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**Sunday 12 July to Sunday 19 July**

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Sunday 12 July

# Good soil

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**‘But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it’ (Matthew 13:23).**

Read Matthew 13:1–9,18–23

For many of us, this parable is well known, and we see in it an explanation of why Jesus’ ministry (and perhaps our church’s) is not as fruitful as we might expect. However, as we journey in this week of devotions, let’s not think of ourselves as the sower; let’s leave the Lord Jesus to be the sower. Rather, read the parable again and picture yourself as the various places the seed lands.

We want to be the ‘good soil’ of verses 8 and 23. We don’t want to fall victim to the evil one (and we pray this in the Lord’s Prayer). We don’t want suffering to draw us away, and we don’t want to be led astray by our worries and our desires for the wealth of this world. Rather, we want to hear the word, and we want to understand what we hear.

Through the death and resurrection of our dear Lord and Saviour, we have been made daughters and sons of the Most High God. We have received much, so it should be natural that we want to learn more about Jesus, more about our Father, and more about the Holy Spirit. We are called to be disciples (those who learn), and that is the way of the ‘good soil’.

***Father, I need your help to be the good soil, so that I can hear your word and not be distracted from it. Protect me from the evil one, from the ways of the world, and from my own selfish desires. Help*** ***me to understand what your Holy Spirit is teaching me. In Jesus’ precious name, Amen.***

Monday 13 July 2020

# Not an optional extra

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**‘They are not just idle words for you – they are your life’ (Deuteronomy 32:47).**

Read Deuteronomy 32:1,2,45–47

We live in a country that is quite dry, and, thus, many of us know the blessings that come with rain! To see the red dirt have sparks of green burst forth; to admire the beauty and diversity of the flowers that appear in rough, rugged areas; to see the joy in the farmers as their seed starts to grow – all of this comes with rain.

Moses desired that the teaching he received from God and passed on to the people would be received like rain. Hearing and understanding God’s word is not an optional extra for us – just as the land needs water, so we need the teaching that God supplies.

We have an abundance of God’s word. We have Bibles on our shelves, computers, and phones. We have sermons proclaiming God’s word from our church (and as many have recently discovered, from a plethora of sources on the internet). Yet, we often find ourselves in a self-imposed drought – we treat the Scriptures as an optional extra, rather than as essential for life!

***Loving Father, create in me a hunger to know your word. I need to know more about you; I need to know more about Jesus. Help me to make good use of the tools and resources that you have provided me. Help me to better hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus’ precious name, Amen.***

Tuesday 14 July 2020

# Pay attention

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**‘Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say’ (Isaiah 28:23).**

Read Isaiah 28:23–29

Those of us who grew up in the city are often quite ignorant of the work that is involved in producing the loaf of bread that we purchase from the store. In our reading today, we see this issue addressed. Often things we think are quite trivial are far more complex and wonderful when we spend some time investigating them.

The prophet wants us to understand that our God is involved in supplying the technology that our farmers use (and all the others involved) in getting us bread. How much more so is he involved in supplying us with his written word! It is a fascinating and worthwhile exercise to look into the areas of translating, manuscripts, and the history of the English (and German!) Bible.

Even more worthwhile is to pay attention to our Scriptures, and we can see that our Lord Jesus did not come by chance to Jerusalem. As we learn more about the Old Testament, we come to learn more about Jesus and what he does in the New Testament. Remember, that the risen Lord revealed to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus all the Scriptures (Old Testament) concerning himself!

Listen and hear the Scriptures. Pay attention to what the Holy Spirit is saying to you through them.

***Patient Father, forgive me for taking your Scriptures for granted. Create in me a desire to learn more and to put into practice what I learn. In Jesus’ precious name, Amen.***

Wednesday 15 July 2020

# Hearing the message

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**‘Faith comes from hearing the message’ (Romans 10:17).**

Read Romans 10:8b–18

Our faith is a living thing that needs nourishment. It doesn’t grow by us trying hard to make it grow. It grows from hearing the word of God. If we desire our faith to be stronger, we need to read our Scriptures, and we need to hear the word of God preached as often as we can.

As Paul explains, hearing also involves preaching, and preaching involves sending (we might say we call our pastors, but wouldn’t it be wonderful to be sending them as well!). The weekly sermon does not appear by magic. Like the loaf of bread that we looked at yesterday, it is good to find out what is involved – and your pastor may be happy to share this with you.

How are we going to hear about Jesus? How are our children (and grandchildren) going to hear? How is our community going to hear? We need to be involved in practical ways in making sure that Bibles are available and are used – that we study it in groups, ask questions, and learn about the various tools available. We need to be encouraging and supporting our pastors and the structures needed to train and equip them. We need to be using what the good Lord has blessed us with to support our local church and ministries that spread the good news about Jesus, in both word and deed.

***Generous Father, I take for granted so much that you give me. Grant me your wisdom so that I will use my money, my time, and all that I have in ways that help people to hear the good news about your dear Son. I also want to know more about Jesus. Help me to better hear the words of your Holy Spirit. In Jesus’ precious name, Amen.***

Thursday 16 July 2020

# Rest, revive

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**‘For the word of God is alive and active’ (Hebrews 4:12).**

Read Hebrews 4:9–13

In Luther’s Small Catechism, his explanation for the commandment about keeping the Sabbath day holy is as follows: ‘We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and his word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it’. This fits in well with what the writer to the Hebrews says in our reading today. As followers of Jesus, we get rest and refreshment from dwelling in the word of God – in reading and studying it and in hearing it preached.

