

The Tragedy of Fruitless Christianity

Luke 8:13-14

July 22, 2018

It is a joy to return again, once again to our study of Luke's gospel. So I'd invite you to turn in your Bibles. Open them to Luke chapter 8. We're studying the parable of the sower also known probably more accurately as the parable of the soils, the parable of the soils in Luke chapter 8. The parable that Jesus tells here, it doesn't have to do with the sower per se, but it has to do with the soils. It's about the ability of good seed to produce, but depending on the soil that it falls in. The seed is the word of God.

The sower is anyone who proclaims or preaches or teaches or speaks or shares the word of God with other people and the soils, the soils are human hearts. The soils are human hearts, that either reject the word, or enfeeble the word or receive the

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word. Three hearts, three soils here are ultimately unaffected by the word of God.

They are utterly fruitless in the end, only one heart, only one kind of soil. In that one heart only the word of God finds a home and it abundantly is effective and fruitful and lasting. If you've found your way to Luke 8, it's been a few weeks. So let's take a look at the parable again, starting in verse 4. I'll, I'm read that again.

Luke 8:4 says, "When a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, 'A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded one hundred fold.' As he said these things, he called out, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'"

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At the beginning there in verse 4, it says, "A great crowd was gathering, people from town to town were coming to him." Huge crowds, massive crowds had gathered in Capernaum there to see Jesus, to watch him perform mighty acts of power. They came to witness his renowned compassion. They came to partake of his kindness and they came to hear him teach the word of God.

Massive throng of people, this is a crowd that might rival a Billy Graham crusade in size, it represents here an incredible first century evangelistic opportunity. But notice, instead of speaking straightforwardly to the crowds about the Gospel, Jesus speaks in such a way as to veil the truth from the masses. He actually here covers the truth in a parable, in familiar images. He speaks truthfully and as we've seen already in our study, he's speaking profoundly. But he's speaking subtly, he's speaking by means of a parable.

Instead of talking directly to what is mostly an unbelieving crowd, about the holiness of God, about the problem of man's sin, instead of talking about coming judgment and eternal punishment, instead of giving the good news about

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salvation from sin in a full and final atonement that he himself will provide once for all, and then calling the masses to repent and believe, to come to the front and pray with trained counselors. Jesus wraps truths in familiar word pictures, he hides the truth from the crowds, but he hides the truth as it were, in plain sight, using a teaching device of a parable.

Why did he do that? What was the point? Look at verses 9 and 10 "When his disciples," See they themselves didn't understand this, they, "when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, 'To you, it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God but for others, they are in parables so that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand."

Why did Jesus speak to this massive crowd in parables? Why does he seem to waste this evangelistic opportunity? Didn't Jesus want everyone to receive the same profound truths? Why didn't Jesus speak plainly without veil, without hiding to the crowds as he spoke to his own disciples? Listen, Jesus knows that most of these people here are not really interested in

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eternal truth. They're just coming to him to hear something interesting. They're here to witness a spectacle. They're here to see newsworthy, breaking news miracles.

So Jesus speaks truth, but he veils it a bit. This is to help his own disciples grow in discernment. To do that, he's here culling the crowd and he's teaching his disciples about it. Both the culling of the crowd and the teaching of his disciples by means of the same simple but profound parable.

It is his teaching that culls the crowd. It is his teaching that makes the distinction here between regenerate disciples and unregenerate spectators. It's his teaching that separates his true disciples from the rest of the crowd, who are nothing more really, than curious on lurker, onlookers, spectators, their fair, fair weather disciples. His teaching is the dividing line. True disciples, regenerate believers, they, even if they're mixed in that massive crowd, they are able to discern something deeper in this familiar story Jesus told. They can hear their master's voice, even when he packages the truth in word pictures

and similes and metaphors. He's not worried at all, that his true disciples are gonna miss a thing.

He's not worried about that. As he would soon say, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them. And they follow me." Comforting words to Jesus' true disciples, but for the others, for those who could see Jesus, but they only looked at him really with their physical eyes. For those who could hear Jesus and hear his word, but they were only listening with their natural ears, they will neither see, nor will they understand, and they will not be saved from their sins.

They will perish in their natural state because they chose to rely solely on the power of their own natural perception, none of their own judgments and opinions coming through their physical senses, none of that is gonna lead them to repentance of their sins, to believe in Jesus Christ, to find full and final salvation, none of it. So Jesus leaves them in that state.

On the one hand, Jesus taught in parables to cull the crowds. On the other hand though, Jesus taught in parables to

kind of peak and provoke and stimulate the interests of his true disciples. Through the parable of the soils here, Jesus has something very, very important to teach his true disciples. It is a vital lesson on discernment. Discernment, the ability to make distinctions, the ability to see deeply, to examine carefully, to discern the difference.

When you stop and think about it, Jesus is really the prototypical sower, isn't he? He's the ideal sower. He is the perfect sower because at this very point in the text, as he is teaching, Jesus is sowing the good seed of the word of God across this large field of a massive, unbelieving crowd. He's sowing seed. Within the crowd that day are those who came with different kinds of hearts. And all of them are pictured in this parable, all of them, by four different soils: hard pack soil, rocky soil, thorny soil, and then good soil.

While Jesus is teaching his own disciples about these different hearts, these different soils, he was also at the same time demonstrating what he was teaching. Namely, that the good seed must find prepared soil in order to be effective and

fruitful. God's word will not produce in hard packed, rocky or thorny soils, it needs to find good soil in order to produce good fruit. And once again, we find the vital principle of Scripture, where there is a conjoining of the spirit and the word, both the spirit and the word operating in conjunction for the salvation and sanctification of souls.

