

Introduction:

Over the next three weeks, we are going to make a very special evangelistic push. On May 17, we are presenting a special lesson that helps us as we face the difficult and frightening financial times we are in and heading for. There's a lot of fear in the world right now. When people are afraid, they turn to God. I think it is a great time for us to capitalize on this natural tendency. We'll be studying from **John 5:1-17** about the invalid by the pool of Bethesda who had nowhere to turn for healing, but was healed by the Lord. He trusted in the pool of Bethesda and was hoping for a lucky break. Instead, he learned to lean on the Lord. The title of the lesson is, "If You Want to Win Life's Lottery, You've Got to Lean on the Lord." Over the next three weeks, the elders are asking you to invite like you've never invited before. About this time last year, the Lanton Church of Christ in Spring Hill did this kind of push. Instead of their average 45 in attendance, they had 109 and baptized three people. The Central Church of Christ in Ocala, Florida used a push like this a few weeks ago and had 100 guests come from the community.

However, this effort is going to take more than a fun sermon title, a special day, and some splashy looking cards. This is going to take work. It is going to take work not just from the elders, not just from me, not just from the deacons. It is going to take work from each and every one of us. Remember what Harold Comer shared with us, it takes about 100 invitations for us to ever find that one person who is truly open to God's truth. That doesn't mean we should give up. It means we need to invite more and more and more. With all of this in mind, I want to look at the Parable of the Sower (**Luke 8:5-8**) and talk about some very simple points about evangelism that I hope will help us over the next three weeks as we work to make this evangelistic effort a success. I know this parable is about the soils, however, I'd like us to consider the sower in this story and how he relates to us.

Discussion:

- I. Trust the seed.
 - A. In the parable, the sower went out with some seed. He placed a great deal of trust in his seed. He believed if he sowed that seed, it would produce fruit and he would have crops to eat. If he didn't trust the seed, he wouldn't sow it.
 - B. We need to do the same. We need to trust our seed. According to **Luke 8:11**, our seed is the word of God. We need to trust that seed. We don't need to invite folks to a carnival. We don't need to invite folks to a movie. We don't need to invite folks to a concert. God doesn't need us to prop up His gospel with our attempts to make it more palatable to people. We just need to trust the seed of God's word.
 - C. **John 6:45-46** is an interesting passage. Jesus is addressing a group of people He had miraculously fed the day before. They've come after Him because they misunderstood the feeding. They wanted a King who would feed them like that every day. Jesus, however, was pointing out that His ministry was not about feeding people. I'm often amazed at the number of folks today who go to this context about feeding the 5000 as if it demonstrates we need to rely on food to bring people in. Jesus says people won't be won by food. Those who will be saved will be saved by being taught of God. **Psalms 119:97-104** talks about this. We are taught of God when we learn from His word. God's word doesn't need our props. God's word doesn't need our decorations. God's word doesn't need our crutches. God's word needs our trust.
 - D. **Isaiah 55:10-11** explains God will make His word accomplish what He wants. It will not return to Him void. We need to trust our seed. We need to trust our God who designed the seed. Our job is to sow the seed, not decorate it.
- II. Be ambitious, sow everywhere.
 - A. The sower was an ambitious farmer. He had seed and he sowed it everywhere he could. He didn't prejudge the soil. He didn't decide beforehand that the soil was too hard, too rocky, too thorny. He knew his job was to be a sower of the seed not a tester of the soil.
 - B. We need to be ambitious. We need to sow everywhere. Today we hear a lot about niche marketing. Instead of trying to get your message out to everybody, just try to get it out to the right people. The gospel, however, is not for a niche market. The gospel is for everyone. Instead

of trying to determine what kind of soil they are ahead of time, let's just sow the seed and let God work on the soil.

- C. Consider **I Corinthians 6:9-11**. The Corinthian Christians had been adulterers, idolaters, homosexuals, thieves, coveters, drunkards, etc. Why were they Christians? Because someone was ambitious with the seed and sowed it everywhere.
- D. The person may be a lay about drunk whoremonger. Invite him anyway. The person may be a faithful member of a church that teaches error. Invite her anyway. The person may have pink hair and a nose ring connected by a chain to his earring. Invite him anyway. The person may be an absolute atheist. Invite her anyway. The person may be rich or poor, black or white, male or female, Democrat or Republican, educated or ignorant. Invite them anyway.
- E. Our job is to sow seed. Then we trust the seed to do its work.

