

The Bible is very clear that there are going to be teachers and preachers that use their role as preacher and teacher to do several things. I'll just list the ones that the Bible lists. There are those who will use the Scriptures to become peddlers of God's word. They will use their ability to teach to make a lot of money and fleece the flock, if you will. And the Bible's pretty clear that that guy is going to be out there. The Bible even says there are going to be those who use their ability to teach and preach to woo women into sexual relationships. And we've seen both of those, haven't we? In our culture, on the news and on television, you've seen that. There are those who are going to use the gospel and are going to use the ability to teach and preach to make much of them and not deflect that off of them onto Christ, but continue to build up themselves and make much of themselves. And then the Bible puts these massive warnings on anyone who wants to preach and teach. Jesus Himself clearly says, "If you cause any of these, My little ones to stumble, if you preach something and teach something, if you lead in such a way that you lead My little ones astray, it's going to be better for you to have a millstone tied around your neck and for you to be thrown into the deepest of seas." He says, "If you add to My word, if you make it more than you should, I'll add to you the plagues described in this book." And then He comes full bore and says, "Not many of you should presume to try to be a teacher because you've got to know you're going to be judged by a stricter judgment." These are all things that are in the Scripture when it comes to what I'm doing here this morning with you. Now in the end, I feel the weight of that, so much so that it affects how our lives, the Chandler family's lives play out. And what I mean is Friday is our Sabbath. That's our Saturday, if you will. And about 5:00PM on Friday, my mind and my heart begin to shift, and Lauren sees that I'm not there anymore. And it's a rare occasion for you to ever see us out on a Friday night at a restaurant, to see us really anywhere on a Friday night because what happens to me is I start to feel the weight of what I have to communicate, what God's asked me to communicate for where you are, for what's at stake in this room in our hour and ten minutes together.

So I want to be alone, I start to withdraw, I start to get into the text and I start to be bothered by what's coming. It starts to become almost an unbearable weight for me. And then by Saturday morning I'm there but not there, and by 11:00AM I want out of there. I need to be by myself. So we'll slip-n-slide for awhile, we'll play, me and the kids. But by noon, I am not there, I have checked out. And if I have to stay there, I'm pacing and I drive my wife crazy. And so I spend six hours on Saturday, not preparing because the prep work is done. I mean, I can tell you what I'm saying two weeks from now in regards to exegetical break down of the text in the original language. That's not what I'm talking about. I just need 6 hours to be alone with God and plead with Him, both for my sake and yours, what's about to happen. And no one here, no matter how we organize or what we build out, gets to carry that weight but me. And at times it can be crushing, especially if what has to be said is difficult and I know it won't be well received. But years ago I can't tell you how bothered I was by my Christian friends. I was angered before I was a believer. Because they didn't know anything about their own faith. Like they couldn't answer any of my questions. I had massive problems with the Bible. I would read it and it would seem like it contradicts itself. That's how it appeared to me. So I would ask them and they would just say, "Well, it's faith." Not only that, but nobody could tell me how the thing got put together, who chose those books, why other books were omitted. And so I kind of went on that campaign a long time ago to go, "Is this thing even historically viable? Is there evidence for this?" And the more I became convinced through research, study and being a pain in the tail to all my Christian buddies that the Bible could be taught and it is viable and it is true, it is the word of God, then the more I went, "Okay, this is what I've got to teach. I've got to teach it, and I've got to be unapologetic about it. And I've just got to lay out what it says. And I've got to know, because the Bible says that for some the word of God being preached is going to soften some hearts, but it's going to harden others." And so I've got to know every weekend that I come up here and

say some things, and people are either going to have their hearts stirred up towards Christ because of that and some are going to go, "Whatever. Forget that. I don't want any part of that," and their hearts will be hardened because of it. Which means I'm going to get e-mails that say "Thank you," and I'm going to get e-mails that say, "I will harm you." But the Bible says this is what's going to happen when you preach and teach, that it's going to be the aroma of life to some and the stench of death to others. So I feel that. I feel that, I know that. It's why I preach the way I preach. It's why at times I feel like I'm in pain before we get that out, before we talk about that. It's why I go home and die on Sunday afternoons. It's why sometimes I go to bed before I eat. It's because of that weight.

Now, I've just unpacked for you the warnings and the weight that God puts on me as a preacher and teacher Luke 8 is about the warning and weight He puts on you as the hearer. Let's look at it. I love the first part of this because the people who knew Jesus the best had no idea what He was talking about. It makes me feel better.

Verse 4, "And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." So He's not talking about the physical ear here.