So Jesus' disciples, they have the privilege of hearing this parable, learning these principles of discernment in gospel sowing, and then observing those principles playing out right before their eyes in real time. Have you ever heard of a teacher besides Jesus Christ, who can teach like that? He is incredible.

Well, last time we talked about the hard packed soil, which is a picture of a human heart that has been hardened by the pride of false religion, false religion. Jesus gave the picture back in verse 5, he interpreted the picture for us in verse 12. I'm not going to go back over that, but you can grab the sermon online and listen to it if you did miss it.

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Today, we want to move on. And we want to look at two more soils, two more kinds of hearts. These are two kinds of hearts that seem to be responsive. They appear to respond well to the word of God. But ultimately, in the end, they turn away from the gospel, and they fall away from Jesus Christ. And folks, you need to pay close attention to this.

Here's the reason you need to listen carefully to what Jesus teaches here. There are many who attend Christian churches across our country, throughout our state, in this region, and in this city, many who call themselves Christians, but their hearts are pictured by the first three soils.

We pray this isn't the case in our own church, but we're quite certain it is, among some. As it was in Jesus' day, so it is in our own day. This is a perennial problem with the human heart, the human condition, the unbelieving heart. It's everywhere in human history. So we shouldn't be so proud as to think it wouldn't happen here in our midst.

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But sadly, what Jesus speaks of here is probably worse in our own time and in our own country, because we have actually crafted an American form of Christianity that accommodates bad soils, that affirms bad hearts, and gives them false assurances that they're just fine, when they're really not. And now through global missions, we've exported this brand of sub-Christian, American Christianity all over the world. American Christianity is a false religion of fruitless converts.

I know that's bold, but I'm gonna say it again. American Christianity is a false religion of fruitless converts. There have been theologians from prominent colleges and seminaries who have engaged in hermeneutical gymnastics, and clever exegesis in interpretation to create a category for this, this mongrel. It's this unholy crossbreed of a Christian with an unregenerate heathen blended together in one, they call them carnal Christians, or backslidden Baptists, they say with a wink, but they're referring to a fruitless Christian.

Yes, I know a fruitless Christian is an oxymoron. But it's a more accurate and less confusing description than carnal

Christian is. Truly there is no such animal. But some felt it necessary to create this category to explain fruitless Christianity, calling them carnal Christians, backslidden Christians, because they felt the need I guess pastorally, to give Christian parents and grandparents feelings of assurance about little carnal Charlie and backslidden Betty.

Charlie and Betty grew up in the church. They grow up, they get older, and they seem wholly uninterested in their adult years in attending church or in the goodness and greatness of God and his salvation. They seem uninterested in submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ. They seem uninterested in growth in holiness. Oh, but that doesn't matter.

They grew up in church. They memorized Awana verses. They came to Jesus at a, at Christian camp, at church camp. And for all that investment, for all that work, for all that effort on the parts of parents and grandparents and others in the church, they see no fruit. They see no lasting fruit. And Charlie's parents are perplexed. They see a life that looks quite worldly.

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Betty's grandparents wonder, but they have been taught, never to doubt the prayer that, pra, that kid prayed. They've been taught never to question, never to disrupt their feelings of assurance. They've been told that God's word never returns void, which we just read in Isaiah 55. It doesn't return void, it goes out and does and accomplishes exactly the purpose that God sent it out to accomplish and sometimes that's judgment, sometimes it's salvation.

It will accomplish its purpose, but that is no promise and guarantee that your kids, who learn Awana verses are going to grow up and become Christians and live as Christians. But they've been told God's word never returns void. So they believe that these prodigals are true sons and daughters of the kingdom, and that they will eventually squeeze themselves through the gates of heaven, even if they're putting out cigarettes at the turnstile.

As I said, they used to be called carnal Christians. They used to be called backslidden Christians. These days, people have dropped the adjectives. Now they just call them Christians.

They're hard hearted hearts of verse 12, they're fruitless hearts of verses 13 and 14. But we Americans have created false forms of Christianity to accommodate them and call them Christians and count them as church members.

And as all the surveys revealed Barna Research Group, Pew Research, they can call themselves Christians now. They can check that box, even if they rarely attend church, rarely read the Bible. "Judge not," right? That is why we need to pay careful attention to Jesus' teaching in these verses. Our background, our enculturation is in this distinctively American false religion. It may have not set us up well, it may have not helped us to be discerning.

But here we get the privilege of listening to Jesus as he gives us discernment, as he helps us to grow in understanding and we're going to learn here from Jesus, how to discern the difference between false professors of Christianity and true possessors of Christ. That is vital, that is vital folks if we are to practice true Christian love.

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Divine love sent from heaven above, the failure to produce true Christian fruit in our lives. The failure to grow into maturity by the Holy Spirit in a life of obedience to Jesus Christ. Listen, that is an eternally damning condition. If we truly love others, we do not want to give them false assurances that they are Christians, when there is no evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. So if we're going to love them, we will love them by praying for them, by admonishing them, and by warning them about the dangers of fruitless religion.

Ah, but before we look at the lives of others, we're going to examine ourselves first. We need to have discernment about others, yes, but lest we be guilty of walking around with that protrusion, called a, a log in our eyes or a beam sticking out of our eye sockets, blinded to our own condition.

Look, we need to exercise discernment about ourselves, first. What a tragedy to grow up and live and live your entire life in a church like this one or other faithful churches around the country, and stand before God and realize you have borne no fruit, nothing, not one little shriveled up grape. You stand

before him, having attended church all your life, and the lever is pulled and down you go.

Let's take a look at the first point in the outline, that's printed in your bulletin. But we're going to start with the pictures of fruitless Christianity. Number one, the pictures of fruitless Christianity. To remind you of those pictures we'll just go back to what we read there in verses 5 and 6. "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it." We covered that first soil last time. Now this in verse 6, "Some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture."

