


A PRELUDE TO *BIBLICAL* EVANGELISM



A large, ancient tree with thick, gnarled roots growing over stone ruins. The tree's trunk is massive and textured, with roots spreading out across the ground and over the stone structures. The background shows more stone ruins and lush green foliage. The scene is set in a natural, outdoor environment.

THE FRUIT OF
THE RIGHTEOUS IS A
TREE OF LIFE,
AND HE WHO IS WISE
WINS SOULS.

PROVERBS 11:30 NASB

PRINCIPLES FOR BIBLICAL *EVANGELISM* FOUND IN JOHN 4, “THE WOMAN AT THE WELL.”

TAKE

- TAKE THE INITIATIVE! JN. 4:6-9

OFFER

- OFFER GOD’S MERCY! JN. 4:10-14

IDENTIFY

- IDENTIFY SPIRITUAL NEEDS! JN. 4:9-10

CONFRONT

- CONFRONT SIN JN! 4:16-18

REJECT



- REJECT FALSE WORSHIP! JN. 4:19-24

REVEAL

- REVEAL CHRIST! JN. 4:25-26

THE **PARABLE** OF THE **SOWER** AND **BAD** EVANGELISM

- One of the dominant myths in evangelicalism is that *the growth of Christianity hinges on its popularity*. The idea that more people will repent if only the preacher were cooler or funnier invariably causes the church to suffer through a ridiculous parade of entrepreneurial types who act as though their personal charm can draw people to Christ. **BUT YOU CANNOT MANUFACTURE CONVERTS BY CHANGING THE MESSAGE OR STYLIZING THE MESSENGER.**
- This error leads to the harmful notion that a pastor's conduct and speech should be shaped by the culture in which he ministers. Many preachers have such strong cravings for cultural acceptance they are actually willing to alter God's message of salvation in order to achieve it. Subjects like **SIN, GUILT,** and **REPENTANCE** are regularly jettisoned so as not to offend or alienate **NON-CHRISTIANS.**

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- Such ***compromises*** do nothing to increase the church's witness within the culture. In fact, they have the opposite effect. By creating ***celebrity preachers*** with ***synthetic gospels***, they only succeed in filling churches with ***UNREPENTANT SINNERS***. Instead of making the world more like the church, such efforts only succeed in making the church more like the world. This is precisely what Christ's teaching in **(Luke 8:5–8) (THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER)**, was designed to avoid.
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THE *NAGGING* QUESTION IN *EVANGELISM*

- *THE DISCIPLES*, having a genuine burden that others would believe, must have been astounded that the masses were *not repenting*. The problem wasn't Jesus' ability to attract an audience—the crowds were huge, often numbering in the *tens of thousands*. But very few were repenting and embracing the Savior. The disciples' own expectations of a global kingdom without end (**Isa. 9 and 45**) were faltering. It must have been easy to lay the blame at the indicting, hard, demanding message that Christ preached (**JN. 6:60-61**).
- The Lord responded to the rising tide of doubt by telling a series of *parables* about *evangelism*. A year before He would give the Great Commission, Jesus told *HIS FIRST PARABLE ABOUT A FARMER SOWING SEED*:

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- *“The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled under foot and the birds of the air ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. Other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out. Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great.”* (Luke 8:5–8)
 - This *agricultural* illustration is a paradigmatic explanation of what *evangelism should look like*. It is designed to answer the fundamental evangelistic question: **WHY DO SOME PEOPLE *REPENT* AND *BELIEVE THE GOSPEL* WHILE OTHERS *REJECT IT*?**


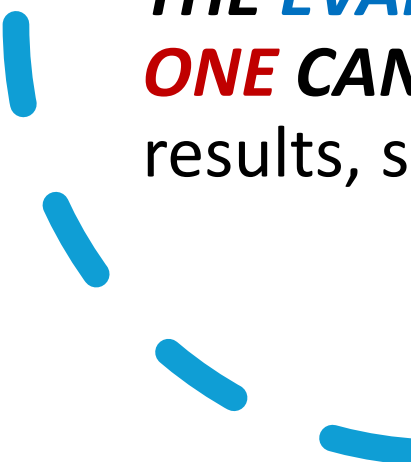
THE *INVARIABLE* SOWER

- (LK. 8:5–8) again, is commonly known as the *PARABLE OF THE SOWER*. But that popular title is indicative of the widespread *confusion* we see today regarding its *interpretation* and *application*. **THE PARABLE ISN'T ABOUT THE SOWER.**
- What is surprising about the farmer in the story is how little control he actually has in the growing of crops. There are no adjectives used to describe his *STYLE* or *SKILL*.
- In a subsequent parable (Mk. 4:26–29) Jesus states that he who sows the seed is actually *ignorant* of *how the seed transforms itself* into a mature plant. After sowing the seed, the farmer ***“goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know”*** (Mark 4:27).