Look at verse 9. This is why I always say that sanctification, growing in God is a process that takes years at times and is rarely instantaneous. And we can see this even by His disciples who spend all this time with Him in verse 9. "And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant..." He just finishes this sermon and they're walking away when the people closest to Him go, "Um, could You help me with that?" Listen to what He says here. This proves my point from earlier.

Look at verse 10. "...he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'"" That's why I said every time the Scriptures are taught, every time the word of God goes out, it has a softening effect on some and a hardening effect on others, because God's going to display both His mercy and His justice. Let's continue to read, because that's not a popular idea. "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God." So let's go back up to the top. "A sower went out to sow his seed." So a preacher, a teacher, in this case Christ Himself begins to preach and teach the word of God. Now He's going to unpack four scenarios for how it's heard.

Verse 11 again, "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved." Scenario one is that the gospel goes out and a heart goes, "Whatever. No thank you." Or the seed lands for a moment but then is quickly snatched away. Let me give you an illustration of that from my own journey. When I started to go to church with Jeff Faircloth, there were times I would bring my crew with me. Because if you're a lost guy going into a church, you don't know what to expect. Things could get weird, they're saying stuff like "redeemed by the blood of the lamb," who knows if they're going to kill an animal. I want my crew with me. And so I got Jimmy Hereford, Darryl and Damon Griffin, the twins...one of them always had a weapon. We came together and we would sit there and there were times they would say things that begin to resonate with my heart. I began to go, "Maybe there's something to that. Maybe there's some truth in that." And then afterwards we'd go eat at "Casa Olé," a very high-end Mexican food restaurant, and we would go in there, eat and I would hear Darryl and Damon or Darryl and Jimmy go, "Oh, please" and they would begin to dog what was just said in church, how ridiculous it was, how silly it was. And it didn't take long for me to convolute with them and go, "That's right." And the seed that touched early was snuffed out within minutes. So the seed landed but I went "Yeah,

yeah, you're right. I see what you're saying." This is an example of scenario one, where either your heart is completely unmoved a few moments afterwards it gets snatched away, it gets trampled on by men. And then even, just to throw this out there, I think even after you become a believer, you have to be very, very careful of putting yourself around hypercritical people. In 1997 I went to a thing where God just blew me up. And I in my seat for two hours and just sobbed and sobbed. I just literally could not pull myself together. And my crew, the friends I was with went over Cafe Brazil and were sucking coffee and by the time I got over there they were debating over which of the worship leaders was better. I was going, "Oh my God, they missed it." So be careful of even having the seed trampled on by men.

Let's keep going here. There's a second scenario, and this one is just gut-wrenching. Verse 13, "And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away." Now I know what I'm about to say is not popular at all, and I know some of you might come back for it. But I already told you that I'm much more scared of God than I am of having a small church. I don't want you to go, but I think what I'm about to say is painfully true. He is talking about men and women who can point back to an event and say, "I said the prayer, I walked down the aisle, I heard the message, I said yes to it and from that moment on have had no objective evidences of regeneration and conversion at all." They have not grown in their love for Jesus, they have not grown in their worship of Him. They literally have a moment to point back to and outside of that, nothing else. And when I press on this issue in one on one conversations, most in the Bible Belt have a story like this. When they were (x) years old, someone basically said to them, "Do you want to come to heaven with mommy and daddy or do you want to go to hell?" And then they walk down an aisle, someone gave them an incantation to speak back, they spoke it back, they got baptized and then, at most, over the years, have been conformed to a moral pattern but have not been transformed by the Holy Spirit of God. They have no root, completely unwilling to repent, completely unwilling to create any kind of depth. Thursday of this week the wind was blowing about 700mph, and I went and had a cup of coffee with one of our elder candidates at "The Corner Bakery" at the new "Shoppes at Highland Village." And we're sitting there and all those saplings, the trees that they planted in September, had all been knocked over. So they had these crews out there trying to save those trees. At home in my front yard, we have three massive oak trees. And when I pulled into my front yard, the wind was blowing the tops of those trees everywhere. It was blowing the dead limbs and leaves off of those trees, but those trees aren't coming down. Because the roots are unbelievably deep. And what Jesus is saying here is there are men and women who point back to this moment where they received a message with joy but they never developed roots. And so what's going to happen is they are eventually going to get off into license or they're going to get off into legalism or something's going to reveal in their hearts that their treasure is not Christ, it's something else, and they'll disappear. License leads to they'll just disappear. In legalism you disappear into death, dead spirituality, not spirituality at all. And that's what Jesus is saying. Some of you hear the word week in and week out, no intention of applying any of it, just hear it and agree with it, which the Bible Belt just so insane for me. It's "That's right," or everybody thinks that you're preaching to somebody else. "Oh, I wish my brother was here...Oh, I hope my wife's tuning in to this...That's good. Did you write it in your journal?" You can giggle, but this is what we're doing. It's never for you; it's always for someone else. It's cultural Christianity. A long time ago you made a decision so you start coming to church week in and week out despite the fact that you have no relationship with God and you have no objective growth in your relationship with Christ for decades. It's a mortifying idea...terrifying.

