

# Fireworks And The Night Sky

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[ 0 : 00 ] Alright. Well, we're looking at the second of these two, of this second part of the four-part parable of the seeds, the soil, and the sower.

And Jesus is teaching in parables, and he's got a great mixed crowd in front of him. And this great mixed crowd that he has in front of him, he recognizes the difficulty of trying to speak to such a group of people, and knowing what happens when he presents himself to them.

And so he talks to them in parables, and I once upon a time learned this fact, which intrigues me, though I really don't understand anything about it.

But if you take that there, which is an electron of some kind, and then you put a microscope on it, which looks like this, and then you look through it down here at this, then what happens is that by looking at this through an electron microscope, you distort what you see so that you can't see what's really there.

And so what's really there is there until you look at it, and then when you look at it, it's not there.

And that's the problem with the kingdom of God, is that if you try and look directly at it, by you looking at it, you will somehow distort it and not be able to see it.

[ 2 : 07 ] And I think this is called a certain uncertainty principle, and a lot of people are uncertain about the kingdom of God because when they look at it, by their looking at it, they distort it.

So Jesus wants to explain to you what the kingdom of God is like, and so he gives you a parable so that you can't look directly at it, but while you're looking in this direction, you know, the soil, the seed, the sower, and all those kinds of things, you catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God out of the corner of your eye.

You can't look at it directly. I suppose it's the same when you have an eclipse of the sun and somebody tells you, don't look at it. You're not to look at it directly because it would blind you.

So in the same way, we can't look directly at the kingdom because it would blind us and we would distort it, and so the whole thing would break down. So Jesus decides to do this by a parable.

And he recognizes that the parable is to explain to them what the kingdom is like. Now, in this second instance, he says that the sower went out to sow.

[ 3 : 23 ] Now, just let me remind you of the fact that in this story, it is the sower sowing that is the central idea. If you get tied up as to which kind of soil you are, you're going to be in trouble.

You'll never dig your way out of it. You've got to see that this is what's happening. What's happening is the sower is going out to sow and the seed is the word of God and the field is the world, the whole world, not just you yourself, but the whole world.

And this is how the kingdom comes to the world. Now, I told you last week and would like to remind you this week that most of us, when we think about God breaking into the world, think of the day of judgment is coming, you know.

The final harvest, the angels, the trumpet, all those things that will come at the end of the world and then we'll sort out between the sheep and the goats and then we'll know who's in and who's out.

And in the meantime, you entertain in your own heart the secret ambition that you and God understand each other. And when that time comes, you'll just have to mention your name and he'll say, right this way, please.

[ 4 : 39 ] That's what most people think is going to happen. But what Jesus says is that right here, right now, in downtown Vancouver, the seed, which is the word of God, is being sown.

And that's how the kingdom of God is present in our world, the world of which we are all a part. It is present by the seed which has been sown.

That is, the word of God is among us. And it's among us in the person of Jesus Christ. We're not responding to a philosophical concept.

We're responding to a person. Just as there are lots of people sitting in this room to whom others have made insufficient response today, and you're feeling lonely because nobody's responding to you the way they should or milk making you welcome the way they should. That's not a bad feeling. It helps you to understand this parable. Because Jesus is saying that I am the word of God, I have been sent, and this is what happens. For some people, it's just like concrete.

[ 5 : 55 ] Remember I talked about that last week and that you've got to break up the concrete in order for the seed to germinate. This time, it's different in that it's rocky ground.

And if you look at the story of how it develops, you'll see that the seed that fell upon the rocky ground, it had no depths of soil and it sprang up very quickly.

Now, remember that this is the ground here and there's a little fringe of soil along here and then there is rock and the seed that is sown sits there and it has no depth and no way to get rooted. And so that's the second sort of thing. What happens to it is it grows up quickly like this but then it wilts quickly like this. So you get this phase and this phase all exposed in this particular parable. So, Jesus is saying this is what happens and when he goes to explain it to them, he says that it immediately sprang up. It says that the sun rose up and withered it.

[ 7 : 04 ] Now, you know what happens in the blistering sun where you have very little soil even in this part of the world that everything dries up.

Your lawn just goes brown because it has no depth of soil. So, Jesus says this is one of the things that happens. It has no root.

Now, what that means, I think, for us and in order to explain to you what it means for us, I think I just have to pause and say who's talking to who?

You know, am I talking to you or is Jesus talking to us or are we talking to each other? How does it happen? You know, it's mostly, I mean, I think we mostly think of the preacher who is, for the most part, a very inadequate person.

I was full of a sense of my own adequacy last week and blasted away at you. I'm full of a sense of my own inadequacy this week and quivering before you.