III. The birds are going to get some.

- A. According to **Luke 8:5**, some of the seed fell on the path, was trampled underfoot, and eaten by the birds. Can't you just imagine what the sower thought as this was happening. His precious seed being stolen from the ground before it even had the chance to germinate and possibly grow into a plant.
- B. The lesson we need to learn is that the birds are going to get some. No matter what a great job we do of sowing, the birds are going to eat some of the seed. According to **Luke 8:12**, this represented the devil coming and stealing the word away.
- C. Let me tell you what that means. You're going to take your invitation cards. You're going to give one to Bob or Suzy or Jimmy or Jane. They're going to take one and say, "That sounds interesting. I'll have to check that out." You're going to think you've found a prospect. But your going to get here on May 17 and they're not going to show up. Why? Because the birds are going to get some. The devil is going to steal the seed away from some.
- D. This will happen in numerous ways. It may be that even while they took the card, they had no intention of attending but they didn't want to hurt your feelings. It may be that they had intended to come, but then someone said, "You're going to go to that Franklin Church of Christ? You know they don't believe in music and they think they're the only ones going to heaven?" It may be that they had intended on coming but then lost the card and on that Sunday just completely forgot. Who knows? Instead of getting bogged down in trying to figure out why they didn't come, let's just understand the birds are going to get some. Let's be ready for that.

IV. Keep on sowing.

- A. Think about that first soil and the way birds work. The sower didn't sow in then find out a few days later that the birds got some of the seed. While he was tossing the seed out the birds would come flocking around. As he was sowing he saw the birds eating some of the seed he trusted. What did he do? Did he say, "This is hopeless; the birds are eating half my seed"? Did he give up? No, he kept on sowing.
- B. That is our job. Keep on sowing. We can all come up with a thousand reasons we think Satan might steal the word out of someone's heart. We can even see it happen as someone sounds interested and then finds out the church of which we are members; their face drops and they lose interest. We see it when they say things like, "Oh yeah, I've heard of you. You guys believe baptism saves; you believe in works salvation." Some of us have begun to believe sowing the seed is hopeless because the birds eat half the seed. But the sower kept on sowing. We need to do the same.
- C. Don't spend your time wondering why and how the birds get the seed. Don't spend your time trying to chase off the birds. Don't spend your time trying to scoop the seed back up. Just keep sowing the seed.

V. The sun is going to get some.

- A. According to **Luke 8:6**, some fell on rocky soil. It immediately germinated and sprang up, but because it had no roots, little moisture, it withered. According to **Matthew 13:6**, Jesus said this was because of the sun.

- B. We just need to understand, the sun is going to get some. No matter what kind of great job we do sowing the seed, some of them will be nothing more than a flash in the pan. According to **Luke 8:13**, this represents those who hear the good news and they love it. They can taste the freedom; they can see the forgiveness; they long for the mercy. However, they never dig deep into Christ and when they discover being in Christ is not all ease and luxury, they wither away.
- C. Let me tell you what this means. This means your going to give an invitation to Bob, Suzy, Jimmy, or Jane. They'll show up. They'll even like what they hear. They may even come back. But then they just drop out. Why? The sun got them. We just need to understand this is going to happen.

VI. Keep on sowing.

- A. It will be really easy to remember some of the folks who we have invited who came for a while but then didn't come back. Or even remember some we baptized into Christ who seemed to great for a brief while but then just dropped out. It will be easy to say, "There's no point. This evangelism stuff doesn't work."
- B. However, we need to simply keep on sowing. Don't stop. Don't give up just because there is some bad soil out there. Don't get bogged down trying to figure out why or taking a break to remove all the rocks. Keep on sowing the seed.

VII. The thorns are going to get some.

- A. According to **Luke 8:7**, some of the seed fell among thorns. The thorns used up so much of the nutrition in the ground that they choked out the seed. The seeds germinated. The seeds grew into plants, but they never had enough nutrition to bear fruit. They just kind of sit there doing nothing but taking up space.
- B. According to **Luke 8:14**, these are folks who hear the word and they like it, but as they go on about their way they get distracted by the cares of the world. They get caught up in the pursuit of riches. They get caught up in worries about health, wealth, and every day life. They get caught up in pursuing fun and pleasures.
- C. We just need to understand that the thorns are going to get some. Let me tell you what this means. This means we're going to invite Bob, Suzy, Jimmy, and Jane. They'll come. They'll respond. They'll walk with us for a while. However, the economy will start to tank and they'll get worried about retirement. They'll take extra jobs that keep them from studying, from praying, from assembling. They'll stop growing spiritually and begin to fade away. They may still hang around, but after a while, they stop bearing fruit. Or they'll try to hang on to Christ with one hand while they pursue the pleasures Satan has to offer with the other. They'll work to get as close to the line as possible with sinful pleasure and, in time, they'll cross that line. We just need to recognize the thorns are going to get some and there's not anything we can do about that.

