

**Obstacles:**  
**July 12, 2020**

Yes. It's our job... **[1 Scatter]**  
To scatter the Word...  
As wide and broad as we possibly can.  
To scatter it to the Wind.  
And hope for the best!

However...  
Based on this parable...  
That was spoken by Jesus himself.

Jesus is describing...  
What happens when we...  
Spread the Word...  
Out into the world.

How it takes hold in some situations...  
But how it doesn't take hold...  
In other situations.

And it seems to me...  
That Jesus is just telling us... **[2 How it Works]**  
The way that it works.

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BUT he's not telling us...  
That we have to accept...  
The way that it works.

He's not telling us...  
This is just the way...  
it's going to be...

And there is absolutely nothing...  
We can do...  
To change...  
What's happening...  
In the world.

He's just telling us...  
How people receive...  
Or don't receive...  
The Word of God... just stating the facts.

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And I was thinking...  
What if... instead of passively accepting his words...  
What if... we heard this as a challenge.

A challenge...  
To do better.  
A challenge...  
To try harder.

A challenge...  
To address the issues...  
That he is simply pointing out.

What if we asked ourselves...  
Is there something WE can do...  
Is there something I can do...  
To help increase the possibility...  
That the seed of the Word...  
Will get planted and grow..  
In people's hearts.

And before we go too far...  
Down this road...  
I know it's the work...  
Of the Holy Spirit...  
To make the connection...  
Between God and people.  
It's not up to us.

The Holy Spirit...  
Creates faith.  
Gives hope.  
Fills people with love.

But... remember... we have the honor...  
Of proclaiming...  
The Word of God.

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Paul wrote... **[3 Hearing]**

In the book of Romans.  
Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.  
But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed?  
And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?  
And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?  
And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?

So faith comes from what is heard,  
And what is heard comes through the Word of Christ.

That's us.  
That's our job.  
To proclaim the Word of Christ.

And maybe...  
We could learn from Jesus...  
How to do it better.

In the gospel lesson...  
Jesus points out three problems.  
Three obstacles...  
To the seed... of the Word...  
Taking hold and growing...

In people's hearts.

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The first obstacle is...  
That people...  
Hear the Word...  
But don't understand.  
What the heck...  
We're talking about.

It's kind of like this: **[VIDEO - UHH]**

That was a video clip from... **[4 Don't Know]**  
The Miss Teen USA contest...  
Back in 2007.

It's an intense situation.  
She was on the spot.  
She was obviously...  
Out of her "comfort zone".

And she... bit the dust... she blew it.  
Gave a totally nonsensical answer...  
That made her look like...  
She didn't know...  
What she was talking about.

And it's painful...  
To listen to her answer.

It makes the listener...  
It makes me...  
Feel very... uncomfortable.

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I think sometimes...  
That's what happens...  
When we try to talk...  
About God.

We think that we need...  
To have some kind of...  
"Great Understanding"...  
In order to speak...  
With authority.

Or we tend to fall back...  
On things we have heard...  
Other people say.

Like...  
God doesn't give you...  
More than you can handle.  
Well... that's not true.

People think that's in the Bible. It's not.  
The idea that somehow...  
We will be spared...  
Being overwhelmed...  
Because we believe in God.

Haven't you ever been... overwhelmed by life?  
It's not God who's overwhelming us...  
Most of the time...

It's the world...  
It's the chaos...  
It's the pain...

All that is just too much to handle...  
Every once in a while.

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But my point is...  
We try to say things...  
That will make people...  
Feel better about God...

Like we are trying our best...  
To sell God... to make God look good.

When really... we have never been asked to do that.  
We have never been asked...  
By God... to be polished...  
Or professional...  
Or even coherent.

We are just asked to tell the truth. **[5 Truth]**  
About our relationship with God.  
That's all.

Don't try to be smart...  
Or wise...  
Or insightful.

Just tell the truth.  
The whole truth.  
And nothing but the truth.

In other words.  
Be a witness.

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Like the man who was born blind...  
And healed by Jesus.

Remember what he said.  
When the religious leaders...  
Tried to trap him...

And make him say things...  
About Jesus he didn't know.

They asked him... Is He the Son of God?

The man said.  
Listen... I told you already. All I know is...  
I was blind...  
And now I see.

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Don't you have a story like that?  
About how you were blind...  
but now you see.

How you were lost...  
But now you are found.

How you were dead...  
But now you're alive.

Don't you have a story...  
About how God...  
Has worked in your life.

That's YOUR truth.  
That's how you in particular... can...  
Proclaim the Word of God.  
Tell what God...  
Has done for you.  
That's all.

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Don't be theological.  
Don't be smart.  
Don't be clever.  
Like those preachers...  
Who use rhymes...  
In their sermons...  
An attitude of gratitude...

Just keep it simple.  
And tell your truth.  
Because other people... want to know...  
Why you believe in Christ.  
People want to know...  
What God means to you.

People want to know...  
Why they should believe...

They are looking for...  
A good recommendation...  
Or a positive review...  
From someone with personal experience.

I mean... for Pete's sake...  
If I can tell you... five places...  
To get a pizza... in Castle Rock.  
Certainly... I ought to be able to tell you...  
What God has done for me.

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So. You want to see what happened...  
When Miss Teen North Carolina...  
Had a chance... to tell her truth.

### **[VIDEO - Miss Teen USA]**

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The second obstacle...  
To the seed of the Word...  
Taking hold is...

When a person...  
First hears the Word...  
They receive it with JOY...

But at the first sign of trouble...  
Or hardship...  
Or persecution...  
The person falls away.

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A man was walking **[6 Cliff]**  
Down a narrow path  
Along a steep cliff.

He tripped and fell over the side.

As he fell... miraculously...  
He grabbed onto a small branch...  
Sticking out the side of the cliff.

