18 The Parable Of The Sower

What The Parable Of The Sower Confirms About Faith

Introduction

The Greek verb *pisteuo* is typically translated in Luke 8:13 in the Parable of the Sower as “believes.” It is the same word as used in John 3:16 which is likewise translated typically as *believes*. Assuming this is a correct translation, this makes Luke 8:13 one of two passages in the Synoptic Gospels that talks about faith and salvation. (The other is Luke 7:47.)

However, the Parable discusses *believing* in a negative manner. The Parable of the Sower teaches that the failure of one who “believes for a while” to obey God’s commands (“falls into temptation”) leads to becoming lost. Thus, faith that later fails in action does not save. In fact, the only person saved among the seeds is the fourth seed who produces fruit to completion. Thus, in this parable Jesus addresses faith and works in a way totally at odds with the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace.

Please note this is not a parable that proponents of cheap grace can avoid by claiming its meaning remains a mystery. Jesus explained the parable’s symbolic meaning in excruciating detail.

Let’s analyze with care the Parable of the Sower.

1. It can mean also trust, commit, comply or obey. For the purposes of this chapter, we will assume the Greek verb *pisteuo* here means to believe in the Parable of the Sower.
Analysis Of The Parable Of The Sower

The first seed never believes because Satan snatches the word from his heart before he can believe “and be saved.” (Luke 8:12.) Unlike the first seed, the second seed (i.e., the seed on rocky soil) (Luke 8:6) “sprouted.” Jesus explains this means the second seed “received the word with joy” and “believes for a while.” (Luke 8:13.)

In Luke 8:13, the Greek tense translated typically as “believes” is the present indicative active of pisteuo. This tense means Jesus is saying the seed on rocky ground “keeps on believing.” Jesus then adds an adverb meaning “for a while.” In this context, the present indicative is indistinguishable in meaning from the present participle active of pisteuo which is used uniformly in John’s Gospel.3 They are both a continuous tense.

Logically, if the first seed would have been “saved” had Satan not prevented faith from forming, this second seed must be “saved.” Thus, Jesus is saying the second seed is “saved” (at least) for a while because it believed for a while yet the first seed is never saved because it never believed.

Jesus goes on to say the second seed then “withered away” (i.e., shriveled up). (Luke 8:6). Jesus explains this means it fell into “temptation” (sinned) and “fell away.” (Luke 8:13, aphistami.) Why did it fall away? It shriveled up “because it lacked moisture.” (Luke 8:6.) The Greek of this verb was present active as well, meaning “it did not continue to have moisture.” Jesus explains again why, saying the seed

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3. On the present continuous tenses in Greek, see page 538 et seq. See also Appendix A: Greek Issues in Jesus’ Words Only (2007). For discussion in particular on pisteuo in Luke 8:13 and John’s Gospel, see my prior book, Jesus’ Words Only (2007) at 171.
“did not have root.” (Luke 8:13.) The verb, however, is again present active in Greek (εκουσίν) and means “it did not keep holding on to the Root.”

Thus, Jesus teaches that someone who received the word with Joy, “continued to believe for a while,” thereby “sprouted,” and then fell into temptation. This person ends up withered away (dead). Dead means no life. No life means no eternal life. The reason is they “did not keep holding to the Root” and so they “fell away.” This was a lesson about faith lacking endurance and being destroyed by sin. Thus, it is a negative message about faith. It is not an example of faith saving, but how faith can be brought to naught by sin.

One of the greatest preachers, John Donne (1572-1631), said this parable contains a great warning to Christians. This is because the second seed represents believers:

Yet we may relapse into former sins, or fall into new, and come to savour only of the earth...We may have received the good seed, and endured for a while, as St. Matthew expresses Christ’s words; Received it and believed it for a while, as St. Luke expresses them, and then depart from the goodness which God's grace had formerly wrought in us, and from the grace of God itself.

