

“How to go from 0 to 100?” Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23.

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A Sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose, they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.” [...] “Hear then the parable of the Sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. 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. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

What kind of Christians do we want to be, with zero fruits or with abundant fruits? What do we want to hear when we finally see the Lord Jesus: **“Well done, good and faithful servant. [...] Enter into the joy of your Master.”** Or... something else. [Matt 25].

There is one difference that characterises those who bear zero good fruits in God’s eyes and those who bear fruits thirtyfold, sixtyfold and even hundredfold. One key difference between zero and hundred. Do you know what it is?

That difference is – what happens with the Word of God in our lives. What is our attitude towards the Word of God, what do we do with it, how do we treat it, what is its place in our lives? We could put it this way - that the fate of the Word of God in our lives determines our fate in the Kingdom of God. They are so inseparably connected.

Jesus tells us this parable of the Sower and with this parable He gives us a few very important, very practical lessons. He explains that the seed in the parable of the Sower is the Word of God, the message of the Kingdom, the Gospel of Christ’s reign.

He also explains that the Triune God brings forth His Kingdom by speaking. His Word that we hear may seem to us as ordinary and insignificant as the seeds that are sown on the ground. There is nothing great or majestic when you look at them. Yet, they have hidden inside of them an unbelievable potential for life and abundant fruit.

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I think it is important to notice that there are four scenarios described by Jesus, not just one. How much fruit do the first three produce? No fruit at all. Zero. It almost seems that the Sower in this parable is wasteful, unnecessarily extravagant in His approach.

The Triune God is the Sower and if anything, His prodigal actions remind us that He indeed wants everyone to come to the knowledge of the truth and to be saved. Everyone! He speaks to everyone, even as many keep rejecting His message.

He keeps calling us, He keeps pouring His grace over us, even if we bear little or no fruit. And, perhaps, we should strive to imitate Him this way too. To be prodigal in speaking Christ's Good News to everyone. No holding back.

Let's briefly examine each of those four scenarios and see what lessons Jesus teaches us. First scenario is **those who hear the Word but don't understand it**. Second is **those who hear, rejoice and but when challenges arise, they fall away**. Third is **those who hear but have something else in this world that they love more**. And forth are **those who hear and do understand**. Hear and do understand.

So first about those who hear but do not understand. "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart." Do not understand...

How we hear the Word of God makes the whole difference. We may just sit and listen without comprehension, and what happens? The devil snatches away what was sown in the heart. The devil loves when we just listen without trying to understand what God speaks to us. The devil loves when we think that we already know everything that there is to know and put in no effort to keep learning.

He just loves it, for if we are not interested to understand, he can easily snatch that Word away. Meaning, there really is no place, no application, no life-giving effect from the Word of God in our lives. As if we had heard nothing. It is a scary picture.

How can we overcome this danger? It is very simple. The Triune God keeps speaking to us, generously. We should listen carefully and study diligently. For we all need God's help to understand His message, without exception. Especially Pastors.

And if there is something we don't get, we should see it as God's invitation to explore that topic deeper, to put in extra energy, to ask and inquire, to read and meditate and discuss, until the Spirit opens the Word of us. It is such a joy to do that!

Second scenario was those "who hear the Word and immediately receive it with joy, yet they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the Word, they immediately fall away."

They have no roots. What does that mean? It means that we only embrace some parts of God's message. Superficially. We like the Good News, we rejoice and feel excited, emotional, passionate and active. But we do not let the Word grow its roots. We do not let the Word of God renew everything in our thinking, in how we perceive this world, in how we lead our lives. As a result we may have accepted some parts of the Word, but

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underneath we remain shaped by the world and when we face challenges, because the Word of God is so contrary to what this world values, we take the side of the world. And we immediately fall away. As we listen to this, we should be terrified.

We are talking about those who joyfully embrace Christianity, and then... fall away. How can we overcome this danger? It is very simple. Our Lord Jesus never stops speaking to us His love and grace. And we should listen carefully and learn diligently.

By praying for the Spirit's guidance to examine our beliefs, to renew our minds so that we are not conformed to the world. By being open to God's Law to reveal where we fall short and rejoicing in every God-given opportunity to learn and understand. Good things.

The third scenario are those “who hear the Word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.” This is about those situations when we hear the Word, but there is something else in this world that we crave more than our relationships with the Triune God.