The first picture of fruitless Christianity is seed that falls into rocky soil, rocky soil. Now, this rocky soil doesn't refer to a bunch of rocks in the dirt. This is not a, a parable about bad farming practices or lazy farmers who never pull the rocks out of their field. Jesus is speaking here of a very well known reality of farming in first century Palestine.

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There were many places throughout their land, maybe a foot or two beneath the surface of the topsoil, which could be very rich, appear to be very good soil. There was underneath there, a limestone rock bed and this layer of limestone could remain hidden from even the most diligent of farmers as they plowed that field for the first time. Seed that was sown into this, what is, what by, you know, by observation they didn't know, but through experience they would learn was shallow soil.

That seed that was sown into shallow soil, couldn't sustain growth. It couldn't bring plants up to maturity and fruitfulness. The problem is that the farmer couldn't tell right away that he had sown his seed into shallow soil because at first everything looked great. The seed would hit the soil, it would go in like any other seed, it would germinate underneath the soil, it starts sending the roots downward for nutrients and water, and stalks upward for light, energy.

Well, because the roots couldn't grow deep enough, they would hit that limestone layer beneath, hidden beneath the soil. And all that young plant's energies would be directed upward. So

this fledgling plant would break through the surface, actually too quickly. It almost looked too eager. Its growth would be mostly above ground, it would look very good, very healthy at first. But then, when the sun passed over that shallow rooted plant, the heat from the sun would cook that plant because without a sufficient root system, without sufficient water and nutrients that plant would wither and die almost as soon as it sprang up and started developing foliage.

The analogy here to the shallow heart is pretty obvious. But let's wait to consider that 'til we look at the next verse, verse 7, which pictures the thorny soil, which is the second picture of fruitless Christianity. Says in verse 7, "Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it." You got good seed, but when it falls into weed infested soil, doesn't matter how hardy or robust of a seed it is, doesn't matter whether it's a genetically modified, bionic super seed when it falls into weedy soil that has, had this suffocating effect on even the best hardiest of seeds.

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In a sin cursed world, everything that we want to grow, that which is useful to us like our food, those plants struggle to survive. But everything we don't want to grow, like thorns, and weeds, and poisonous, noxious plants. My backyard is full of them, all right, those plants grow without any effort at all. And they grew up more than everything else I want to grow, like my grass. Weeds are right at home in a sin cursed soil.

And they act and grow with aggressive hostility toward our food. So when these two kinds of plants are together, plants for food and weeds for the curse, when our food is trying to grow in a soil that's been seeded with weeds, the more aggressive weeds, they take over that space, they grow faster, they grow stronger, they grow higher than our crops, the weeds steal the precious sunlight and energy. They devour the soil's nutrients; they drink up the moisture in the soil.

You might say the weeds are guilty of plant murder. When they kill, they kill their victims slowly. The weeds choke out the good plants, suffocate them over time, they starve the good plants of food, they dehydrate them of water, they rob them from

the sun, sun's energy. It's a slow, cruel death over time, but those good plants eventually bear no fruit. Again, the analogy to the heart condition is pretty apparent.

So let's get right into our second point, which is Jesus' interpretation. In verses 13 and 14, you see, second point your outline, he points to the roots of fruitless Christianity, the roots of fruitless Christianity. Jesus' interpretation of the first picture of fruitless Christianity is there in verse 13.

"The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away." The first reason for fruitless Christianity that Jesus points out here, is superficial enthusiasm, superficial enthusiasm. And at the root of this kind of heart, which is pictured by the rocky soil is the failure to fear, and to trust, and to love God fully and truly. Superficial enthusiasm at the root of the heart, pictured in the rocky soil is the failure to fear God, to trust God, to love God fully and truly. These people are people who have not,

who have not examined their hearts, they don't see themselves clearly.

They think they've got a good picture and a good understanding. They're pretty self-assured, but they don't see themselves clearly. And they refuse to look at themselves closely. They refuse to look at their own hearts. Interesting thing about these supposed disciples, is that they look like the best converts. They're excited, they're joyful, they're eager to learn, and it's, get this, it is not an act. The verb that Jesus uses here indicates that they really feel this way.

They really do receive the word whenever they hear it. But that is part of the problem. Their emotions are out in front. And their minds and their wills are lagging far behind because they haven't thought deeply enough. "They have not counted the cost in order that they might wholly and completely devote themselves to God." So Jesus says here, "When they hear the word, they receive it with joy." Probably a better way to translate that is, Whenever they hear the word, they receive it with joy. That's what the text actually says. The picture is of

someone who will receive the word with joy. And they'll do so repeatedly. Whenever they hear it.

They're excited listeners. This is kind of the person who hears and then kind of starts to fall away. But they come back and they keep hearing and they, then they fall, and they come back, and this is a multiple conversion person. You know that person? The one who's repeatedly making professions of faith recommitting their lives, they're getting baptized and re-baptized and they come again and get baptized, re-baptized again.

Each time they are sincere in doing so. In fact, they seem so sincere, so zealous, so eager, they appear to be the model convert. As I said, these are people who are reacting superficially, with a mere emotional response. And let me just say this, that there is nothing wrong with emotions, per se. In fact, emotions are a vital, indispensable part of our lives as humans and especially so for us as Christians.

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True, godly affections, a love for God, a love for his truth, a love for holiness, a love for God's people, a love for lost people. Corresponding negative affections, like hatred for all that offends and dishonors God, a hatred of sin in any form, a hatred of anything that's preventing our holiness.

Surely those are emotions too, right? They're godly affections and godly affections are vital, but when our emotions are not the product of a deep, of deeply rooted convictions, anchored into biblical truth, that's when our emotions can lead us astray. The gospel is a message that is received by faith, true biblical saving faith, which is threefold in nature.