Look at the next one. Verse 14, "And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature." The third scenario is a man or woman who hears the gospel and receives it, but as they begin to walk, there is an invitation into obedience. "This is what I command...This is what I'm asking of you...This is the step that I want you to take..." And either because it is not instant gratification, because it is too difficult or because you don't want to do it, you just say "No, I'm not going there...I'm not doing that." I can't tell you how many times we see this, where people just say "No." As if God is the great enemy of joy, as if God is the great enemy of pleasure, as if God is the great enemy of riches. I can't tell you how often

people trade intimacy with Jesus Christ for the dumbest things. On Monday we did Restore, which is our day of prayer and fasting, I was teaching out of 1 Timothy 4. If you've got this historic dark sin in your life, we have the same rule with our staff that we have with everyone here. We say it's okay to not be okay, it's not okay for you to be a liar. So you can come into my office any time as our staff and go, "This is an issue I struggle with." And we provide counseling for all our people, we provide patience for all our people. We love on them. We want to care for our staff. But you don't get to be a liar. You don't get to just perpetually lie. And I told them, "This job, it's not better than a relationship with Jesus Christ." To know Christ, to be known by Him, to walk in intimacy with Him, it's not better than this job. In fact, it's a horrible trade. You work a lot of hours for not a lot of money. And so think about some of the things that people trade intimacy with Jesus Christ for. For our single women, one of the things we see all the time if you trade it for intimacy with a man who can't lead you. That's a horrible trade. Let me tell you this from experience and counseling. There are things that are worse than being alone. How about this one, and this is just such a big one on both the male and female side here. I don't know if it's because we're young or if it's just epidemic. Pornography is not a good trade for intimacy with Jesus Christ. It's just not a good trade for even intimacy in any way. But this is what happens to us. We start walking and go, "Oh no, I can't be obedient to that...I'm not going to walk there...I'm not going to do that. So let's justify it, let's go back to the word, let's proof text, let's take this. Oh, I don't have to do that...Oh, this is only in this scenario...I don't have to listen to that..." And what you do is go, "I'm going to do it my way, and nobody gets to tell me what to do" and you're off. And the Bible says what happens is life just chokes the mess out of you and you never become all that Christ created, wired and breathed life into you to become. Do you remember when "Dead Poet's Society" was so big and you literally couldn't go to church or any kind of conference at work or any kind of thing where they weren't "Carpe diem!" That phrase was on shirts, it was on bumper stickers. It was really out of control. I wanted to seize carpe diem. That's what it's talking about here, that we might live fully, live deeply. And when you say no to that, the Bible just says spiritually what's happening is you're beginning to be choked out. You can be choked out to where you're never bear fruit, that you're going to be spiritually retarded, your growth will be stunted.

There's one more scenario. By the way, I don't think this text is mathematical, but one in four makes for a long life of preaching, doesn't it? I want you to look at this process in verse 15. "As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart..." So what happens is the word goes out, whether in a sermon, whether in your own Bible study, whether on a sermon you hear in the car, anywhere you get the word of God. When you hear it, you hold it fast in an honest heart, which means you don't start playing games in your mind, you don't start the process of justification. You hear it and in an honest heart go, "That's not where I am. I am sinning in that area of my life. I have not given that over to God. I have not been honest in this area. I have not walked in what God has commanded me to walk in." and you repent and seek out accountability, help, counsel, whatever you can get that enables you to walk in the fullness of what the word of God commanded you to walk in. But the word has to hit an honest heart. If it doesn't hit the honest heart but it the heart of the hider, the liar, the manipulator, I think you need to roll it up to one of the other three scenarios. It has to hit an honest heart, a heart that gets it. And here's another thing. I think this hold fast idea has a connotation of movement. I think the majority of Evangelicals, myself included, have a delayed obedience issue. We have God put things on our heart and think, "Oh, I need to do that. Chili's? Sure!" And then it's one of those things that doesn't get addressed for months or years. And then here's what you end up finding. You end up finding men and women who have been struggling with a specific sin for ten years, twelve years, thirteen years, thinking that this is the time that they're finally going to be able to get over it despite the fact that Christ and the Holy Spirit of God has been for years going, "Come on! Let's get out of this. This not what I have for you. This is not why I bled for you. There's more. There's greater intimacy with your spouse, there's greater intimacy in life, there's greater joy to be had. Let's get out of here." And we're going, "Oh yeah, we will. We'll do it next time." It's just devastating to the heart.

