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What Can Johnny Appleseed Teach Us?
The Parable of the Soils from a Worldview Perspective: Part 2

By Tal Davis

In the first installment of this two part series we talked about a legendary 19th century farmer named John Chapman, better known as "Johnny Appleseed." Chapman traveled throughout the Midwest establishing numerous apple orchards. Eventually, he became something of legendary character in American folklore. The stories had him doing all kinds of amazing (even impossible) things, sort of like Paul Bunyan, John Henry, Calamity Jane, and Pecos Bill. Nonetheless, Johnny Appleseed was a real person, even if his legend was greatly exaggerated.

We mentioned John Chapman as an example of a farmer planting seeds, a figure Jesus used in one of His most famous parables: The Parable of the Soils. In part one we looked at that story Jesus told of a sower tossing seeds on different kinds of soils (Matthew 13:3-9). (To read Part 1, click here: (<http://www.marketfaith.org/2021/07/what-can-johnny-appleseed-teach-us-the-parable-of-the-soils-from-a-worldview-perspective-part-1-tal-davis>) In the parable, the Lord describes a man sowing seeds (He did not say what kind – it's irrelevant), and described what happened to them when landed on four different types of soils. First, He says some of the seeds "*fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up*" (Matthew 13:5). Second, some seeds "*fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil... But after the sun rose, they were scorched... and, they withered away.*" (Matthew 13:5-6) Third, other seeds "*fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out.*" (Matthew 13:7) And fourth, thankfully for the farmer, "*But others*

fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times as much." (Matthew 13:8)

Jesus' listeners were not able not comprehend the symbolism and meaning of the story. So, unlike most other parables He told, Jesus took the time to explain the metaphorical meanings of each element in this tale.

18 "Listen then to the parable of the sower. 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one sown with seed beside the road. 20 The one sown with seed on the rocky places, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution occurs because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 And the one sown with seed among the thorns, this is the one who hears the word, and the anxiety of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 23 But the one sown with seed on the good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces, some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times as much." (Matthew 13:18-23 NASB)

So it is clear Jesus was not just giving a lesson in agriculture. The story was intended to illustrate a spiritual principle. Since His audience apparently did not get it, Jesus explained its meaning and application to them. In this installment we will look at how Jesus interpreted His own parable, and see how we can

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discern some principles of worldview ministry and witnessing in His explanations.

SOIL 1 - Useless Soil - (From Matthew 13:4)

19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one sown with seed beside the road. (Matthew 13:19 NASB)

The first element of the story we have to identify is the seeds. In Luke's Gospel's version of the story, Jesus clearly indicates that "The seed is the word of God." (Luke 8:11 NASB) In Matthew Jesus is not so direct in His identification, but it is certainly implied in verse 19. Jesus says the useless soil on the side of the road is symbolic of a person who hears the "word of the kingdom" but does not understand it. Obviously the birds in the story which ate it up were meant to represent Satan, the "evil one," who snatches it away before it can even germinate in one's heart.

It is a sad truth that so many people, even those who are fortunate enough to hear the gospel thoroughly proclaimed, never really understand its meaning and application for them. There may be two reasons for that to be true from a worldview perspective. First, most people in the world simply do not have Theism as their worldview. They will have either Naturalism, Animism, or Far Eastern Thought, as their personal worldview. In those cases, when the people hear the Christian message, it may make no real sense to them since they cannot fathom the underlying worldview truth of Christianity or the Bible. If we intend to reach most people in the world, we must first know their worldviews. We can then present our message accordingly,

starting with introducing them to the theistic worldview.

The other reason many people do not respond to the gospel when they hear it is that their hearts are so hardened that the message cannot penetrate to the individual's soul. They are like those whom Jesus said, "...are told in parables, so that while seeing they may not see, and while hearing they may not understand." (Matthew 13:10) They will not and cannot listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to trust Christ. They are easy prey for Satan's spiritually blinding attacks.

SOIL 2 - Rocky and Dry Soil (From Matthew 13:5-6)

20 The one sown with seed on the rocky places, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution occurs because of the word, immediately he falls away. (Matthew 13:20-21)

In this instance the Word of God (the Gospel) is like the seeds that fell on the rocky places where they barely germinated but soon were "scorched" by the sun; "and because they had no root, they withered away." (Matthew 13:5-6)

Jesus identifies this soil as being like someone who hears the gospel and even "receives it with joy." However, the message never really takes root in his heart, but is only superficial and for outward appearance. So when "affliction or persecution" (and we could add peer pressure, ethical choices, troubled times, etc.) comes, he quickly loses heart and abandons his faith (which he never really possessed). From a worldview perspective, we might say this person has a theistic worldview, and may even have some understanding of the Christian belief system. Yet, he is not able to commit himself to the full implications of what it means to follow Jesus as Lord. He

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simply has no real roots or depth to his understanding.

A recent survey by George Barna indicated that "Nearly three out of every five young Christians (59%) disconnect from church life after age 15." One of the main reasons is probably that their experience of Christianity is shallow. They know the basic concepts of Theism and probably believe in God, yet it never goes deeper than that.

Consequently, we need to better educate our Christian youth, not just about what we believe, but why we believe it! Worldview training would be good place to start. Also, we must better model the Christian life for them to see its reality in our lives.

SOIL 3 - Thorns and Weeds (from Matthew 13: 7)

And the one sown with seed among the thorns, this is the one who hears the word, and the anxiety of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. (Matthew 13:22)

Next Jesus interprets the meaning of the soil corrupted by thorns. This soil represents a person who hears the gospel but "anxiety of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke" it out. It too produces no good fruit. And what good is planting a crop if it produces no harvest? (Maybe you can make it into a corn maze like many farmers do in Georgia in the Fall.)

Jesus' point is that many people are amenable to hearing the gospel, and may even embrace it to a certain extent. However, as He says, "the anxiety of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful." In other words, these people cannot get past their worldly cares and ambitions to become authentic disciples of Christ. So, as in the other examples, the

seed of the word does not bear fruit, rendering it useless for God's Kingdom.

From a worldview perspective we see these people as being like those who have perhaps grown up in a theistic and culturally Christian environment. They may have attended church and even made a profession of faith or been confirmed. However, as they get into their teens and early twenties, they get caught up in the activities and cares of life and business. Barna's survey also found many young adults stating that "Christianity is not relevant to my career." We do not need, in most of these cases, to introduce them to Theism, they already believe it. What is needed is for them to grasp the full relevance of Christian discipleship in their careers.

But we must not be in despair, for there is one other productive kind of soil.

SOIL 4 - Good Soil (From Matthew 13: 8)

But the one sown with seed on the good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces, some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times as much." (Matthew 13:23 NASB)

This is the best-case scenario for Christian evangelism. These people are represented in Jesus' parable by the good and rich soil that germinates, takes root, sprouts and grows, and then ultimately produces a vast harvest of edible fruit. They hear the gospel. They are grounded in the theistic worldview, clearly comprehend the content of the gospel message, and readily receive it. They then become faithful followers of Jesus.

So then, we know that fruitful Christians study the Bible, pray, attend

and are active in church, etc. And, like all good fruit, they tend to reproduce more of their kind. Thus, fruitful believers are conscious of their witness for Christ in word and deed, and actively lead others to faith in Christ.

If Jesus' parabolic "Johnny Appleseed" came to your house what would he find? Could he sow seeds into a good soil and produce good fruit? More importantly, what if Jesus Himself walked in? What would He find? The big question that His Parable of the Seeds poses to all of us is, "What kind of soil am I?" Do we produce the fruit of the Spirit that Paul talks about?

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23 NASB)

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