

Hear the Word!

Psalm 119:1-16 Isaiah 55:10-13 Luke 8:4-15

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Pastor Dave Bolte



The Gospel of Luke begins the parable¹ of the *Sower and the Seed* with a **triple emphasis** on sowing. Literally it says “a *Sower* went out to *sow* his seed, as he was *sowing*...” Jesus teaches us that the seed is the Word of God, and of course, Jesus Himself is the Sower. He is not stingy, but extremely generous, in sowing His Word. Through His Holy Christian Church, Jesus is actively sowing the seed of His Word in every nation on earth. The goal is that all will hear, listen and believe in Him as the Savior of the world.

The seed that Jesus sows is the **Word of God**; and it has the power to create a harvest. The word of God is the Bible, the Holy Scriptures. They are *inspired and inerrant*, they are truly God's very words to us. God uses His Word to create faith, to soften hearts, and to open eyes. His Word is clear, understandable, and effective. God's Word comes to us in two ways: the **Law** and the **Gospel**. The **Law** and the **Gospel** must be clearly defined and always separated from each other². *It's hard to imagine two other words that are more important in theology!*

The **Law of God** is powerful and its primary purpose is to expose your sin and to convict you in your rebellion and disobedience. The Law of God is crystal

¹ A Parable is an “illustrative story to teach a spiritual truth, and only by faith will it be productive and effective in your life.” Parables both reveal and conceal spiritual truths. For those with faith, those who want to learn spiritual truths from Jesus, parables teach you and give a better understanding of the Kingdom of God. For others, without faith, who do not want to listen nor learn from Jesus and His parables, they conceal the truth. Parables may even seem ridiculous to an unbeliever. Faith is the key; it gives you the desire to want to learn from Jesus.

² These two fundamental words — LAW and GOSPEL — that are critical to understand in your pursuit of being ever more Biblically literate and Doctrinally sound. The Lutheran Confessions capture this importance in this insightful quote: “The distinction between the Law and the Gospel is an especially brilliant light which serves the purpose that the Word of God may be rightly divided and the writings of the holy prophets and apostles may be explained and understood correctly.”

“Formula of Concord”, Article V, Book of Concord

clear in the **10 Commandments**; the Commandments teach you what is right and wrong, good from evil, truth from error. The Law of God, the 10 Commandments, shows you your sins. They show you how you have sinned against God and against others. The Law of God reveals the depth and the corruption of sin in your life. It creates guilt, it always condemns, and it declares that you will die in your sin. The Law of God is extremely powerful; the Bible describes it as a fire that consumes and a hammer that crushes rocks. The Law of God has the power to convict you of sin, but it has no power whatsoever to heal you, forgive you, or give you life.

For healing, forgiveness, and life, you need the **Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ**. The Gospel is the good news that your sins are forgiven because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Son of God came into the world to do the work of salvation that you were unable to do. He lived a perfect life for you under the Law of God; He perfectly obeyed the 10 Commandments every moment of every day. He then took the judgment and condemnation of the Law *that you deserve* upon Himself when He died on the cross. Everything Jesus did He did for you and in your place³. That's good news, that is the **Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ!**

The Gospel is the power of God that brings salvation; it is the power of God that forgives sins, creates faith, and gives eternal life.

God's Word comes to us in two ways: **the Law and the Gospel**. This parable teaches us that Jesus is *continually sowing* the seed of His Word in your life.

But God's Word does not always produce faith. People can **resist** the Word of God and turn away from it⁴. In the parable, 3 of the 4 “soils” failed; the Word was lost, no harvest was produced. That is a 75% failure rate.

³ This is called the “Perfect Obedience of Christ.” Jesus perfectly obeyed God the Father in life (fully obeyed the Commandments of God) and in death (God the Father’s will was that His Son would die for the sins of the world). His perfect obedience in life is called “Christ’s Active Obedience”; and His perfect obedience in death is called “Christ’s Passive Obedience”.

⁴ This parable clearly teaches that “once saved, always saved” is a FALSE teaching. It gives false assurance to people. This parable teaches us that intentional perseverance is essential in the Christian faith; Jesus describes that perseverance as “ongoing hearing” of the Word.

