



## First Baptist Church Selmer

THE "HEART" OF THE MATTER • THE HEART "AMONG THORNS" •  
MATTHEW 13:7, 22; LUKE 8:7, 14; HEBREWS 6:7-12 • 11/20/2022

### MAIN POINT

The person with a heart "among thorns" is a heart that appears good for a while but is overtaken by the competition found in worldly cares such as wealth and pleasures.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Who would describe themselves as being competitive?**

**How can competition be a good thing?**

Competition is a biblical concept. From Jesus' competition and ultimate defeat of Satan in the wilderness to Paul's description of faithful endurance to the end in which he states, "*I have finished the race*", competition in and of itself is not a bad thing. In contrast, the book of Proverbs speaks very poorly to the one that doesn't fight for the most important things

*"I passed by the field of the sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down."* - Proverbs 24:30-31

Since the fall of humanity, we live in a world that fights back. If we aren't willing to work or fight back against it, we will likely lose the battles we face daily but competition and "being competitive" are not always the same thing. Sometimes the two are confused leading to a heart of sinfulness.

**In what ways could "being competitive" be sinful?**

In today's lesson, we are going to look at the seeds sown "among thorns." The hardness nor the shallowness of the soil would be the problem because the soil was fertile enough to sustain growth. The problem was with the competition. The seeds grew well in the soil but the thorns grew even faster eventually leading the plant to be choked out and therefore remain unfruitful.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 13:7 AND LUKE 8:7

*Matthew 13:7 "Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them." (ESV)*

*Luke 8:7 "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it." (ESV)*

**What is something you have planted only to be overgrown by the weeds around it?**

**What would be the problem with attempting to remove the undergrowth, especially among the thorns?**

Thorns are never fun. They are a good guard to a beautiful rose but are a headache to deal with in the field. Thorns are entangling, scratchy, and can inflict great pain. We can all relate to them. Even small children know that they hurt and you have to be careful if and when you handle them.

Paul uses the concept of a thorn by describing a "thorn in his flesh" in 2 Corinthians 12:7, "a thorn was given to me in the flesh." Very painful, agonizing, and relatable to all humanity.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 13:22 AND LUKE 8:14

*Matthew 13:22 "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." (ESV)*

*Luke 8:14 "And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature." (ESV)*

**How can you relate to this person?**

**What types of things can you name that would fall along the likes of worldly cares, riches, and pleasures of life?**

**How can these things prove unfruitful in our lives?**

In the words of Matthew Henry, "Prosperity destroys the heart, as much as persecution does; and more dangerously, because more silently: the stones spoiled the root, the thorns spoiled the fruit."

**How can "good times" ultimately lead to great spiritual heartache?**

**Why is prosperity preaching such a popular idea in today's time?**

The person described here is one that displays quite a bit of growth, perhaps even a season of it. The issue arises because the person is not hardened to the Word nor driven away by tribulation, but instead, lured away by the pleasures of the flesh.

The very competition that can be good for the soul and spirit is now used against them by deception. The darkness of the world becomes more attractive to them than the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Worldly cares are fitly compared to thorns, for they came in with sin and are a fruit of the curse.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREWS 6:7-12

*7 For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. 8 But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. 9 Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things - things that belong to salvation. 10 For God is shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. 11 And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (ESV)*

**What is the result of a life that produces no fruit but only "thorns and thistles"?**

**Which is more natural for us? To compete against the world around us or to be sluggish and let it influence many facets of our lives.**

**Why is fighting back against the cares of the world vital for the life of a believer?**

If allowed to grow, our lives will quickly become more about the thorns and thistles around us than about the fruit we are called to produce as believers. The Bible is clear that "true believers" produce fruit. Anything less than fruit producers is only deceiving us into thinking we have something that is not true.

The garden of our hearts may be full of vegetation but only the one that produces fruit can truly have "full assurance of hope until the end." If we are to clear the thorns around our hearts, it must start first with repentance soon followed by action.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What do you need to do to guard your heart against the thorns and thistles the world produces around us?**

**In your life, what is the biggest obstacle to competing against worldliness in your life?**

**What is one specific step you can take this week to begin to remove worldliness from your life?**

## PRAYER

Thank God as you close your group that His word is true and powerful. Pray that you would embrace your role as an ambassador of the kingdom and not of this world.

## COMMENTARY

| LUKE 8:4-8

Initially, the sower is Jesus Christ, but the sower represents any of God's people who share the Word of God (John 4:35-38). The seed is the Word of God, for, like the seed, the Word has life and power (Heb. 4:12) and can produce spiritual fruit (Gal. 5:22-23). But the seed can do nothing until it is planted (John 12:24). When a person hears and understands the Word, then the seed is planted in the heart. What happens after that depends on the nature of the soil.

The seed without the soil is fruitless, and the soil without the seed is almost useless. The human heart is like soil: if it is prepared properly, it can receive the seed of the Word of God and produce a fruitful harvest.

Jesus described four different kinds of hearts, three of which did not produce any fruit. The proof of salvation is fruit and not merely hearing the Word or making a profession of faith in Christ. Jesus had already made that clear in His "Sermon on the Mount."

*The crowded soil* (v.7, 14) This soil illustrates the person who does not repent and "weed out" the things that hinder the harvest. There is enough soil so the roots can go down, but not enough room for the plant to grow up and produce fruit. The plant is crowded out and the fruit is choked. "Cares, riches, and the pleasures of life" are like weeds in a garden that keep the soil from being fruitful. The person with the "crowded heart" comes closest to salvation, but he still does not bring forth "fruit to perfection."

## | HEBREWS 6:8-12

The illustration of a field reminds us of our Lord's parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23), as well as Paul's teaching about the fire testing our works (1 Cor. 3:6-23). A field proves its worth by bearing fruit, and a true believer, as he makes spiritual progress, bears fruit for God's glory. Note that the "thorns and briars" are burned, not the field. God never curses His own!

The crop of God's blessing pictured in Hebrews 6:7 is called "things that accompany salvation" in Hebrews 6:9. Not every believer bears the same amount of fruit ("some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty," Matt. 13:23); but every believer bears the same kind of fruit as proof that he is a child of God (Matt. 7:15-20). This is the fruit of Christian character and conduct (Gal. 5:22-26) produced by the Spirit as we mature in Christ.

The writer listed some of the fruit that he knew had been produced in their lives: because of their love, they had worked and labored for the Lord; they had ministered to other saints, and they were still ministering. These are some of the "things that accompany salvation."

But he was concerned lest they rest on their achievements and not press on to full maturity and the enjoyment of God's rich inheritance.

While it is true that it is God who "carries along" to maturity (Heb. 6:1, 3), it is also true that the believer must do his part. We must not be lazy but apply ourselves to the spiritual resources God has given us. We have the promises from God. We should exercise faith and patience and claim these promises for ourselves!

*(The Wiersbe Bible Commentary by Warren W. Wiersbe)*