- ***This ignorance*** is not unique to the sower in Christ's parables but rather is true of ***everyone*** who sows. The growth of the seed is a mystery that even the most advanced farmer cannot explain. And that reality is the key to understanding the Lord's first parable.
- ***JESUS*** explained that the ***SEED*** is ***THE GOSPEL*** or "***WORD OF GOD***", the ***FARMER*** is ***THE EVANGELIST***, and the ***SOIL*** represents the heart of the hearer (***Matt. 13:19***). The evangelist scatters the seed—that is, explains the gospel to people—and some of those people believe and receive life. How this happens is a ***divine mystery*** to the evangelist. One thing is clear, however: though he is the human means, it does not ultimately ***depend on him***. The power of the gospel is in the working of the Spirit, not in the style of the sower (***Rom. 1:16; 1 Thess. 1:5; 1 Pet. 1:23***). ***IT IS THE SPIRIT OF GOD WHO RAISES SOULS FROM DEATH TO LIFE, NOT THE METHODS OR TECHNIQUES OF THE MESSENGER.***

- The **APOSTLE PAUL** understood this principle. When he brought the gospel to Corinth, he planted the church and left it in the care of **APOLLOS**. Later he described the experience this way: ***“I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth”*** (1 Cor. 3:6). God was the one who actually drew sinners to Himself, changed their hearts, and caused them to be sanctified. Paul and Apollos were both faithful, but they most certainly were not the explanation for the supernatural life and growth. This truth caused Paul to say, ***“So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.”*** (1 Cor. 3:7).
- This runs counter to the notion that the **RESULTS OF EVANGELISM** can be influenced by the cultural assimilation of the **pastor**, or the **style of music** used at his crusades. The preacher who thinks **designer jeans** will make his message more palatable is akin to a farmer investing in a designer seed bag so that the soil will be more receptive to his seeds.

- ***JESUS INTENTIONALLY HIGHLIGHTS THE FARMER'S LACK OF INFLUENCE OVER THE GROWTH OF THE SEED.*** The entire parable makes the statement that as far as evangelism goes, it simply does not matter what the evangelist wears or how he does his hair. Such externals are not what makes the seed grow. Anyone who argues that a preacher who imitates a particular segment of culture is better able to reach that culture, has completely failed to understand Jesus' point in the parable.
- ***REMEMBER, ALL THE FARMER CAN DO IS SOW, AND ALL THE EVANGELIST CAN DO IS PROCLAIM.*** As a preacher, if I thought someone's salvation was contingent upon my persuasiveness or relevance, ***I COULD NEVER SLEEP.*** But instead, ***I KNOW THAT "THE LORD KNOWS THOSE WHO ARE HIS"***
(2 TIM. 2:19).

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- It is not coincidental that the New Testament **never calls evangelists** to **bear the responsibility** for another person's salvation. Rather, having proclaimed the message faithfully, we are called to rest in the sovereignty of God—much like the farmer in **(Mk. 4:27)** who sleeps through the night after a day of scattering seed.
 - **CHRIST'S DESCRIPTION OF THE FARMER PROVIDES THE BIBLICAL MODEL FOR EVANGELISM.**
 - **THE EVANGELIST MUST PLANT THE GOSPEL SEED, WITHOUT WHICH NO ONE CAN BE SAVED** (Rom. 10:14–17). Then he must trust God with the results, since only **THE SPIRIT CAN GIVE LIFE** (Jn. 3:5–8).
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THE *INVARIABLE* SEED

- Not only is the farmer's *style irrelevant* to the success of his crops but Jesus also *does not suggest* that the sower *should alter his seed* to facilitate growth. And this absence of discussion about the seed directly corresponds to *evangelism*. **JESUS ASSUMES THAT CHRISTIANS WILL EVANGELIZE USING THE TRUE SEED—THE GOSPEL.**
- Most preachers outwardly profess that the gospel is an *unalterable non-negotiable*, but that doesn't stop them from subtly softening its sharp edges.
- Modern gospel presentations frequently portray God as *indifferent to sin* and not its *judge*; the sinner as the *victim*, not the *offender*; the *cross of Christ* as the remedy to *frustrations* and *unfulfilled dreams*, not the *propitiation for our sins*; and a divine endgame that revolves around our *temporal happiness*, not our *eternal state*.

- One of the primary refrains about *evangelism* today is that the church needs to update the methods without altering the message. But if we're **NOT FAITHFULLY** preaching the truth about *man's sinfulness*, *God's grace* and *mercy*, the *sinner's need* for *repentance* and *faith*, and the *completed work of Christ*, **WE'RE NOT PROTECTING AND PRESERVING THE GOSPEL MESSAGE.**
- As a reminder, believers are sternly warned in Scripture against *tampering* with the message (**Gal. 1:6–9; 2 Jn. 9–11**). If a frustrated evangelist looks at how difficult his task is, or how closed his culture seems to be to the gospel, the problem is not with the faithful messenger or the true gospel. Rather, **IT LIES IN THE NATURE OF THE SOIL INTO WHICH THE TRUE SEED FALLS.**
- Thus, the sower and the seed are constants in Christ's parable. The only variable is the soil—**THE RECEPTIVITY OF THE HEARER.**