[ 8 : 19 ] but I won't let on in either instance that I... But the thing that I think has to happen, like, I had a discussion about the Pharisee and the publican last week, you know, the one who prayed thus with himself, I thank God that I'm not as other men, had such a high opinion of himself and then a low opinion of the publican, you know.

And, you know, as soon as you hear the story like that, you identify yourself with the publican. Well, he's the guy that went home justified, so that's really the kind of humble person I am, you know. But if you want to understand what Jesus is saying, stand up to the gun, you know, the thing that's pointing at you. So if you want to hear this story, look at yourself in terms of what this parable says. Look at your own heart in the light of this parable. That's what we need to do. And what it says is that you produce rootless Christians. It has no root.

And, you know, that's, that's very much the picture of our world, isn't it? People who are spiritually rootless wandering around looking for what I called in the title of this, what did I call it?

[ 9 : 41 ] It was something about fireworks at night. Fireworks in the night sky. That they're looking for the kind of emotional experience you get during the sea festival when you look out over English Bay and suddenly the dark sky is filled with the most brilliant display of light.

Oh, and in many colors and in many shapes and it's a magnificent thing to see and it's there for several seconds and then it's dark and because of the brilliant light it's even darker than it is usually. The whole thing turns to kind of velvet blackness and it's gone. Now, a lot of people, I mean, a lot of us suffer from this kind of spiritual experience.

Fireworks that light up the whole of the night sky for us and then disappear and it's gone completely and it's blacker now than it was before.

And so, what Jesus is saying is that the impact of the word of God is something that creates an immediate emotional response to which people make and they grow quickly and they respond quickly because of the circumstances of their life but then something else comes along and they're lost.

[ 11 : 03 ] the lights go out. They receive it with joy. They spring up quickly but then the sun comes and scorches it.

Now, you see, the difficulty with this is, I think the difficulty that we experience right now is that many, many, many people in our society have had that kind of spiritual experience in their encounter with the gospel.

It's been dramatic, it's been full of color, full of light, full of beauty, full of charm, totally fascinating, then it's gone.

And those people become bitter and angry and they become, in a sense, the disciples of agnosticism and even atheism because they say, I've tried that.

I've had as dramatic an experience as any one of you and it doesn't work. And so, we draw people into an emotional experience of the word of God and they get caught up in it at a particular time of crisis in their life, mostly.

[12:24] They make a commitment to it, they become involved in it, they begin to respond, the whole thing sort of breaks out in their life and it's something which is magnificent and then persecution comes and it's gone.

And in its place there comes a kind of spiritual vacuum and a bitterness and an anger because what they hoped for they haven't realized in their life.

And the breaking point is this and it says it here very clearly. The breaking point is that having received it with joy and finding that they responded very quickly there wasn't any root so that when the sun came out it withered immediately and when Jesus is explaining this to the disciples he said, when tribulation and persecution comes then people turn away.

And you see the difficulty with the kingdom of God is that it is alien to the world in which we live.

And the great demand for religion is religion which is not alien to our world.

Something that fits into our world. Something that fits into our desires. Something that fits into our ambitions. Something that makes life better for us. That's what we want. And when we find that that doesn't happen then we sense that this doesn't fit into my world and my world is persecuting this or this creates stress and tension for me and I can't handle it and therefore I have to give it up.

[14:07] It's not practical to be a Christian to be a member of the kingdom of God in the kind of world in which I live. And so we abandon it.

And that's what Jesus says happens here. We receive it with joy no root tribulation persecution. The kind of stress that we are put under by reason of having glimpsed the reality of the kingdom.

Now a lot of people have written books about the Christian faith. These are current books. You get Scott Peck writing about the road less traveled.

You get Eugene Peterson and his long obedience in the same direction. You get in one of the collects of the prayer book that O Lord support us all the day long of this troublous life until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed and the fever of life is over and our work is done.

You get the kind of faith that is described in the epistle to the Hebrews which is something that goes on and on and on and on. All these are to make us aware that what God has done in revealing the kingdom to us is in a sense to root us in eternity and we're in for the long haul.

