass and months pass and it doesn't happen? The problem isn't the soil. The problem is...the soil is useless without the seed, and the seed is the Word.

We need to ask, "Oh, God, dare we give Your Word anything but its rightful place in our lives? Dare we treat it as anything less than our necessary food? Dare we?"

When we do, Jesus answers, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all parables? Hear therefore the parable of the sower. The message is this: The Seed is the Word of God.

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For Further Study and Application

1- Read the “parable of the seed” in Matthew, Mark and Luke in your favorite translation. Without using the combined translation found in this lesson, merge the three together to form your own harmony of the Gospels.

2- Take a concordance and look up the word “seed.” List the key verses on cards or sheets of paper and using only the passages that use the word as it is used here (seed to be planted), see what kinds of characteristics the Scripture lists of physical seed and the kinds of things that affect them. Now make the “spiritual switch.” God created seed in the physical realm to demonstrate in the spiritual realm the principles of life and growth. By each passage, make spiritual application, knowing that “the seed is the Word.”

3- Who are those “who have ears to hear”? How can understanding that affect the way you teach? How can that affect the way you counsel?

4- Take a Bible dictionary or listing of the parables and, scanning the list, see what other parables might speak to us of the Word. Read them and try to merge the principles with the ones in this lesson.

5- Without referring to the lesson, name the four things mentioned that we can conclude about the Word, if the Seed is the Word. Now add to that list any other principles that the Holy Spirit brings to mind.

6- If the Word of God is the only thing that can equip us to live the Christian life, what commitments might God be calling us individually to make to His Word in the days to come? Get alone before God and make those commitments.

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