It is not that the Word failed,
but the heart of the person failed.

How you listen to the Word of God is very important.

There are many things that can take the Word of God away from you⁵; many things that can distract you and cause the Word to be unproductive in your life. Jesus highlights the work of Satan and his depraved demons (*hard path*); separating yourself from Christ and His Word when you suffer trials, temptations, or persecution (*rocky path*); and being distracted by the world in its ways (*thorny path*). In all these examples, the same Gospel is being proclaimed, but it has different effects on different people. The Gospel is ultimately rejected and people lose their way and their faith. They have forfeited eternal salvation.

Be careful that that does not happen to you! This is a strong warning for you to pay careful attention to how you hear and respond to the **Law of God** and the **Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ**.

Jesus teaches us that we are to **hear the Word and to retain it**. Right after this parable, Jesus continues to teach about hearing the Word of God. He says that we are to *consider carefully how you listen to the Word*; and that *His mother and brothers are those who hear God's Word and put it into practice*.

The “**good soil**” is the person who takes hold of the Word of God, keeps it in their heart, and puts it into practice. It means that you are eager to hear, learn and understand what God teaches you in Holy Scriptures. The Holy

⁵ The Bible speaks in so many ways about “apostasy”, that is falling away from the faith. Rarely does it happen in one sudden event; rather it is usually gradual, a “drifting away” as Hebrews teaches; by separating yourself from Christ's Word and His Church. Failure to worship is almost always the first sign of apostasy. [If you would like to study this a little more, send me an email and I will send you some insightful notes I have on Apostasy from the Book of Hebrews.]

Spirit creates a desire within you to be **biblically literate** and **doctrinally sound**; the Holy Spirit creates a hunger and a thirst for the Word of God. That is the nature of faith; it draws you to Christ and His Word⁶. Only Satan, your sinful nature, and the world want you to stay away from Christ and His Word.

Remember how Martin Luther teaches it in the Small Catechism: *We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but **hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it***⁷.

This parable calls you to evaluate yourself. Take an honest look at what your attitude is towards the Word of God. Is your heart hard or soft when it comes to God's Law? Do you believe the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and know that your sins are forgiven and that you belong to God? Are you eager to **hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop?**

Perseverance in God's Word is what this parable is all about.

Hearing, understanding, and properly responding to the Law and the Gospel.

Jesus is the Sower of the seed in your life.

He is continually at work bringing His Word to you; putting it in your ears and planting it in your heart. He has given you a plethora of ways to learn, study, and understand His Word.

The question today is **how** do you hear and retain the Word of God?

Amen.

⁶ If Bible study is new to you, then I have two suggestions. First, read just one chapter from the Bible each day, start with either Luke, John, or Psalms. Start getting used to opening your Bible during the week. Second, come to one of my Bible studies and see how they work. It is a safe place where you will not have to talk or answer questions. Bring your Bible and just follow along. Bible study is a pillar in the Christian life.

⁷ This is the meaning of the Third Commandment in Martin Luther's Small Catechism.

Lord Jesus, we thank You that You have sown the seed of Your Word into our hearts.

We ask for “good soil”, that is a heart that intentionally hears and retains Your Word.

Allow Your Law to work in our hearts to convict us of sin.

Lead us to repentance and turn us away from rebellion.

Grant us faith in the Gospel, trusting that our sins are forgiven and that we belong to You through faith alone and by Your grace alone.

Help us to understand Holy Scripture, and give us a hunger and thirst to become ever more biblically literate and doctrinally sound disciples.

We pray this in Your Holy Name,
amen!

Psalm 119:1-16

1 Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD.

2 Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart—

3 they do no wrong but follow his ways.

4 You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed.

5 Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!

6 Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands.

7 I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws.

8 I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me.

9 How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.

10 I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.

11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

12 Praise be to you, LORD; teach me your decrees.

13 With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.

14 I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

15 I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.

16 I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.

Isaiah 55:10-13

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, 11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. 12 You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. 13 Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever."

Luke 8:4-15

While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: 5 “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. 6 Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.” When he said this, he called out, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.” 9 His disciples asked him what this parable meant. 10 He said, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, ““though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.’ 11 “This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. 12 Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13 Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. 14 The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. 15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.