4. In 1610, Donne publicly renounced Roman Catholicism, and wrote anti-Catholic pamphlets. He was an attorney who was drafted by King James, as it were, into being an Anglican minister in 1615.
Donne is saying this parable teaches a Christian believer who “departs from the goodness” wrought in him or her by God has departed “from the grace of God itself.” Disobedience disqualifies believers from grace.

Thus, the second seed’s source problem is not lack of faith. Its problem was having the wrong expectations of what it costs to follow Christ. As Lisco in *The Parables of Jesus* (1850) explains, the second seed represents those who “seek and expect from Christ an easy life,...[and] will make no sacrifice for it.” *Id.*, at 62.

What would have prevented the fall? Jesus said ‘keep holding on to the Root.’ When you let go, you are opposite of the saints who “keep the commandments of God, and the faithfulness (pistis) of Jesus.” (Rev. 14:12.) (For discussion of pistis’ meaning in that phrase, see page 490.)

**Parallel To Revelation 2:4-5**

There is no missing this point if you see the precise parallel to Revelation 2:4-5. There Jesus tells the Ephesians they have “left your first love,” and “art fallen,” so “repent” and do your “first works.”

The second seed in the Parable of the Sower likewise had “joy” in the word at first, like the Ephesians had “love at first.” The second seed “sprouted” and thus had “first works,” just like the Ephesians. The second seed then sinned and “fell away,” just as the Ephesians “art fallen.” The solution, as always, is “repent,” as Jesus told the Ephesians in Revelation 2:4-5 and do your “first works.”

**Third Seed Illuminates Traits Of The Saved Fourth Seed**

Now who is the only saved person in the Parable of the Sower? It is the fourth seed, which is the only one who brings forth fruit or...dare I use the synonym...works.

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The fourth seed is received by the good and noble heart that hears the word. To understand the fourth seed, we must see the contrast to the third seed. The KJV says the third seed “brings no fruit to perfection.” (Luke 8:14, KJV.) However, the translation is lacking.

Rather, the third seed is choked by thorns (i.e., the worries of this world) and so does not telesphorousin. This Greek word combines teles, which means end, with phore, which means to produce, bring forth. Together, the two words literally mean “to complete” or “bring to a finish.” Telesphore is often used with regard to fruit, pregnant women or animals. (Robertson’s Word Pictures.) Telesphorousin is the present active form in Greek. So it means “did not keep on producing to the end” or “did not continue to the finish.” **Completion, not perfection, is in view.** They did not telesphorousin, i.e., they did not keep on producing to completion. They were choked off.

This is likewise reminiscent of the Sardisians whom Jesus tells in Revelation 3:2 that their works are “not complete,” i.e., incomplete.6 NASB,GWT,ALT,Darby. (Cfr. KJV “works not perfect”). Failure to complete your works leads to a loss of salvation.7 As Jesus tells the parable, Jesus really means the works of the third seed did not reach “completion,” but were instead cut off by thorns that stopped their growth, just as Jesus was saying about the Sardisians’ works.

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6. Pleroo (from the Greek word pleres) means “to complete” or “make full,” “to carry through to the end,” “to make complete in every particular, to render perfect etc.” (Thayer’s).

7. I suspect the KJV intends to set the bar as high as perfection for doctrinal reasons. This translation would suggest we have an impossible burden, which the KJV hopes to imply means we can only be 100% perfect if we had the imputed righteousness of Christ to begin with. Yet, the verb is not directly about perfection. This reads far too much into the verb. It is emphasizing the human failing of not completing the works given to them.
Knowing the flaws of the third seed opens our understanding of the fourth seed’s reason for being saved. The fourth seed, by contrast, “fell into good ground, and grew, and brought forth fruit a hundredfold.” (Luke 8:8.) Listen to Jesus’ explanation of why this person alone among the four is ultimately saved:

And that in the good ground, these are such as in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it fast, and bring forth fruit with patience. (Luke 8:15 ASV).