When we seek for something else and hope that the Kingdom of God will be just added on top. Then we find ourselves in situations where our Christian faith and our commitment to Jesus stands in a way of what our hearts truly desire. This is about those times when we choose to chase what we love more than the Triune God. And our lives prove unfruitful.

How can we overcome this danger? It is very simple. The Word of God is given to us in so many ways. We should gladly receive it, listen carefully and learn diligently. Allowing the Word of God to identify and expose our idols, and that is never pleasant. Repenting from the misplaced trust of our sinful hearts and rejoicing in God's forgiveness. Striving to seek His Kingdom first. Listening and learning. For we are privileged to do that.

The fourth scenario are those “who hear the Word and understand it. They indeed bear fruit and yield, in some cases a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Those who hear and understand. Did you hear this?

So much fruit! How is that possible? Are these some super-Christians? Super-active, super-driven, super-motivated? It is quite simple. It is all about the fate of the Word in us. Life-giving Word is what produces those good fruits. How would that happen?

It is so simple. Like one, two, three. One, when we listen and learn to understand, the Word of God reshapes us to be more and more like Jesus. The Good Lord guides us with His wisdom, transforms us by His grace, fills us with His peace. He changes us from inside out, daily drowning the Old Adam in us and raising us up for new life in Christ.

You may not even notice it, but the Word of God transforms everything in you and your interactions with the world. You are a new creation. As we listen and understand, our lives become less and less about us and more and more about Christ in us and through us.

Two, the Word of God motivates us. The Word always comes together with the Holy Spirit. They create new hearts in us, new and living hearts, filled with gratitude and joy for God's countless mercies, and the Word and the Spirit fill us with passion to please our God by serving to all people whomever He has placed in our lives.

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And three, as we listen and learn to understand, we can't help ourselves but allow the Spirit to guide our lives. God's wisdom, grace and peace are poured out in the lives of those around us, as are Jesus' Good News which we are so keen to make known to everyone, so that everyone can get to know this God and be blessed as we are.

The Word of God does all of that. As we carefully listen and diligently learn to understand. This is a much-needed lesson from this parable. **Now reflect, what is your attitude to the Word of God? Did you recognize yourself in that parable?**

I certainly did. It is not easy to understand the Word. It is so much easier to focus on something else, there are so many distractions in this world. And it is not easy to recognize those areas in my own thoughts and actions which are not shaped by the Word. And it is not easy to identify what or who I fear and love and trust more than the Triune God.

I would suggest that all of those scenarios apply to each one of us. They all speak about us at different points in our lives. For this is also true - I want to hear and to understand the Word. I do. As do you. It is so joyful when the Lord opens the Scriptures for you, when you are enlightened by the Spirit, when His grace and peace fill you up. So lovely!

The good Lord wants you to hear and to understand and bear much fruit. There is little gain from us hanging around if we don't want to understand. We don't merit some extra points by just sitting in. Your Father wants you to understand. That is why He has given His Church the gift of Pastors. We are not priests who stand between God and people.

We are the stewards of God's mysteries, of His Word and Sacraments. God gives us Pastors so that we can hear and learn and understand and bear much fruit. This is why the Holy Spirit helps Pastors to prepare sermons, this is why we try to make our sermons available, in printed and recorder forms to as many as possible.

So that you can hear, re-read them at home, meditate, learn, discuss them with fellow saints, family and friends, ask and inquire, clarify, share and pass on what you have understood, so that the fruits of the Word will keep multiplying through you.

This is why the Lord blesses us with opportunities to study the Word together, in Bible Classes and in Catechism Classes, so that we can hear and learn and understand and the Word would bear much fruit through us, for without the understanding we are like zero-fruit Christians, easy prey to the devil, and of no use for God's Kingdom. Very sad.

But the Lord Jesus is good. He keeps providing for us opportunities to hear and to learn, abundantly, extravagantly, prodigally... even if we are not always able to see them for what they truly are. Let's pray that our God helps us to appreciate what He does for us so that we can put in some efforts to receive His gifts with open ears and grateful hearts.

I pray, may we as a congregation, and may you as individuals be surprised, may you be shocked when you finally see the Lord and when He reveals to you how much fruit the Word of God has produced through your ordinary life, as you humbly served and witnessed to all whom the Lord had placed in your life.

And it all begins and ends with listening and learning to understand. Amen.