[15:37] Now the difficulty is that many of us encounter Christianity in a particular moment of crisis in our life when our guard is down when our self-sufficiency breaks down and we need something from outside so that in that crisis moment in our life when the seed of the word of God is sown in our hearts and takes root and meets the need of that particular critical situation then we say that's great but now that I'm not in trouble anymore I don't need it anymore and what has grown up quickly withers and goes instead of what Christ is saying here needs to happen and that is that it needs to take deep root root in our lives we as Christians are very put a lot of emphasis on bearing fruit and of course there is no such thing as bearing fruit unless there is a deep root the invisible reality has got to be there before the visible reality is going to show and the invisible reality is the root that goes down and takes hold and becomes the source of life for the

Christian so that's what Jesus is saying in this parable is this immediate response which is so which in one way is so dramatic but then it's gone and as a minister of the gospel I recognize that one of the things that happens to me all the time is that there is a real demand for a dramatic experience of the kingdom of God and to draw people into a dramatic experience but then what you do is you get yourself caught in saying in people putting pressure on you having provided them with a dramatic experience of God to provide them with some more and so you get caught into the business of providing dramatic experiences for people without end more trumpets more light more music more angels more marching more choir more something to keep the thing going and you can't do it and

Jesus says that that's what happens and when persecution and distress come into our lives we abandon it that same word you see is the same word that is used in the in the Lord's prayer when you say lead us not into the place of stress and persecution we ask God that he will sustain and keep us in that situation and not let us be overcome by it because inevitably it comes and the reason that it comes is because God's purpose for us is not to give us a flash in the night experience of God which we try and preserve for the rest of our lives but to get us rooted and grounded in the reality of the kingdom which in the day of judgment will become the only reality that's left to us that's all there is there isn't any more now when Christ is talking about this towards the end of his ministry in the gospel according to St.

John certain Greeks come along who are strangers to Jesus and strangers to the Jewish religion but they are attracted by this person Christ and they go to Andrew and Andrew goes to Philip and Philip goes to Christ and he says these men have come and said sir we would see Jesus they want to see him and Jesus sends them the message except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abides alone now I think that there is a kind of connection between this section of the parable and what Jesus taught those Greeks about the seed of corn the kernel of corn falling into the ground and dying because you see Jesus is the word of God Jesus is the one who has come into the world Jesus is the one who has died and in his death he has as he said in that in that story he said if the seed doesn't fall into the ground and die it remains alone but if it dies it produces many seeds and so Christ has come as the seed that's fallen into the ground and died and he's brought forth a great harvest as it were so there is a sense in which this seed that falls into the ground is for us a kind of poison pill you know how the Iraqi soldiers in the fight with Iran they used to carry poison pills under their lip in order that if they got captured they would swallow it and die and I think the seed which is the word of God is a kind of poison pill you know and you swallow it and you die and what that means is that what happens to you and the thing I think that is hard for us the thing that really is difficult about it is that the world no longer is sufficient we die to that the world cannot provide the needs that you discover in your heart the world cannot provide what you long for at the center of your life it can't do it you have tasted the poison pill humanly speaking this poison pill and you are dead to the world and that's why

[ 21 : 59 ] Christ goes on to say not only did he have to come into the world and die but so do we the man who loves his life will lose it the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life well that's that's what I think happens when this seed takes root in our lives the whole source of our life shifts to something entirely different and one life has taken root and that life is eternal life and another life is the life that shrivels and dies I hope I haven't got you mixed up with this maybe I have but you see how the word of God is to take root in your life and become the source of your life and the transitory reality of our world the flash experiences of religion they wither up and die they don't go anywhere and more and more your life depends on that root digging into the earth and becoming for you the source of life you remember that this is one of the old pictures in the book of Psalms where it says blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly neither standeth in the way of sinners neither sitteth in the seat of the scornful but his delight is in the law of the

Lord and therein shall he meditate day and night he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water and his leaf will not wither because his root goes deep and calls on the resources so that even when the persecution comes and even when the tribulation comes he is still in touch with the reality of the purposes of God and I want to assure you that the persecution and the tribulation can be very acute indeed and can raise very real problems of a personal nature and can make the world say to you so that's what happens to Christians is it that's what happens to people that believe in the God of love is it that's the persecution that you're under and at that point that the root goes deep enough that you are drawing your resources not from what the world around you can provide but from what God has provided and that you know that your taste or experience of the kingdom of God is such that you are no longer dependent upon you are dead to anything the world can provide because your resources are rooted in the grace and mercy and righteousness and holiness of God who has revealed himself to you in Jesus

Christ that's the basis of your life and mine and that you see is what makes it such powerful good news but you see Jesus says it's like a sower going out to sow and throwing the seed on the ground and the seed germinates quickly and grows up and evaporates and that's the religious experience of many people but it does that but Jesus goes on from there to tell you what it is his purpose

should happen not that there should be this kind of flash experience of religion which is embittered and angered many people because of the transitoriness of it but that there should be a deep rooting of the word of God in their life that becomes the very source of their life let me pray our God help us to stand directly in line with what it is that Christ is saying and to be deeply aware of the work that it is his purpose to do in our lives and hearts that the word of God may take deep root and that the tribulation and the persecution which comes from our world may not cause our spiritual lives to shrivel up and die but may mean that the root will go deeper and the fruit will be more abundant we ask this in

Christ's name amen a first al good of you to church amen to