The Greek verb for “hold it fast” is in the Greek present active again. It means “keep on holding down.” It is not hold “fast,” but hold “down.” (Robertson’s Word Pictures.) This is a significant point. As Jesus tells the parable, the devil swooped down and stole the word from the first sewn seed, depriving it of salvation. By continuing to hold down the word, the fourth seed is guarding itself. It is doing everything possible to keep Satan from snatching the word away. It is the same meaning behind John 8:51. He who has “kept guard” (tereo) over Jesus’ word “should never [ever] taste death.” (John 8:51, ASV.) Finally, what does it mean that the only saved person in this parable “brings forth fruit with patience.” (Luke 8:15, ASV)? Salvation depends on completing works to the end.

Luke 8:15 really means: “who keep carrying on producing fruit with endurance.” The Greek verb this time is karpos (carrying) combined with phore (produce, bear) in the Greek present indicative. So it has a continuous meaning. This is followed by hupomeno in Greek. In most translations of this verse, hupomeno is rendered as patience. However, almost everywhere else hupomeno appears in the NT it is translated as endurance, which is the more likely intended meaning of Jesus. The combination of karpos and phore implies fruit-bearing by definition. This parallels Luke 8:8 which mentions “fruit a hundredfold.” Thus, literally, Jesus is saying the saved seed “keeps carrying on producing fruit with
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endurance.” This is in sharp contrast with the third seed which was lost because it did not “continue to the finish” or “produce to completion.” (Luke 8:14.)

So let’s build a diagram of the saved person in the Parable of the Sower.

**TABLE 2. Parable Of The Sower: Fourth Seed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fourth Seed (The Saved)</th>
<th>Jesus’ Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>good ground</td>
<td>noble and good heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seed sewn</td>
<td>heard the word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grew</td>
<td>kept holding the word down (protecting it)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>keeps on producing fruit a hundredfold</td>
<td>keeps on carrying on producing fruit with endurance. Cfr. third seed fails to produce to the finish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here is Jesus’ salvation formula in a nutshell. Producing fruit is never optional. Fruitlessness and being choked are pictures of the lost, even including those who “kept on believing for a while” and who “received” the word with joy at first. In fact, Jesus’ point is even more adamant than just that: Jesus is saying partial fruitfulness is not enough. Jesus portends gloom for the one who has growth and then is choked off by thorns. Your initial good works are forgotten if you do not finish and complete well. Instead, you must endure to the end to be saved. This is an echo of Matthew 10:22 once more. It is reminiscent of Ezekiel 33:12. Salvation by faith alone is clearly refuted. Salvation by works alone is not approved either. However, salvation by endurance in good works to the end is crucial besides faith. So says the Lord Jesus Christ.

Its use as a key to unlock all the parables flows from Jesus asking: “how will you know all the other parables if you do not understand this one?” (Mk 4:13.) Thus, to hold onto the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace, this parable, more than others, must be obscured. Yet, it is a parable one cannot claim is hard to understand. Jesus already explained it!
Luther Could Not Come Up With A Gloss
To Solve The Parable Of The Sower

No one has ever properly explained how Jesus’ Parable of the Sower can even remotely line up consistent with the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. Luther’s effort is so untenable that it proves how absolutely impossible it is to reconcile the two. Luther must have realized Jesus contradicts the Modern Gospel. Thus, he injects the Modern Gospel’s doctrine of faith, not works, into what saves the second seed. Luther then ignores how this mismatches the rest of what the parable means.

Luther begins his commentary properly. The first type who has their seed snatched are those who “hear the word” but do not understand it. (Sermons of Martin Luther, Vol. II, at 114.) These “never believe” and never become saved. (Id., at 115.)

Luther then says the second seed knows the correct doctrine of salvation, i.e., “they know the real truth” that they are saved by “faith without works” (the Cheap Grace Gospel). However, “they do not persevere.” He adds: “when it comes to the test that they must suffer harm, disgrace and loss of life or property, then they fall and deny it....in times of persecution they deny or keep silence about the Word.”

