

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: February 19, 2012

Beware the Thorns!

by Dan Trygg

“And it will come about in that day, that every place where there used to be a thousand vines, valued at a thousand shekels of silver, will become briars and thorns.”

Isaiah 7:23

“And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word,¹⁹ and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”

Mark 4:18-19

“And the seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.”

Luke 8:14

“Sow with a view to righteousness, reap in accordance with loyalty; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD until He comes to rain righteousness on you.¹³ You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice, you have eaten the fruit of lies, because you have trusted in your way...”

Hosea 10:12-13

“For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem, ‘Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns.⁴ Circumcise yourselves to the LORD and remove the foreskins of your heart...’”

Jeremiah 4:3-4a

What happens to land that is left untilled or unworked? It doesn't take long at all for weeds to grow up, and even *take over* a plot of ground that is left without cultivation. In ancient Israel, during the time of Isaiah the prophet, the Lord warned the Israelites that their enemies, the Assyrians, were going to invade. They would fill the land, overrun the cities and towns, and lay siege to Jerusalem. Isaiah told them what would happen during those years of invasion. Because it would be unsafe to stay on their farms, the Israelites would abandon their homesteads, and flee to Jerusalem for refuge. “Every place where there used to be a thousand vines,... will become briars and thorns.” If you ever had a garden at home, you are very familiar with the need to continually pick out the weeds. If you don't, they will quickly take over the garden, and you will have a very poor crop. Allowing a plot of ground to go fallow is to abandon it, to not work it, till it, plant anything on it, or weed it. Guess what happens? The weeds take over. **In Israel, some of the more common weeds are thorns, briars and nettles. So, not only do you lose the potential productivity of the soil if the weeds are allowed to grow up, but the land becomes almost impassable.**

Everywhere you try to go, you have to battle the thick underbrush of briars, thorns and nettles. Doesn't sound like much fun, does it? “And as for all the hills which used to be cultivated with the hoe, you will not go there for fear of briars and thorns; but they will become a place for pasturing oxen and for sheep to trample” (Isaiah 7:25).

This was a commonly understood fact of life, which all Biblical people would have been aware of. It was something they had observed repeatedly, both in the struggle to keep weeds out of their fields, and in seeing what happened to land that was allowed to go fallow and unworked. **Jesus used this everyday fact of life to illustrate an important spiritual truth. In the parable of the soils, He mentioned that one of the places that the seed was sown was in the thorny ground.** The seed sprouted, but the weeds quickly grew up with the plant and choked it out. In His interpretation of this parable, Jesus said that the seed was the word of God. **The thorny soil represents those who hear the word, and as they go on their way, the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, the pleasures of this life, and the desires for other things *choke out their spiritual growth, and they bring no fruit to maturity.*** The matters of this life take precedence over spiritual things. These people are living more for what their *present* earthly life has to offer, than they are for the *eternal* kingdom of God. **The interests of this present life consume more of their time, attention, energy and focus than the things of God.** As a result, the things of God, their relationship with Him and the fruit they could bear for His kingdom, begin to take second, third, or an even more diminishing place of priority in their lives. As this happens, **their spiritual vitality becomes shaded with these other things, and their spiritual life becomes weak and unhealthy.** Eventually, this lack of vitality and spiritual focus stunts their spiritual maturity, and **they do not become or produce what God had in mind for them.**

Jesus used a very descriptive word for this process. He said that these other interests “choke” the word, so that it brings no fruit to maturity. We probably can all relate to being choked, at one time or another. Possibly, you have had a dog who pulled on his leash to the point of choking. **Some other definitions of the Greek word are “suffocate, drown, throttle, or strangle”.** There are two variant forms of this basic word for choking used in the accounts of this parable. One is “choking-together” referring to the crowding, pressing-together growth of the weeds around the plant. This is the word one would use for applying pressure to one's throat, and slowly throttling them. The other variant could be translated “choking-away”, emphasizing the

increasing loss of life as the choking process continues. So, **as the competing worldly interests press in upon us, and we allow them, they will slowly choke away our spiritual vitality.**