Now look at what happens here, and I'm going to point out the prosperity garbage gospel. Because I've heard this text used for the crap they say. Verse 15, "As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an

honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience." Let me make this known before we move forward. Early on, before I started reading the Bible myself, I used to just believe anything I was told. And one of the things I was perpetually is that if I would just do this thing, all of a sudden everything would come together for me and that if I got up every morning and had a quiet time, Jesus would personally show up in my room and answer my questions. "Should I do this?" and He would say audibly, "Yes." Uh, it didn't work out like that for me. I was told early on that when I really struggle with anger and lust, that if I would just confess it out loud, then that would break its power. So I would go, "I've got a lust problem...I've got an anger problem" and two days later I was angry about lusting again. And it's like there are all these promises that there's this simple "You take this one step and in 24 hours, it will all take care of itself" kind of bull out there. Do you see what happens? They bear fruit because of patience. They hold fast, they're patient. These are words that say step by step by step by step, day after day after day after day, you can't submit yourself for four weeks and then go, "Well, I'm not where I think I should be, so I'm out." Now let me point out what I wanted to point out. Verse 16, "No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light." He just switched here from fruit to light. Jesus does this constantly in the gospels. Fruit and light are almost synonymous to Him. So He just said that the word that falls on the good heart bears fruit, much fruit, becomes a light for all the world to see. Now look at what He says next. It's a terrifying verse. "For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light." Does anybody else find that verse terrifying? On to verse 18. Now this is a verse that I heard a guy talk about six weeks ago that just proof texted it out right out of this text and made it about being rich because Jesus loves you. "Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away." Now I've heard men take this text completely out of that context and say, "If you use your riches and you give your riches, then God's going to expand your riches even more. But if you hoard your riches, they're not even your riches to begin with and God's going to strip those from you." The problem with that is it's nowhere near what this text says at all. That's being a peddler of God's word. That's fleecing the flock. This text, this verse is clearly in the context of hearing and doing the word of God. So what He's saying here at the end is that for those who hear, those who will hold fast in a good and honest heart and produce fruit with patience, fruit will be added to those men and women, intimacy will be added to them, love will be added to them, healing will be added to them, life will be added to them. And those who have more because they listened and obeyed will be granted more and more and more in an ever-expanding experience of the joy and weight of God that is so vast that the book of Ephesians says it will take the coming ages, millenniums for us to taste and understand the fullness of it. But for those who won't, even what they think they possess will be taken from them. I'm telling you, this is such a weighty idea. Now you have to go back to the book of Matthew where Jesus says, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord,' and I will say, 'Depart from me, you cursed, for I do not know you.'" You have to deal with the book of Hebrews that says some will experience spiritual things but not be a believer at all. Even what they think they have will be taken from them, i.e. you're going to fall off into license and disappear and Christianity is going to be something you believe but way back there, or you're going to become the legalist, which has no relationship with Christ but becomes the police for everybody else. Even what you think you have will be taken from you. Be careful then how you hear. Be careful how you hear. Who would have thought such things were at stake in this room week in and week out?

For your name, for the sake of the name of Christ, it might do you well to take account of your heart and your life. How are you hearing? Which are you? If you've these four scenarios that He's throwing out there, which one are you? Is your heart just unmoved? Okay, my heart was unmoved for years. Do you have this thing that you can point to years ago but have just done nothing from then to now? Are you somebody that said, "Yeah, but..." and you've got these areas of your life that Christ doesn't get to tell you what to do, the word of God doesn't get to tell you what to do? Do you have those areas of your life? Do you understand that the Bible says you're spiritually being choked out? Maybe you're just confused. Maybe you're going, "Chandler, I don't know. I'm confused out of my mind now." If we don't take a second to ask yourself, "How am I hearing?" then I think we're in a really, really dangerous place.

Let's pray. "Jesus, thank You for the word. I thank You that You love us enough to disclose Yourself to us. I think my prayer specifically this morning is for men and women who have a long history in church. I think that's why my heart is so grieved this morning. I pray for those who week in and week out hear the word, who are good churchmen and churchwomen who have just started either being choked out or are still in a place where they get no moisture. It's just a matter of time before license or legalism overcomes them. Maybe they're even walking it today. I want to thank You with everything in me that You're pleading with us this morning to hear, to repent, to turn, to embrace, to walk in the things You've asked us to walk in. I thank You that You love us enough to unpack difficult things for us. And I pray as You said that You would give us ears to hear. I think we want to love You. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."

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