Luther in essence is saying that they lose their salvation because under pressure they deny this truth that salvation is by faith alone. This is a bizarre self-contradiction. If you can lose your salvation by losing faith in the principle of faith alone, then faith alone does not save you. You must endure or persevere in the doctrine of faith alone or be lost. This is a self-contradiction, because then faith alone did not save you. Faith and perseverance in faith alone saves you. These two

ideas are self-contradictory: if you must persist in faith to be saved, then *persistence*, not the faith alone, is necessary for salvation. Hence, Luther’s solution is nonsensical. (Anyone who has read eternal security arguments know that they reject Luther’s argument precisely because salvation then depends on more than a one-time faith. Luther is actually contradicting the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace to save it from the Parable of the Sower.)

Luther’s comments on the third group are enlightening as well. This group of seeds “always possess the absolutely pure Word....” (*Id.*, at 116.) Their fault is “they do not *earnestly* give themselves to the Word, but become *indifferent* and sink in the cares, riches and pleasures of this life....” (*Id.*, at 117.) They are thus apparently initially saved. Luther says “these have all in the Word that is needed for their salvation, but they do not make any use of it, and they rot in this life in carnal pleasures.” Luther seems to understand Jesus is saying their problem is sin, not lack of proper faith. Luther says that despite the proper knowledge of the Gospel, “they do not bring under subjection their flesh.” (*Id.*)

This leads Luther to the correct conclusion why the fourth seed is saved. Luther says they “bring forth fruit with patience, those who hear the Word and *steadfastly retain it*, meditate upon it and *act in harmony with it*.” This leads to as true a statement as you will ever hear by Luther:

> Here we see why it is no wonder there are so few true Christians, for all the seed does not fall into good ground, but only the fourth and small part; and that they are *not to be trusted who boast they are Christians* and praise the teaching of the Gospel. *Id.* at 118.

Luther realizes that salvation depends in the Parable, as Jesus depicts it, on *YOU!* It depends on the earnestness of your *response* and *productivity!*
This is the end of Luther’s substantive commentary. What did he do? He explained Jesus’ parable correctly. Yet, he pretended it was consistent with the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace by injecting it into what saved the second and third seeds initially. Luther did so without acknowledging it was self-contradictory nonsense. How can a seed that is saved by faith alone have to persevere and not succumb to sin? How can it lose salvation by being overcome by the thorns (pleasures) of this life? Nor did Luther try to ever explain away why the saved fourth seed alone had completed works.

Luther’s response is a perfect example of how people retain the cheap grace gospel even when it contradicts Jesus. Luther is conceding certain unavoidable aspects of this parable are at direct odds with cheap grace. Yet by injecting the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace into the middle of the discussion, Luther makes it appear that Jesus’ words are compatible with it. In this manner, Luther has somehow rationalized away that a conflict exists.

It is as Isaiah prophesied: “the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.” (Isaiah 29:14.)

How Presuppositional Logic Blinded Luther

A worthwhile side-note is to point out that Luther’s presupposition which imposed faith alone on the Parable of the Sower is not unique. It is how Luther erred repeatedly in construing other passages. It is a presupposition Luther allowed to permeate all his interpretations of the parables. Warren Kissinger noted this defect in his The Parables of Jesus: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography (Metuchen, N.J.: American Theological Library Association, 1979) at 47:

The central category of his [Luther’s] hermeneutic is... sola fide, and this is reflected in his interpretation of the parables. It often appears strained and as a presupposition superimposed upon a given parable. Here perhaps
Luther does some “spiritual juggery” of his own, and reflects... a methodology which he found so distasteful in the allegorizers [of parables].