True saving faith has an intellectual element when we understand the gospel. True saving faith also has an emotional element. When we ascent to and affirm the gospel. True saving faith though also has a volitional element, when we obey the gospel, repenting of our sins, and following Jesus as Lord. Take away any of those elements. And you no longer have Biblical faith.

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All those three elements mind, emotions, will, that is the stuff of true saving faith that the Bible describes. Growing from sound, healthy roots of true biblical conviction. That's what all true believers have in common is true biblical saving faith, mind, emotions, will, all involved.

But some people respond to the gospel only with a superficial enthusiasm. They've either bypassed the intellect, or ignored the will, or they've done both. And they've responded only in the emotion of the moment. Some combine the emotion with the intellect, feeling the thrill of intellectual stimulation at the hearing of the word, but there's no fruit produced, no obedience offered to Christ from the heart of love and worship.

Frederick Godet refers to these people as those with quote, "Excitable natures, in whom imagination and sensibility for the moment make up for the absence of moral feeling, they are charmed with the novelty of the gospel, and the opposition which it offers to received ideas." End quote.

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That is to say, some people just have a feeling connection to the gospel or an intellectual connection to the gospel. They like the novelty of it, they like the, you, you could say even, subversion of the gospel in our current world, because the gospel is always countercultural. Some people dig that.

Jesus confronted these kinds of people along the way in his ministry on earth. In fact, turn a few pages ahead in Luke's Gospel to chapter 9, chapter 9, Luke 9:57 and following. Several these kinds of people responded to Jesus and, but they came with a superficial enthusiasm. And Jesus actually discourages them from discipleship, he actually turns them away from following him with a word.

Look what it says there, Luke 9:57, "As they were going along the road, someone said to Jesus, 'I'll follow you wherever you go.'" Well that's superficial enthusiasm, right? "Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'" Enthusiasm isn't going to last an overnight stay. "To another he said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.'" And Jesus

said to him, 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead. As for you, go proclaim the kingdom of God.' Yet another said, 'I will follow You, Lord. But let me first say well, to those of my home.' Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'"

Look, the implication each of these cases is that they turn back from following Jesus. His word of challenge, just a simple statement is enough there to repel them and reveal their hearts and expose them for what they are. But back here in Luke 8:13, notice that it's, times of testing that reveal the superficial convert, times of testing, even though he receives the word, whenever he hears it preached with sincerely felt emotions of joy.

Jesus says in verse 13 that, "Though he believes for a little while, because he has no root, in time of testing, he falls away." Just as the heat of the sun test the depth of the plant's root system, revealing that root system to be either deep or shallow. So also trials reveal the depth or shallowness of someone's professed faith, right?

Proverbs 17:3, "The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the Lord tests the hearts." Little pressure, little heat, it's all it takes to test the validity of someone's profession of faith. Jesus is specific at spelling out the kinds of testing that come to those who profess faith.

Luke records here the word "testing" it's a more general summary term that Jesus used for testing, *peirasmos*, but Matthew and Mark record more specific words that Jesus used two, "Tribulation and persecution." Tribulation literally means pressure. It's referring to a pressing down or pressing together, squeezed in a vise.

Could refer to trouble in general, but particularly of affliction, oppression. The word persecution in Matthew and Mark refers to being pursued, hunted, even injured. Add both of those terms together tribulation, persecution come to those who profess Christ according to Matthew and Mark because of the word. Those, the tribulation isn't just a general one that we

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all feel or persecution that maybe we all feel if some other country were to invade and persecute us. That's not the sense.

This is tribulation, persecution that come because of the word or in Sermon on the Mount terms. Jesus spoke of tribulation, persecution that can come on account of the Son of Man. When that happens to the superficial enthusiast, that person withers and wilts and dies like a shallow rooted plant in the sun's heat.

They may have received the word with joy whenever they heard it. They may have believed for a time, they may have come forward, signed cards, met with counselors, they may have been in the church for a time, but when the heat comes, they're goners. Whereas Jesus said, here in the text, "They fall away." They fall away. It's the verb we get from, from this verb, we get the word apostasy.

In fact, one of the meanings in the range of this verb, *aphistemi* is religious in nature, it's to become apostate, to go apostate. So when testing comes, those with rocky soil hearts,

the superficial enthusiast, while their emotions take them in decidedly away from Christ direction. They distance themselves, they withdraw, they go away, and they eventually stay away entirely.

These are the apostates, they're not true believers. But they're fruitless Christians who only professed faith, were superficially connected to the vine, but they never actually possessed faith or vitality from the vine. They appear, only appear to be Christians, and only for a time as, 1 John 2:19 says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out that it might become plain that they are not all of us."

The apostle John wants us to learn discernment too. This is strong teaching from Jesus, isn't it? And I'm guessing that there are those in our midst who are more emotional among us and they're wondering, What about me? What if my emotions lead me astray? Will I fall away too? Will testing come to me that's eventually going to drive me away?

Listen, if you're more emotional person by nature, and if you're here wondering whether or not your emotional response to the gospel and the truths of scripture and your love for Jesus is real. How do you know if this is all really real? You know, by whether or not your faith endures testing. James 1:12 says, "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life," Get this, "Which God has promised to those who love him." That's the root of it all. Those who endure testing are those who know and love God.

It's not mere emotion; it's rooted, anchored emotion. It's emotion that springs up from deep conviction about knowing God. The love is real, and they will no doubt about it, Romans 8, read that last section in Romans 8. "Neither life nor death, nor angels, nor powers, nor any other thing," Right? "Will separate us from the love of God in Christ." They will stand against tribulation and persecution because they know and love and reverence the Lord God. They'd rather die than live in any denial of Christ.