VIII. Keep on sowing.

- A. It is easy for us to look around and see folks who have come into the body of Christ who just aren't growing. They aren't doing anything spiritually. We even see them waffling around with sin. It is easy to wonder what good all this sowing is doing.
- B. However, we simply need to keep on sowing. Don't stop. Don't get bogged down in trying to figure out what all the thorns are. Don't get bogged down in trying to chase away the thorns. If you do, you'll stop sowing the seed. Keep on sowing the seed.

IX. If you keep on sowing, some will fall on fertile ground.

- A. According to **Luke 8:8**, even though a whole bunch of the seed didn't produce good fruit, even though a whole bunch were stolen by the birds, scorched by the sun, and choked out by the thorns, some of the seed did fall on good ground. Some of the seed sank into the rich earth, sprang up shoots, grew into plants, and bore amazing fruit.
- B. According to **Luke 8:15**, this represents people who hear the Word, accept the Word, hang on to the Word, grow because of the Word, and bear fruit from the Word. They do so with patience. It doesn't happen overnight. But it will happen.
- C. Let me tell you what this means. This means you will invite Bob, Suzy, Jimmy, or Jane and they will come. They will be intrigued and keep coming. They will study and keep coming. They will

accept and become God's children. They'll keep coming. They'll keep praying, studying, assembling, growing. In time, they'll bear fruit in their own lives and in the lives of others. All this will happen because you sowed the seed.

- D. But what would have happened if you had seen the birds hovering over head and not sown the seed? What would have happened if you had seen the rocks in the field and not sown the seed? What would have happened if you had seen the thorns sprouting and not sown the seed? In each case, the seed would never have found the good ground. Here is the take away. If you get only one point from this lesson, please get this one. The seed only falls on good ground if we keep sowing it. We are to be sowers of the seed, not testers of the soil. Remember **Ecclesiastes 11:6**. We need to simply sow at all times, because we never know which will bear the fruit. The only thing we do know is if we don't sow, there will be no fruit.

X. Let's prepare for rain.

- A. There is part of this story that is not actually stated in this story. However, it is implied. It must be. The fact is, for all the trust in the seed and for all that the sower relied on finding good ground, there is just a whole bunch of this we can't do anything about. The farmer knows this. He puts out the seed and he hopes for rain. He puts out the seed and he trusts God to act.
- B. Sadly, too many sowers are like the one mentioned in **Ecclesiastes 11:4**. They are watching the winds and the clouds. They decide whether or not they think it will rain to decide whether or not they will sow. Instead of regarding the wind and the clouds, we need to remember that is God's job. Our job is to sow the seed. God's job is to grow the seed.
- C. Consider **I Corinthians 3:5-7**. Our job is to sow the seed. God's job is to grow the seed. The question is, do we trust God to do His job? If we do, then instead of waiting around until we think we see the wind and the clouds just right, we need to start sowing. Let us no longer despair about how useless evangelism is or how useless it is in Middle Tennessee. Let us quit thinking of all the reasons something won't work and remember our God is more powerful than that. Granted, we can't make any seeds grow, either here or in any place. But our God can. As long as we are sowing, it will eventually fall on good soil and God will grow the seed.

Conclusion:

Obviously, we do not want to sow the seed for only three weeks. However, we do have a very important evangelistic push coming up in just 21 days. Three Sundays from now, we want to get as many people here as possible. Can we double our attendance on that day? Can we get over 300 people here? I know our God can do that? Are we willing to sow the seed and let God do His work? Remember, our God can do far more abundantly beyond all we ask or think (**Ephesians 3:20**). Let's ask and think big. I want to encourage you to offer at least 5 invitations per week. That's just one per week day. Don't worry about whether or not you can say it just right. Don't worry about whether or not the birds are hovering in that person's life. Don't worry about how many rocks or thorns are in that person's life. Just sow the seed. Then let God do His work and see where He takes us. Are you ready for that?