Thus, Luther had a penchant of twisting Jesus’ parables so that they fit the presupposition of faith alone. The parable texts did not support Luther’s favored conclusion. The parables, in fact, stood for the opposite. However, to prevent the casual Sunday Christian from learning the parables were all at odds with faith alone, Luther incessantly injected faith alone into how to read each parable. He read each one to conform to his presupposition that faith alone was true.

Luther’s decision to do this has had major repercussions on Christian history, and created a tantalizing yet deficient path of salvation for millions of souls.

If Luther had not distorted the parables’ meanings, then Jesus’ parables would have refuted faith alone doctrine long ago in everyone’s analysis. Rather than accept Jesus’ correction, Luther was constantly redacting Jesus’ Gospel to fit Luther’s youthful endorsement of the Fable of Cheap Grace.

Thankfully Luther gave up this fable when he was more mature. (As an older man, Luther endorsed the costly grace gospel as what Jesus truly taught. See the Shorter Catechism and Longer Catechism of 1531 and the Antinomian Theses. At most he gave lip service to his youthful doctrines. The Mature Luther reformulated salvation-doctrine to be one of costly grace yet without bluntly declaring his change to anyone.)

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In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus says the seed in good ground sometimes produces different yields. Jesus says “others fell upon the good ground, and were giving fruit, some indeed a hundredfold, and some sixty, and some thirty.” (Matt. 13:8, ASV.)

This precisely parallels Jesus’ Parable of the Unprofitable Servant. (Matt. 25:14-30.) In that parable, one servant is unprofitable, and produces nothing. Jesus says this one must be thrown outside where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The two servants with five and ten talents produced respectively are, by contrast, welcomed in the kingdom.

There are two striking parallels. The unprofitable servant is similar to the second seed in the Sower Parable who “believes for a while” (Luke 8:13) but sins and hence withers (dies) (Luke 8:6), never bearing any fruit. Likewise, the profitable servants produce varying multiples of talents, which clearly parallels the fourth seed in the good ground that produces varying amounts of return.

This tells us Jesus is underscoring a distinction on who is saved and unsaved in the Parable of the Sower, just as Jesus clearly did in the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant. For in the latter, the servant of His Lord who takes the treasure given him but who produces nothing is then sent to a place “outside” of weeping and gnashing. Jesus elsewhere says this place is the “fiery furnace” where there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. 13:42.) Of course, there is no weeping in heaven (Isaiah 25:8; Rev. 7:17, 21:4), and thus we know Jesus’ imagery is meant to signify damnation for the servant of His who is unprofitable.

This means in the parallel Parable of the Sower that the second seed who sprouts initially but produces no fruit or this third seed which is choked off and produces nothing is meant to symbolize the same thing as the unprofitable servant. Therefore, we know that Jesus intends us to view the seed that produces no fruit and withers (dies) to be spiritually
dead even though at first “he believes for a while.” (Luke 8:13). He is as damned as the unprofitable servant in the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant.

Hence, when combined, these two parables are clear. Jesus teaches a one-time believer who sins and produce no fruit, and consequently withers and dies (Luke 8:6, 13) is an unprofitable servant who goes to the place “outside” where there is “weeping and gnashing.” Jesus specifically says this place is the “fiery furnace.” (Matt. 13:42)

Commentaries On The Parable Of The Sower Without Presuppositions

In Counting the Cost, subtitled The Cost of Bearing Fruit With Perseverance, Mark Dunagan, of Beaverton Church of Christ, correctly explains the Parable of the Sower in Luke 8:11-15. He says:

Being a faithful Christian is not an easy or effortless task for anyone, including the “good” heart. This person has to hold on to the gospel, and bear fruit with “perseverance.” It is going to take work and effort to live the Christian life.10

Amen!

Clarke’s Surprisingly Frank Commentary
On The Parable Of The Sower

Adam Clarke, the famous commentator, typically does everything he can to twist passages to fit cheap grace. However, in reading the Parable of the Sower, he brings no such presuppositions.