As J.C. Ryle put it, quote, "Feelings, no doubt, fill a most important role in our personal Christianity. Without them there can be no saving religion, hope and joy and peace and love and fear are things which must be felt if they really exist. But it must never be forgotten that there are religious affections which are spurious and false and spring from nothing better than animal excitement.

"It is quite possible to feel great pleasure or deep alarm under the preaching of the gospel, and yet to be utterly destitute of the grace of God. The tears of some hearers of sermons, and the extravagant delight of others are no certain sign of conversion. We may be warm admirers of favorite preachers, and yet remain nothing better than rocky ground hearers. We should be content with nothing less than a deep, humbling, self-mortifying work of the Holy Spirit and the uniting of our hearts with Christ." End quote.

I hope you heard that "Deep, humbling, self-mortifying, self-killing work of the Holy Spirit, and uniting of our hearts

with Christ." That's true conversion. That's the kind of conversion that will stand the test, any tribulation, any persecution on account of the word, on account of the Son of Man, that will stand to the end.

So the first reason for fruitless Christianity has to do with this superficial enthusiasm. And at its heart, down deep at the root, there is the failure to go deep to self-examine, the failure to work out true repentance, the failure to grow deep in roots of knowledge, and loving, and trusting, and fearing God.

But there's a second reason for fruitless Christianity. A second reason here in the text in verse 14, which we might summarize as temporal distraction, temporal distraction. And at the root of this heart problem is the failure to expose and repent of idolatry. At the root of the, of temporal distraction, that ultimately chokes out all fruit bearing, at the root of that heart problem is the failure to expose and repent of idolatry, I suppose that's why the apostle John, at the very end of his letter, first letter said, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

Idols are so pernicious and so deceptive, and they're ubiquitous. John Calvin called the heart an Idol factory, just pumping out idols, pumping out idols, always something else to worship other than God. When God created us as human beings, he created us to be worshipers. It's in our DNA, we cannot help it spiritually, but to worship something. So that means if we're not worshipping God, we are worshipping an idol. So don't be fooled.

Even the staunchest atheist of our day is an idolater and you can be sure of this, that the more fervent the atheist, the more fanatical he is in his anti-supernatural religion, because it is a religion. In our day, in our time, as in Jesus' day, there are so many idols. Jesus puts them all very simply, briefly, and comprehensively into three categories.

Three kinds, look at Verse 14, Jesus explains this second picture of fruitless Christianity, he says, "As for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear but as they go on their way, they're choked by the cares and riches and pleasures

of life and their fruit does not mature." So unlike the rocky ground people, those, these people with weed infested hearts, they are able to develop some depth of root and grow up into what appears on the surface anyway to be a healthy plant.

One commentator described these people who said, quote, "They have no objection to the doctrines and requirements of the gospel. They even want to believe and obey them. But they allow the things of the earth to get such a hold on their minds, that they leave no room for the word of God to work. And from this, it follows that no matter how many sermons they hear, they never seem to benefit from any of them. A weekly process of truth stifling goes on within, and they bring no fruit to perfection." End quote.

"As they go their way," Jesus says, "As they go their way." That refers to them living out their lives, they are choked as they live out their lives by the cares and riches and pleasures of life. The word for life here is a word *bios*. It's not the word *zoe*, the word *zoe* refers more to spiritual life. *Bios* refers more to the temporal issues of life. So we're talking

here about temporal distractions, the distractions of this current, temporal world. And these are pictured in the parable as thorns, that strangle the life out of the good seed.

This is so dangerous, beloved, so dangerous, because the dying, the strangulation, it happens over time. You've heard the illustration of the frog, you put 'em in a boiling pot of water, and he hops out, right? Feels the heat because it's amphibious, immediately feels the temperature change and gets out of there. But you put the frog in the ambient temperature water, its own skin, it feels it, you just slowly turn up the heat, right and that frog eventually, doesn't jump out.

It'll cook, it'll boil, and it never leaves because it's imperceptible to the frog. That's this, could be years, decades, even a lifetime of Christian profession and church attendance. For so many, being choked by the thorns is imperceptible to them. But the close, to the close observer of Christianity, to every godly fruit inspector, which ought to be every one of us as Christians, it's clear and obvious, there's no fruit to be found. What are the thorns?

Three kinds of thorn bushes here. Three idolatrous roots producing these thorn bushes, which you can jot down in your notes as three sub-points. First, you've got the cares of life, the cares of life, which refers to an anxious preoccupation people have with subsistence, how to make a living, how to get the daily bread, the idolatry involved here is a worry over biological life, anxiety over survival.

Now typically, these are not the struggles of the wealthy. But of those with less means, those who are anxious about providing food, buying clothing, having shelter, paying rent, paying the mortgage. Often these people, these are people who get themselves into debt, to get through these little stresses and financial stresses and that gives them something else to fret over. Not people of great means. Although there are some people with means who can act just like this.

We call them misers, right? Wealthy penny pinchers, who live a life of poverty because they're worried about the next stock market crash. But mostly these are people who are in the

GRACE CHURCH

lower tier of society, anxious as they struggle to eke out a living and yet they live. Yet they continue day by day. It's just that they're boiling with anxiety and, in their hearts, over the next day, even though God has been totally faithful, their whole life long.

Anxiety over temporal, biological life is a sin. It's a sin, no matter what you have or don't have in the bank. And the poor are not here, excused for this sin because they're poor. To be anxious and worried about the carrier, cares of life is sin. And to let these preoccupations divert your attention away from the good seed of God's word and growth to fruitfulness may be eternally damning. Cares, worries, anxieties are all manifestation of a failure to believe in God. A failure to take him at his word. A failure to trust him.