In our modern world, we often see relaxation as getting away from work and our normal activities – and in doing that, we sometimes fall into the trap of getting away from church and from reading his word. When we go on holidays, we don’t get away from eating, sleeping, breathing – nor should we put aside our Bibles. Rather here is an opportunity to hear more of God’s word. For example, listen to recorded sermons and audiobooks that will help you dig better into the Scriptures, and why not listen to whole books of the Bible.

Restoration and revitalisation are available through God’s word because it is alive and active. While it may cause some pain as it reveals the sin within each of us, we need this sword to do its surgery. As we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us through God’s word, we will draw closer to God – and oh what joy it is to behold our Saviour!

***Merciful Father, grant me the courage to allow your Holy Spirit to work in me through your holy word. Help me to see the areas in my life that need work. Make me into the person that you know is best for me and your kingdom. In Jesus’ precious name, Amen.***

Friday 17 July 2020

# A useful crop

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**‘Land that produces a crop receives the blessing of God’ (Hebrews 6:8).**

Read Hebrews 6:1–8

While there are some challenging aspects in our text this morning, the writer to the Hebrews wants us to know the dangers of falling away from all that we have received. Our faith in Christ is a living, dynamic thing, and we need to be moving forward in our learning. He is not saying that we should move away from the death and resurrection of our Lord, but rather move deeper into it. For example, get to know our gospels better: Why do we have four of them? What is the difference between them? What different aspects of Jesus do we gain from each them?

We want to be a land that produces a useful crop. God has chosen to spread his gospel not through angels, nor through spectacular miracles in the sky, but through us. We are to go and make disciples. We are to teach all nations. We are called to be useful in spreading the good news of our Lord and Saviour and all that he has done.

To receive forgiveness, to have peace with God, to be an adopted child of the Most High, and then to refuse to be of service (to be useful!) seems ridiculous. Remember, our usefulness is not through our own strength but through the Holy Spirit working in us – and he works through God’s word. The better we know our Scriptures, the better we hear his voice.

***Gentle Father, thank you for all that you have done for me through your dear Son. I want to be useful in spreading your gospel. Create in me a thirst for your word. Help me to clearly hear your Holy Spirit. Mould me into the person I should be. In Jesus’ precious name, Amen.***

Saturday 18 July 2020

# Teach me your way

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**‘Teach me your way, Lord’ (Psalm 86:11).**

Read Psalm 86:11–17

In our reading, David sings about his desire to learn more about God. He acknowledges God as his Lord as one who is ‘a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness’. Surely, this is a God who we want to learn more about.

Throughout this week, we have travelled around our Scriptures and have seen the importance of getting stuck into God’s word. Like David, we acknowledge that we can’t learn about God without his help. Like David, we don’t want our heart to be divided between serving God and serving ourselves. We want our hearts to be glorifying God forever!

Back in my Scripture Union days, our motto was ‘To know Christ and make him known’. This still sums up my desire. I want to get to know Christ better, and the more I learn, the more I want to share with others. Do you want the same thing? Are the fears and troubles of the world stopping you? Notice in our psalm that David goes on to mention the troubles he is facing – but these don’t stop him from worshipping God. It's rather the opposite. His worship is even stronger. Turn to our Father, and he will hear you and teach you.

***Holy Father, thank you for your compassion, your grace, and your abounding love shown to me, especially in the death and resurrection of my Lord Jesus. Teach me your way. Give me an undivided heart. Deliver me from my fears and troubles. In Jesus’ precious name, Amen.***

Sunday 19 July

# Sharing the good news

by Maria Rudolph

**‘The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ)’ (John 1:41).**

Read John 1:29–42

Pretend for a second that you lived 2000 years ago. What would be the first thing you’d do if you realised Jesus was here?

Andrew, one of Jesus’ first disciples, ran to tell his brother Simon (soon to be Peter) about it. He wanted to share the good news with someone, and not just anyone but someone close to him. The good news is hardly news if we keep it to ourselves, and it is indeed good, so we will want others to hear it too.

You and I know a lot more about Jesus than Andrew did at that point. Andrew, who had been a disciple of John the Baptist, heard his teacher say, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’ (John 1:36) as he saw Jesus passing by. Do you think he could have comprehended what that title meant? Can you comprehend it any more now? How capable are our human minds of comprehending the good news of Jesus’ redemption of us? It probably sounds as much like nonsense now as it did 2000 years ago. But as Andrew did, we look at the good news with the eyes of faith, worked in us by the Holy Spirit, the very Holy Spirit that John the Baptist said Jesus would baptise his followers with.

You have received that Holy Spirit at your baptism, and you can claim the status of being adopted into the family of God forever. So, back to our starting question: What would you do if you realised Jesus was here?

Well, there is good news: Jesus *is* in fact here! He is *in* you, as the Holy Spirit dwells within you always. God promised to never leave you nor forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:6), and, therefore, he stands alongside you right now. We are indeed longingly waiting for the time the Lamb of God returns in all his glory, and the prophecies of John in the Book of Revelation come to pass, yet every day we are part of God being present and creatively active in the world today. Who could you share that good news with today and this week?

***Loving God, thank you for coming as a humble servant to take my guilt upon you forever. Help me to express the joy of your salvation in being a witness to you to the people around me. Use me to be your hands, your feet, your mouth and your ears today and as I step into a new week. In Jesus’ name, Amen.***