Clarke correctly sees the target of this parable is the one in the crowd who fails to bring forth personal fruit:

Under the parable of the sower, our Lord intimates, That of all the multitudes then attending his ministry, few would bring forth fruit to perfection. (Comm, Matt. 13:3.)

Clarke also correctly understands the problem with the first two seeds is the deficiency of soil when one hears Jesus’ Gospel. There is the impervious ground “by the way side.” There is no room in the soil for the seed to enter. Then there is the stony ground in which the second seed landed. The stony ground only has a thin surface of the earth to grow in. (Comm., Matt. 13:4-6.)

Then Clarke says the difficulty with the third seed is different. It is not the soil itself. Rather, it is the surroundings in which the seed is sown. This earth has been “ploughed up,” and thus was fertile and accessible for growth. However, this seed was sown where there were already “brambles and weeds” which unfortunately “had not been cleared away.” (Comm., Matt. 13:7.)

Then Clarke correctly sees the difference for the fourth seed. It is prepared to hear the gospel:

Good ground — Where the earth was deep, the field well ploughed, and the brambles and weeds all removed. (Comm., Matt. 13:8.)

Let’s stop there. The Modern Gospel teaches it makes no difference how you prepare the soil of your heart prior to hearing the gospel. Nor is it supposedly important after you
hear the gospel to clear away the cares and worries of this world as a precondition to not later being choked off, and hence bearing no fruit. According to the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace, your saved-relationship can never turn on either preparing your heart to listen nor improving your chance of being fruitful once you are saved. Thus, notice how Clarke is forced to admit Jesus teaches contrary to the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace by the force of Jesus’ words.

Cornelius Exemplifies Perfectly The Fourth Seed


In fact, Cornelius’ story proves it is foolish to believe that pursuing God earnestly does not matter to prepare yourself to find the true Gospel. In Cornelius’ case, God sent a message to a man who did not know Christ. God’s message was that the man’s acts of generosity to the poor had been a fragrant odor to the Lord. God now wanted Cornelius to hear the gospel from Peter. Cornelius was the good soil. Yet, Cornelius was still unsaved and without the Holy Spirit when he did this generosity and when the Lord brought Peter to Cornelius. (Acts 10:1 ff.)

Finishing Up Discussion On Clarke

Clarke has admitted all of Jesus’ points about the importance of preparing the soil and our productivity upon hearing the word. Clarke is very close to exposing the falsity of the Gospel of Cheap Grace. It claims the receptivity of our soil makes no difference. All that matters supposedly is the sovereign electing force of God. Clarke gets ever so near to exposing the impact of Jesus’ mention of the four soils as playing a key role in final salvation. Yet, Clarke does not fol-
low-through. Predictably, when the Gospel of Cheap Grace is vanquished in Luke 8:13 — when Jesus says the second seed “believed for a while” but due to sin ends up lost (Luke 8:13) — Clarke is stone silent. He makes no comment.

Salvation Message Of Revelation Is Straight From The Parable Of The Sower

As we touched on earlier, we can confirm our interpretation of the Parable of the Sower from Jesus’ words in Revelation. Jesus once more states His core salvation theology in Revelation. Jesus does this by reproving or commending each church by the criteria that Jesus used in the Parable of the Sower. This is done ever so subtly. Thus, many commentators miss this.

There are some who left their first love. (Rev. 2:4). They correspond to the second seed that starts with joy. This seed “believes for a while” but in time of temptation falls away. (Luke 8:13.) In Revelation, these do not “produce to completion” because of incomplete works. (Rev. 3:2.)

Then there are believers at another church who are neither hot nor cold but lukewarm. Jesus explains why: “Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing.” (Rev. 3:17.) These correspond to the third seed which was choked not only by the cares of this world, but also by “riches and pleasures” of this life. Thus, they did not produce to the end. (Luke 8:14.)

