**I Hate Thorns!**

If you’ve ever done any gardening, you know that weeds can take over in no time, and if you don’t get them out, they can overpower the vegetable plants and steal their water, nutrients and sunlight. Nothing is much worse than pulling weeds and getting into a patch of razor sharp thorns, and we have Adam to thank for that. Apparently before he sinned, thorns weren’t a problem, according to Genesis 3:18. But thorns and thistles were part of God’s punishment for Adam’s transgression and mankind has been dealing with them ever sense.

Jesus once told a parable about a sower who went out to propagate seed, and it fell on all kinds of soil. Some fell by the roadside, some on rocky ground, some among thorns and still other on good soil (Mark 4). Of course, the main lesson is that we can spread the same gospel and it will be received differently because individuals who hear it are influenced by their own prejudices and life situations.

Certainly all of the preconditions Jesus outlines are valid and important in understanding why our efforts are not always as successful as we wished they would be. But I believe it is helpful (at least for me) to meditate on the impact that the thorns of life can have on my spiritual life and wellbeing. After all, only a heart of good soil is capable of bearing fruit, “thirty, sixty and a hundred fold,” and thorns will just get in the way. But what are these thorns according to Jesus?

**Worries of the World.** Lots of folks worry. A lot. And the kinds of things they worry about aren’t necessarily immoral or ungodly. Martha was worried about being a good hostess when Jesus visited and was upset that Mary was learning from Jesus instead of helping (Luke 10:41). Jesus reminds us that many worry about what they will eat, or drink, or wear (Matthew 6:31). There is nothing wrong with being hospitable or making sure our families have what they need. The problem arises when we get our priorities out of order and begin to focus on the physical at the expense of the spiritual. It’s all a matter of trust; if we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all of the other stuff will be there for us (v.33).

**The Deceitfulness of Riches.** We will never be fruitful as disciples of Jesus Christ until we develop the proper attitude toward the material things in our lives. We are constantly bombarded with ads promising that joy and happiness can be ours if we can only come up with the money for the latest new product. But of course, the truth of the matter is that “not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). We fall for the lie that, if I can only work hard enough to move my family into the next income bracket, we can truly be happy. Jesus made it clear in the “beatitudes” that true blessedness or happiness comes from having our spiritual lives in order (Matthew 5:3-12). If I could somehow gain the entire world for myself, but lose my soul in the process, I would have made a bad trade (Matthew 16:26).

**Desires for Other Things.** Wow, that covers a lot of stuff! People have a seemingly endless capacity for devising ways to entertain themselves in the absence of striving to please their Creator. Some of it is inherently bad and some is not. Entertainment, hobbies, sports, family time, social gatherings are all great as long as they don’t become the center of our lives. But then there is the destructive side of what the world has to offer; drugs, alcohol, illicit sex, pornography – you name it, it’s readily available for the asking.

**But I’ve been a Christian for a long time!** I fully acknowledge that Jesus’ main point of His parable is that the gospel never lacks power, but that individuals have their own baggage that sometimes keeps them from availing themselves of His grace. On the other hand, it is entirely possible (and too often happens) for a person to be baptized into Christ and to remain on a church membership roll, but never really bear fruit. Paul wrote, “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about your-selves, that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you fail the test?” (2 Cor. 13:5) With some self-examination, I may find that there are some thorns choking out my usefulness in the Lord’s vineyard. My heart may need some serious thorn weeding so I can be free to fulfill my potential on behalf of the cause of Christ.

Each of us must learn to trust God enough to lay our lives at His feet and let Him provide for us. We must recognize that true happiness doesn’t come from accumulating wealth and that a preoccupation with the diversions of this life will only supplant our dedication to serving Christ. It’s time to put on our gloves and pull up the thorns by the roots.

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