Cares, worries, anxieties erode the soul. They dull the clarity that comes from scripture, they stifle all joy, and they short circuit full, complete obedience unto fruitfulness. Those who succumb to the cares and worries of the physical life are distracted by temporal things. And that reveals the fact that

they have made an idol out of making a living, which is the stuff of this temporal, biological life.

Turn over a few pages to Luke 12, Luke 12 and look at verse 22. This is the passage in this section at the end of Luke 12 that corresponds to the, Do not worry, passage in Matthew 6, where Matthew records the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus starts with the command in verse 22, "Do not be anxious." And he ends with the command, "Fear not." Don't be anxious and don't fear.

Let me just read a few verses in the section, start in ver, verses 20-23. "He said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your body, about what you'll put on. Life, for life is more than food. And the body is more than clothing.'" He goes on to illustrate that, but skip down to verse 29. "And do not seek what you are to eat and what you're to drink, nor be worried, for all the nations of the world seek after these things, your heavenly Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom. And these things will be added to you."

Verse 32, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Not just bread, and clothing, and shelter, the kingdom. Look, that's the issue in verse 32, isn't it, right there? Those who feel the stress and strain of making a living, they will, will they succumb to the cares of life as temporal distractions that take them away from the kingdom of God, away from the word of God? Or will they resist temptation, trust God, prefer his kingdom, which is promised by the father in the Gospel? Will they live in the comfort of this good shepherd, who commands his sheep, Fear not little flock or are they gonna refuse to trust that good shepherd, and live in sinful, fearful, anxiety? That's the issue.

Verse 14, go back to Luke 8 and look at verse 14, there's a second temporal distraction in verse 14. And it's called the riches of life. The riches of life. The idolatry here at work is the worship of money, of stuff. I like Jesus' word for it, he calls it uh, with an idle name, *mammon*, *mammonos* is the name he uses. The riches of life, it refers to a preoccu, occupation with worldly goods, with accumulating wealth, with buying

property, success in business, and then with pride in stuff, and in business, and possessions, and all the rest.

There are so many who strive to get rich or get richer or stay rich. And rich isn't just about the money. It's about the reputation. It's about the success of the brand. It's about the success of the endeavor, the project, whatever it is, but it is a temporal distraction. It is a sinful pursuit, that may be eternally damning. That's always been the way of the world, hasn't it?

We can see it clearly in Luke's Gospel, Luke's Gospel is replete with warnings to the rich. He records many of the Lord's warnings, in the Sermon on the Mount we already saw Luke 6:24. "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation." Luke 12:13 to 21, just before the section I read there, Jesus told the parable of the rich fool, the man who was self-contented, and yet he was greedy for more. And so he tore down his barns to build bigger barns, this guy's always about building projects, right?

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So God said to him "Fool, this night your soul is required of you, and the things that you have prepared, whose will they be?" So the one who, "so is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." Man, let that be a epitaph on our tombstone. "He was rich, she was rich toward God." Or the well known story of the rich man and Lazarus another, another warning from our Lord, look, Luke sick 16:19-31. This is one of the most harrowing portrayals of hell in all the Bible.

And contrary to popular belief, it was the rich man, not the poor man Lazarus, it was the rich man who is in eternal torment and unrelenting anguish in the flames of Hades. Terrifying picture. Rich Young Ruler of Luke 18:18-24. After hearing Jesus demands for discipleship that he part from his riches and follow Christ, what did he do? He walked away from Jesus, but "he walked away very sad and sorrowful, for he was extremely rich." Striving for wealth is not only an eternally dangerous pursuit, one that tiptoes around the perimeter of a deep and dark abyss. But chasing money we know from Scripture is also an utterly futile occupation in life.

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Proverbs 23:4-5 tells us, "Do not toil to acquire wealth, be discerning enough to desist. When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings flying like an eagle toward heaven." Look, ask any Christian man or woman, those whom the Lord has blessed with means, with abilities and avenues in providential circumstances to make money. And there are those godly men and women who have the ability to make money and those Christians are a blessing to the church. But those wealthy, godly Christian people are going to be the first to tell you the precarious nature of wealth.

They will tell you about the folly of trusting in money, they will tell you about this Proverb I just quoted from Proverbs 23. And then they will illustrate that with anecdotes from their own life, how they too fell into the trap of loving money, trusting in money, and found it gone in a heartbeat. The stock market took one point or points of difference, and all of a sudden, they're wondering what to do. They learn to trust God, not money. They learn to be generous and kind and give and give and give. Listen to those people.

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Look to the Scripture and do not succumb to the love of money. And listen very carefully, you do not have to be wealthy, or have a large bank account in order to be tempted with this sin, to be tempted by the riches of life because sometimes it is the poorest of the world who are most enslaved to wealth. I got two words for you, Colorado lottery. Black Hawk, gambling, Las Vegas.

It's so sad to see people cashing in their social security checks, and pumping it into a slot machine, enslaved to greed. Sometimes the poorest of the world, they're longing for, craving for what they don't have, and they're craving for it with greedy enslavement and desire. They love money, but they don't have and they want it so badly. And the tragic irony is that the love of money by the poor, it never actually yields money. Like in Vegas, all it does is give it to the house. It's the biggest scam out there.

That's temporally, eternally, it earns them a place in hell. Though they suffer in this life, like the poor beggar Lazarus. They're enslaved by greed and thus they're not going to

share eternity with Lazarus. But they're going to share eternity with the unbelieving rich men that they envied. All the casino owners are gonna be there with them.

And that's why Jesus warned, "No servant can serve two masters. For either he'll hate the one and love the other or he'll be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." God is the only true and living God, but money, which there, is more literally translated *mammon*. *Mammon* is a false idol. It's a false God, and that is at the heart of all who love money. It's idolatry and greed.