Hanging on for his life,  
He cried out: "Is anyone up there?"

"I am here," a voice replied.  
"Who's there?" the man asked.  
"It's me ... God," the voice answered.

"Lord, help me!" the man squealed.  
"Do you trust me?" God asked.  
"I trust you completely," the man said resolutely.

"Good," God said, "then let go of the branch."  
"What?"  
"I said, 'Let go of the branch.'"

Then the man called out... "Is there anyone else up there?"

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The man was ready to switch up...  
When God asked him to do something...  
That required him...  
To have some faith.

And sometimes...  
We think... and we teach...  
That faith is going to make...  
Your life easier.

That is clearly not true. **[7 Trouble]**

Having faith in God...  
Does not mean...  
That we will not have pain...  
Or suffering...  
Or sadness...  
Or sorrow.

That stuff is still going to come.

BUT... having faith means...  
That we have someone to turn to...  
When we have pain...  
And suffering...  
And sadness...  
And sorrow.

And we trust that our God...  
Has the strength...  
To help us get through...  
Difficult times.

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We make a HUGE mistake...  
When we sell the church...  
Or our faith...  
As a completely happy clappy place...  
Filled with happy clappy people.

We are real people.  
We have real problems.  
And God has given us...  
A real community...  
Where we can share...  
Our burdens...

And be surrounded by people...  
Who will help us in times of trouble...  
Who will pray for us...  
When we so desperately need...  
To know that someone is praying for us.

AND we have a God...

Who is a very present help...  
In times of trouble.

That's what the Bible says.  
Not some rosy naive idea...  
Of what it means...  
To believe in God.

But real faith.  
In the course of real life.

Our faith is designed...  
To empower us to endure...  
Hardship.

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And finally... the last obstacle...  
To the Word of God taking hold...  
In the hearts and minds...  
Of people is...

The WORLD... it's just too loud. **[8 The Lure]**  
The lure of the wealth...  
The promise of life...  
And prosperity...  
And power...  
Away from God...

Putting our hope and trust...  
Into what the world offers...  
Instead of what God offers.

This one seems the most overwhelming to me.  
I'm not sure... what to do...  
I don't know... how we can convince...  
Other people...  
That the things of this world...  
Aren't going to last forever.

People are weird.  
They like to believe...  
That the things they think are important...  
Are permanent...

That somehow they will survive...  
Indefinitely.  
For eternity.  
Ad infinitum.

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Have I ever told you...  
That we have an unfinished crawl space...  
Under about one-third of our house.  
It just an area of dirt...  
Covered with thick black plastic.



Anyway... we have one daughter...  
Who is still in a transitional stage of life...  
From college... to the real world...

And she has stuff.  
We have moved that stuff...  
Many many times.

I tell myself...  
One more trip...  
And I will be done...  
Knowing full well...  
We will move her stuff...  
At least three more times.

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But anyway...  
Over the years...  
She has been gradually...  
Bringing her stuff...  
Leaving it at our house.

We then... put the stuff...  
Into plastic bins... from the Home Depot...  
And shove them...  
Into the black hole...  
Into the abyss...  
Beneath our home.

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Someone told me...  
That was not a good idea...  
Because the kids...  
Will never come and get their stuff...

And someday...  
When you are old...  
And want sell your house...  
You are going to have to climb in... under there.  
And get all that junk out.

To which I said... WRONG.  
That is not true.  
If and when...  
We get to that point...  
Of selling our home...

I'm going to pretend...  
Like that stuff does not exist.  
We are going to sell the house...  
And let the new owners discover the hidden treasure.

I don't want it.  
And if the child cares...  
About those worldly possessions...  
Then she can come and get the stuff...

Otherwise... too bad... so sad.  
Out of sight... out of mind...  
Poof! Like magic... It's gone!

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Jesus dealt with this...  
As directly as any other topic... **[9 Treasure]**

In the gospel of Matthew...  
Chapter 6... he said...

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,  
Where moth and rust consume  
And where thieves break in and steal;

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,  
Where neither moth nor rust consumes  
And where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is,  
There your heart will be also.

And I guess...  
Ultimately... that's the problem.  
People love stuff and money... more than God.

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But we as Christians...  
We know... there is no life to be found...  
In the treasures of this earth.

They are not eternal.  
They do not last.  
You can't take stuff with you..  
When you die.

Well... you know.  
When you start talking about death...  
People get nervous.

It's a hard reality.  
For people to embrace...

That everything.  
Eventually...  
Leads to nothing.

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I don't know how to bridge the gap...  
On this obstacle to the Word of God.

If people love the things of this world...  
More than... they love God.

Well... there's not much we can do.  
I guess... I don't know...

I suppose... we can live as an example.  
We can put our possessions...  
And the power that we have...  
And the things of this world...  
In their proper place.

Maybe we can acknowledge...  
That this world...  
Doesn't have power...  
Over our lives.

Maybe we can act as though...  
There is something more important to us...  
Than what we can see...  
What we can feel...  
What we possess.

Maybe we can be a witness...  
To the intangible grace of God.  
And make that grace...  
A priority... in all that we say and do.

But I'm just saying...  
The cares of this world...  
And the lure of wealth...  
Is a very very large obstacle to faith.

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Boy. That seems like a lot.  
But again... back to the beginning...  
This gospel lesson...  
Made me wonder... **[10 Challenge]**

If Jesus is subtly challenging us...

To work a little harder...  
To do a little better...  
To be a little clearer...

At proclaiming the Word of God.  
To this world...

This world... that is obviously...  
That is desperately...  
That is continuously...

Needing God.

How are you doing...  
At overcoming... the obstacles...  
To God's Word?

It's a real question...

Consider yourself challenged!  
In the name of Christ.  
Amen!