The other part of this word picture is that **the seed of the word sprouted and started well**, in this soil. As the seed grew, these other weeds also grew and slowly crowded out and choked away the life of this planting of the Lord. **From this, we can see that** even though we may *look back* and see some real times of spiritual interest, growth and commitment, ***what matters is not how well we started, but how well we finish!*** This is especially significant because **the fruit of one's life cycle does not develop at the beginning. It grows and matures over time, coming to full fruitfulness later on, toward the end of the life cycle. The diabolical attack of Satan is designed to slowly overtake us over time, so that we are almost imperceptibly seduced by worldly interests.** Some people may congratulate themselves by remembering past "glory days", where they were excited by things of the Lord, and think everything is good. But, Satan has succeeded in slowly stripping them of their spiritual focus and energy. They will *not ever* bear the fruit or accomplish the main work they were created for.

What are we to do? The prophets had clear, strong words of direction for us.

(1.) Break up the fallow ground in your life. What does that mean? **It means to radically evaluate your life, repent of poor choices and habits that are stealing your time, energy and resources, and determine to open your life up to God.** There are probably parts of your life that have become cluttered with worldly habits and things which keep you from being fully devoted to God and the work of His kingdom. Breaking up the fallow ground means that you are going to "clear the board" and start over. **With a spiritually informed perception, reevaluate everything.** Be willing to relentlessly redesign and rebuild your life. Allow God to be the designer. Throw your heart and life open to God *with no limits*. "Lord, what do *You* want?"

(2.) Rededicate yourself to God. This is what the phrase, "Circumcise yourselves and remove the foreskins of your hearts." As Jews, all of the men were already circumcised in their bodies, but their hearts remained unclean, undevoted to God. Circumcision was a sign of covenant devotion and commitment to God. To circumcise their hearts meant to remove their mixed motives and desires, and recommit their lives to God.

(3.) Sow with a view to righteousness. Don't sow just any place. **What does it mean to "sow"? It means to invest of your time, energy, talents, money and possessions. Don't waste them. They are all limited resources.** We are to invest them wisely. **We are to invest them with a view toward accomplishing what is right before God, what causes spiritual growth and the advance of His kingdom.** Jesus said, "Don't labor for the food that perishes, but for that which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you" (Jn. 6:27). Everything in this world *will* pass away, and *is* passing away (I Jn. 2:17). Why invest *here*, in the things that are passing away, when you can invest in what *will endure for eternity*? **What will produce eternal fruit? Investing in your own spiritual growth and maturity, because it will equip you to become fruitful for God, and investing in loving and serving others in Christ's name, because it will draw people to Christ.** If they choose to follow Him, they will welcome you in heaven (Lk. 16:9). *That* is fruit that is truly lasting.

(4.) Do not sow among thorns. This is not just a restatement of the previous principle. It is specifically warning us not to invest in things that will eventually grow up to choke out the spiritual life within us. Beware. **This is a very real danger. God is warning us of a very serious trap. DO NOT GO THERE. DO NOT INVEST THERE. Watch what you are doing, and where you are investing those precious, but limited, resources of your life. Make them count.** "Only one life, soon it is past; only what's done for Christ will last."

(5.) Determine to seek the Lord until He comes to rain righteousness on you. This is where it gets gutsy. **How radically are you willing to pursue God? How desperate are you? God is a God who hides Himself from the casual and curious who are not serious** (Isa. 45:15; Matt. 13:10-15). **However, He promises to reveal Himself to those whose hearts are fully dedicated to knowing and serving Him.** As David counseled His son, "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a *whole heart* and a *willing mind*; for Yahweh searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. **If you seek Him, He will let you find Him;** but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever" (I Chron. 28:9). Again, "Yahweh is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you" (II Chron. 15:2). The word for "forsake" means to "loose, let go, abandon". **If we let God go in favor of worldly interests and pleasures, He will let us go from His protection and allow us to taste the fruit of our own choices** (Prov. 1:24-33). **If, on the other hand, we determine to value Him and pursue Him, He will respond to us, welcome us, and share Himself with us.** "For those who honor Me I will honor, and those who value Me lightly will be lightly esteemed by Me" (1 Samuel 2:30).