Well cares and riches are two of the temporal distractions that can reveal an idolatrous heart is, which is never going to produce lasting fruit. There's a third temporal distraction that can choke the good seed. And it's the pleasures of life, the pleasures of life, which are widely available actually, to rich and poor alike in our modern world. These are some of the most damning distractions, temporal distractions of all, what's the idol? The idol involved here is the self. Whatever keeps the

self comfortable, whatever gives the self pleasure, whatever makes the self happy.

In a country that's founded on the right to pursue happiness. I'm afraid we got a lot of these kinds of idolaters around us. In fact, I would dare say that this is probably a sin that we have all been delivered from rich and poor alike. Because pleasures abound in the modern world. You do not need to be a millionaire any longer to get what you want, to stay entertained, to stay pleurably distracted. Sports, movies, restaurants, vacations, activities, tours, travel, television with 500 channels and soft comfortable couches to sit in.

So prevalent are the pleasures in our day that millions are ensnared, taken captive, enslaved to this form of idolatry. People today are so sufficiently contented and so wholly and completely distracted. They are utterly uninterested in the salvation of their eternal souls. They'd rather see what's next on Netflix. What are the pleasures? Well, there are, in, pleasures that are inherently sinful. Pleasures also that are

not inherently sinful, but can become sinful by excessive indulgence.

Hendrickson puts it this way, he says "The pleasures of life are of two kinds, A: Those that are wrong in themselves drunkenness, drug addiction, gambling, sexual vice, etc. And B: Those that are wrong when a person overindulges in them, games, sports, entertainments, etc." Here we are in Colorado, right? In the summertime. This is the time of the year when we're all reminded of the incredible beauty of the country, the area we live in. Many of us take time to partake of that beauty and enjoy it. There's nothing wrong with that, at all. It's what the Lord gave it to us for.

Our state has long been a tourist destination. In fact, many people move to Colorado so they can live close to where they can take advantage of all the closer proximity to all those outdoor activities, whether it's in the mountains or in the plains and all year round. But how disappointing it is to see Christians, professing Christians, especially older, retired Christians, who buy into that satanic lie that retirement from

work means the opportunity for self-indulgence. One last chance to check off all those bucket list items.

One last chance to soak up all the pleasures of this life before kicking the bucket and ascending to the sweet by and by, where they can't get any of that stuff. Too often they abandon the joyful duties and privileges of their Titus 2 roles in the church. Their final opportunities to evangelize unsaved family members and friends before entering heaven.

Many of them become absentee Christians, having abandoned their posts at church, having abandoned our Lord's Great Commission to give themselves over to the fleeting pleasures of the world. Some like Demas, they reveal in their older age that they have all along been in love with this present world. Remember Demas, according to 2 Timothy 4:10? He proved to be in love with this present world, Paul said, "Demas has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica."

He went where the action was, he went to the urban center where his heart would find fulfillment. And sadly, I watch

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Greeley

Demases in the church, young and old alike, but especially sad in the older times, older years. Especially noticeable here in Colorado, people who desert the Lord's commission to make disciples and they're gonna go check more stuff off their bucket lists. So tragically sad.

Three different kinds of thorn bushes here, the cares of life, the riches of life, the pleasures of life, but all three of these with the same entangling, strangling effect, they all prevent the growth to maturity of spiritual fruit. And it's a damning condition, beloved.

J.C. Ryle again, he puts this so well, and we would do well to hear and heed his warning. "The things of this life are one of the greatest dangers which beset a Christian's path. The money, the pleasures, the daily business of the world are so many traps to catch the soul. Thousands of things which in themselves are innocent become when followed to excess a little better than poison to the soul and a helping hand on the way to hell. Open sin is not the only thing that ruins the soul, in the middle of families, and as we follow our lawful callings, we

must be on our guard. If we do not watch and pray, these temporal things may rob us of heaven and smother every sermon we hear." End quote. Every sermon, including this one.

Folks, fruitless Christianity is not only a tragedy for those who are fruitless Christians, you need to understand it's wicked before God. God is angry about fruitless Christianity. I'm going to spend more time in this next week, but the lives of fruitless Christian tell lies about God. They miss represent God to others, they deny the power of the gospel, they blaspheme the Holy Name of God. It's a very serious sin.

It's really the sin tantamount to taking God's name in vain. You work around people maybe who take who's, who say, OMG and take Jesus' name in a vain way or use it as a curse word and you, you recoil at that, I, I understand. But listen, more offensive to your ears and eyes should be those who profess Jesus Christ with their mouths, but by their deeds they deny him. That is taking God's name in vain in a more profound way than anybody who utters a verbal blasphemy. It's blasphemy.

And that's why, point three in your outline, there's only one end appointed for fruitless Christians, those who profess Christ, but bear no fruit originated by the Holy Spirit. Number three, the fate of fruitless Christianity, the fate of fruitless Christianity there in point three, turn over to John 15. John 15, and we'll close with this. John 15, this is the passage about the vine and the branches. And its imagery that goes back, way back to God's people as pictured as the Lord's vineyard. We see that actually in Isaiah chapter 5. You can actually jot that down and read it later, Isaiah chapter 5, because you're going to find a lot of parallels to the things we've talked about this morning.

Love of wealth, riches, property, homes, love of pleasure, love of eye, the idolatry of self-indulgence, pursuit of self-fulfillment, all those same sins are there pictured in Isaiah 5 in prophetic, poetic language; those same sins brought judgment of God on unrepentant Israel in Judah. Assyria came in and carted off the northern army into exile, Babylon came in and carted off this southern kingdom of Judah into exile, ravaged the land, destroyed the land, and killed so many people, is a

vivid picture of God's feelings and sentiment about fruitless Christianity.

