

## Sexagesima, February 12, 2023

**Readings: Isaiah 55: 10-13, Hebrews 4: 9-13, Luke 8: 4-15**

### *Scripture Alone*

The Sower sows the seed of His Word (Luke 8:4–15). This Word is living and powerful (Heb. 4:9–13) to conceive new life in those who hear it. But the planting of Christ is attacked by the devil, the world, and the flesh. Satan snatches the Word away from hard hearts. The riches and pleasures of this life choke off faith. Shallow and emotional belief withers in time of temptation and trouble. But see how Christ bears this attack for us! Christ's cross was planted in the hard and rocky soil of Golgotha. A crown of thorns was placed upon His head. Satan and his demons hellishly hounded and devoured Him. Yet, through His dying and rising again, He destroyed these enemies of ours. Jesus is Himself the Seed which fell to the ground and died in order that it might sprout forth to new life and produce much grain. In Him, the weak are strong (2 Cor. 11:19–12:9). He is the Word of the Father which does not return void (Is. 55:10–13) but yields a harvest hundredfold.

### **Sermon Transcript**

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

There's a whole lot to unpack in all of these passages, but I think the need to start is in 2 Corinthians because it takes a little bit to try and figure out what Paul and how Paul is saying that, because some of the things he says like, "I'm talking like a mad man," or, "I'm a fool," and it's like what are you saying?

First, we need some context. If there was any problem or any heresy that would come up in the ancient church, it would come up in Corinth. Every problem that was ever had in the church was found in the people of Corinth. They seemed to be willing and ready and able to accept any snake oil salesman that came their way. They were the problem children of all of Paul's churches. He constantly had to go back to them, constantly admonished them, constantly tell them, "Look, I gave you the Gospel. What are you doing?" So much so that here, in this 2 Corinthians passage, you should hear every word of Paul just dripping with sarcasm. He is confronting the Corinthians for their false ideas and for their readiness to fall after false teachers, teachers that would place extra burdens upon them by telling them, "You had to become a Jew first before you could become a Christian."

By that they meant follow every single letter of the law of the Old Testament including the ceremonial washing and the sacrifices and the circumcision and everything else that went along with it and then, after you did all of that, then maybe you could become a Christian. That was one of the heresies. The other heresy was an idea that matter is evil and spirit is good, and so you need to get rid of your desires here on earth and imagine and get special knowledge that only I have, and for a price you can get, and then all of your woes will be gone.

I mean, when I say snake oil salesman, I was not exaggerating. This is exactly what's going on. These false prophets were giving false ideas to the Corinthians, and they were paying for the privilege to be deceived. The teachers were living in luxury while they were enslaving the people with false teaching. And so Paul is trying every way possible to try and get them to see the error of their ways, and so he does this in sarcasm. He says, "For you bear with fools, being wise," (You should see air quotes around the "wise") "yourselves. For you bear

it if someone makes slaves of you or devours you or takes advantage of you puts on airs or strikes you in the face."

I mean, can you imagine wanting all of that? Paul is saying, "You're fools because you're allowing that to happen," and then he says, "But I'm sorry. I was too weak to do all of that. Instead, I was your servant and I didn't put any extra burdens upon you. I'm sorry I wasn't like the other guys putting a burden upon you." You should hear the sarcasm all the way through. And then, "Oh, I should speak like a fool a little bit more. Let me boast about how wonderful I am. They say they're Hebrews. Well, so am I. They say they're Israelites. So am I. Son of Abraham? So am I. Servant of Christ? I'm even better. I'm talking like a mad man now." He is just making it foolish. He's making them see the foolishness of the ideas of searching after something other than the grace and mercy and peace of God.

Isaiah talks about that Word that goes forth and accomplishes exactly what God desires and it does not come back to Him void, and what does God desire? God desires us to hear and to know that, for the sake of Christ, we are forgiven all of our sins and it is a free gift that we cannot purchase with gold or silver or good works or anything else that we do. It is simply given to us freely by God through His Word. His Word does the work.