And here in John 15, Jesus makes use of this same vineyard imagery, vines and branches and fruit, to remind his disciples about the importance of bearing fruit. Just as he's doing in the text we're going through in Luke 8. He's left the upper room with his disciples, he's near to his death. He's making his way to the site of his arrest, where Judas Iscariot who is the prototypical, professing disciple who bore zero fruit, he's about to betray Jesus into the hands of Jewish leaders, who are also fruitless religionists.

And as Jesus walks with his disciples on the way to that site, he wants to remind them of a few things, not the least of which in importance is the need to abide in him in order to bear much fruit. Look at John 15, verse 1, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

"Already you are clean, because of the word that I have spoken to you, abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." Stop there for a second.

The open secret about fruitlessness. The open secret about fruitfulness is that in order to bear fruit, we must remain in Christ. We must abide in Christ, you say for how long? To the end. Forever, vitally connected to him, just as a fruit bearing branch must remain vitally connected to the life-giving vine. Look at verse 2, though it says, "Every branch in Christ that does not bear fruit divi, divine vinedresser there takes it away." That's interesting. He takes it away.

You know what some of those commentators and exegetes and theologians who wanted to advocate for a carnal Christianity, I told you about at the beginning. You know what they used to say about that verse? Every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit, he

lifts up. What? He's cutting 'em off? He's taking them away. How do I know that? Look down at verse 6. "If anyone does not abide in me," oh, that's the same people. "Anyone that doesn't abide in me." He is not lifted up, not lifted up to be cut off. Yeah, but "He's thrown away like a branch and he withers. The branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned." Pretty clear, isn't it? And it's a harrowing reality.

Fruitless branches are cut off from their superficial, apparent attachment to the vine. Oh, yes, they may profess Christ. Oh, yes, they may come to church regularly. But they have no vital connection to the vine. You can see it in their lives. You can hear their speech. There's no vitality. There's no Christ-ness coming out of their lives.

There's no love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, produced by the Spirit coming out of their lives. They're cut off from that superficial attachment. They're cast away into the rubbish pile. And there they dry up completely, which just gets them ready for the only usefulness that they have, to be burned. To make a

little heat before they turn into a pile of ash. Doesn't matter, Luke 8:13 that "They once heard the word have received it with joy, showing fast and eager growth on the outside."

It doesn't matter Luke 8:14, that they want showed signs of life, being somewhat rooted into the soil, sending up stock and branch perhaps even some green leafage. They don't bear lasting fruit if they're unproductive branches, those are as good as thorns to the vinedresser. They're stealing vitality from the true branches, so he cuts them off. He's pruning them off of the vine.

So look, don't be fooled by church attendance, beloved. Don't be fooled by verbal profession. Don't be fooled by enthusiasm, eagerness, emotion, religious activity. Those are not true and certain signs of true conversion, not in yourself and not in other people. What matters is a transformed life. What matters is a life that demonstrates the sanctifying power of the gospel and the increasing growth of Spirit produced fruit. Fruit, that by the way, genuine fruit that by the way,

cannot be counterfeited. It can be mimicked for a time, but not counterfeited.

Only the Holy Spirit can produce true biblically defined love. True, biblically defined joy. True, biblically defined peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, only the Holy Spirit can produce that. And that fruit of the Spirit uses the word of God in a prepared heart of good soil to produce lasting fruit to eternity. I know that's the truth about so many of you.

And I'm concerned about some of you. And it may not be true. And I want to warn the one and encourage you and admonish you. Put your faith in Jesus Christ. Let's have enough of all this pretending. Let's have enough of, of any fakery. Let's, let's get rid of that because it's eternally important. It's eternally vital. And so I, we all plead with you. Don't be superficial enthusiast. Don't just merely be enthusiastic about the preaching, and the teaching, and the many good things this church has to offer. Examine yourselves and go deep. See whether you be in the faith.

Don't give yourselves to the distractions, the temporal distractions of this world. Root out every form of idolatry. Make sure that your soil, your heart has no thorny seeds. Get rid of them all. And beloved, for those of you who God has granted good soil, look out for these signs of what may indicate something else. Look out for that, but listen, if you see in you what can only be explained by God in his word, what can only be produced by the Holy Spirit, this kind of fruit, look even if it's small, I know sometimes we struggle and we doubt.

But if you see yourself enduring trial, enduring testing, if you see tribulation, persecution coming for the sake of the word and the son of man, and you endure, you pass the test. If you believe this gospel, if you believe it, and you're living by it, and you are setting it as priority and the church's priority in your heart, and you're cutting out all other things, be encouraged, because that can only be produced by the Holy Spirit, by the power of God.

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Let's pray. Our Father, I pray that you would do by the Holy Spirit, what only you can do. That you would convict those who need convicting and draw them for saving faith in Jesus Christ. That you would deliver them from enslavement to the things we've talked about, and introduce them to Jesus Christ for the first time that their consciences can be clear from their guilt over sin, that they can be freed from enslavement to this, this dying world. Or they can know the joy of a reconciled relationship with you father, and they can bear fruit to everlasting life.

I pray for those who are here, who may have softer hearts and weak consciences and, but are true genuine believers who you know by name who Jesus Christ died for by name, all their sins forgiven, his righteousness covering them as a garment spotless and perfect before you. I pray for your sheep, the little flock, that you would strengthen their hearts with encouragement. That none of them would be discouraged or afraid, when they shouldn't be discouraged or afraid. But that you would encourage their hearts and strengthen them in faith and you would cause them to bear fruit to everlasting life. Again, that all of us father

GRACE CHURCH

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would give glory and honor to you. In the name of your son Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, amen.