Now, when we think about that, if God's Word does the work and God's Word plants faith within me and that faith allows me to believe and put my trust in God and I'm able to be called a son of God and heir of the promise of eternal life full of the glory and majesty of God, that I have the joy of Christ, the love of God, and I have peace in this world, why in the world would you give that up? So that you can feel good about yourself because you've done X, Y and Z. I mean, literally, Paul is just trying to make the Corinthians feel so ridiculous that they were deceived by this so they won't be deceived by it ever again. But they will put their faith and their trust in the promises of God, and then, just to add on an extra little bit, Paul goes on, "Yet if they really want to boast, let me tell you about how I have suffered for the sake of Christ."

These other people, they don't suffer for their message, they gain by their message, but, Paul, he was whipped five times by the Jews. He was beaten by rods three times. Now, that's the Roman punishment. As a Roman citizen, it was illegal to be punished by the rod, and yet Paul, who was a Roman citizen, endured that punishment three times. He could have stated his right as a citizen of the nation of Rome and gotten beyond those beatings, but he didn't. He suffered the punishment that the Roman government gave to outsiders, not insiders. But he did for the sake of the Gospel. He was stoned by his own people. He was shipwrecked three times, afloat for a day and a half, in danger in cities and out and then out in the country, from the Gentiles and the Jews, from robbers, from wild beasts, from rivers, from everything. You name it.

Again, Paul says, "But I don't boast in any of that. I'm weak, and I rejoice in the fact that I am weak, because I know that Christ's power is made perfect in weakness. I know that, no matter what comes my way, I will boast, and the only thing I have to boast about is my weakness and Christ's sufficiency for me." Paul is trying to desperately help them to understand that when we look to our hope, when we look to our comfort, when we look for joy and peace in this world, we cannot find it in our own efforts. We cannot find it in anything other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And it is only that Gospel that frees us because He does the work, and the Word is given freely and accomplishes what God desires.

That's what Jesus is talking about in the parable of the sower and the seeds. The Word of God, he throws out in all different places. Why? Because you never know where it might take root. We may look at somebody and say, "Uh-uh." They got tattoos all over their faces and big loops in their ears and multiple piercings all over the

place and leather and nasty looking, and we're going, "Well, they're definitely the hard soil. Nothing's going to get into there." But we don't know. It might just be that person that the seed plants in and grows to great fruit. We are not called to judge others. We are called to share the Word of God freely and richly and let Him do the work of bringing the people in. Our job is just to trust Him to be faithful with His Word and to share the joy of having received these gifts of salvation. We don't need to understand how it's going to work. We just need to know that it does through Christ and His efforts.

It's easy. It's simple. Jesus says He speaks in parables. This is not Him. He's quoting Isaiah saying, "We speak in parables so that seeing, they might not see and, hearing, they might not hear." That's not saying, "Well, I'm going to make it so difficult for everybody. I really want some people not to see and some people not to hear." That's not what He's saying. What He's saying is it's so simple, it's so free, it's so much a gift that there are going to be people who'll look and then say, "Oh, come on, I'm smarter than that. There's got to be something else. There's got to be more to this," I mean you're saying, "What? There's nothing? I am a poor miserable sinner, and I don't get any credit for my salvation? Come on. I should get some recognition for something within me."

Jesus says and the Word of God says, "No." It's just that easy. So some people will hear and say, "I get it. Nah, that's too easy." Some people will see and say, "That's just simple. That's just blind faith. That's not really real." It's not because God desires them to hear that and see that. It's that they will because of their own "brilliance" and their own "wisdom" and their own efforts and their own desire to look to themselves for their hope. But our hope is in Christ which comes to us through His Word, which comes to us in the waters of baptism where we receive the benefits of His death on the cross. It comes to us in His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. It comes to us by reading because when we read, the Word does the work, simply by reading and hearing His Word, faith is planted.

What an amazingly free thing that is, so let us as we go forward in our lives not be deceived by anyone that tells us what we have to do for our salvation. Let us not be worried that we're not doing enough, but let us pray that God would fill us with His joy and with His peace and that, with that joy and peace, we might then be enthusiastic about sharing the love with those around us that we might know that His grace is sufficient and we don't need to be afraid whether we face shipwreck and hardship and beatings and torture. Not that I'm looking forward to that, but if it comes, you and I both know God's grace is sufficient for us and He will bring us through to our home, because our home is not of this world. Our true citizenship is not in any country here in the world. Our true citizenship is in Christ, where we are the kingdom of God.

Let's go forth as ambassadors for the cross, ready to face whatever, being able to boast only in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His grace and mercy for us.

May that mercy and that peace and that grace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.