Yet, there is one church and one seed that is viewed as on the right path. This is the church of Philadelphia which compares to the fourth seed in the Parable of the Sower. The church at Philadelphia is told “I know thy works,” and as a result a door is in front of them that no one can shut. (Rev. 3:8.) This church has very little “power” left, but “did keep

“So because thou art lukewarm, I will spew thee out of my mouth.”

Rev. 3:16
my word, and did not deny my name.” (Rev. 3:8.) This corresponds to the fourth seed which “in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it fast, and bring forth fruit with patience.” (Luke 8:15.) There is an unmistakable parallelism between “keep my word” (Rev. 3:8) and “hold it fast” (Luke 8:15) as well as “thy works” (Rev. 3:8) and “bring forth fruit....” (Luke 8:15).

Thus, Jesus has made re-appear in the Book of Revelation all the criteria for assessing the saved seed versus these lost seeds from his Parable of the Sower. Why?

Precisely because there is no more difficult passage for Cheap Grace doctrine to explain in the Synoptic Gospels than the Parable of the Sower. Jesus in the Book of Revelation written near 90 A.D. invokes the Sower Parable obviously to rebuff the message Jesus heard in the church pre-90 A.D. that faith alone saves, and works matter not at all. In the Sower Parable, those whose faith died, who fell in times of temptation, or whose works were incomplete were lost. Only the one who produces fruit to the end with endurance was saved in the Parable of the Sower.

Conclusion

The Parable of the Sower is an amazing nugget of Jesus’ doctrine. For here is the whole true gospel of salvation from Jesus’ lips. It is all contained in a very unassuming Parable of the Sower. Jesus tells you how to be saved and what is necessary to complete your salvation. Jesus tells you also how to be lost even after you have faith and accepted His word with joy and experience initial growth (“sprouted”).

The key starting point is to realize Jesus tells you that the outcome turns crucially on the preparation of the soil of your heart to hear Jesus’ Word. Jesus taught in this parable that you must brace yourself to accept the Word’s requirements. You will face trials of temptation. Others who are not constantly deliberating on Jesus’ words or who are not
focused on them will fail. The second seed was foolish, not counting the costs. It quickly “believed,” but just as quickly fell into temptation. The third seed began well, but let the world’s demands crowd out those of the Lord. Only the fourth persisted in producing fruit with patient endurance, and was saved.

Marcus Dods, D.D., in his *The Parables of Our Lord* (Edinburgh: Macniven and Wallace, 1883) at 10-20 aptly explained this parable. The second seed had a “shallow” conception of the costs of the kingdom. The second seed thought he did not have to stay *rooted* to the Words of Jesus — he wondered off to other teachers than Jesus, and thus did not “keep holding to the Root (Jesus).” The third seed went a little further. It had zeal for the word of Jesus. Yet, the third seed’s zeal was soon crowded out by the cares and interests of this world. The third seed heard the word, accepted it, but thereafter did not keep the pathway to growth clean by making sure “the field [was left] to itself.”

Thus, as to the first three seeds, even those who believed for a while, Dods says there was a “failure of the gospel.” Jesus said the reason had nothing to do with the Word itself. It turned instead upon the varying quality of the soils *before the Word was sown*. It turned upon man’s hearts prior to receipt of Jesus’ doctrine. It turns on three things: stubbornness (first seed), moral weakness (the second seed) and lack of maintaining one’s clear focus (the third seed). Dods calls these “three faults” by the names “impenetrability, shallowness and dirt.”

Interestingly, if you understand the Word as all the Parables and teachings of Jesus, then the first seed is actually comparable to a *belief alone* zealot. Such a person is so utterly *stubborn* that every parable and direct statement by Jesus on salvation is *twisted* to come out contrary to its literal meaning. The belief alone advocate *never* believes the Word of Jesus as He delivered it. Their hearts are *hardened* by the presupposition of faith alone. We saw here they clearly used this presupposition to reject the plain sense of the Parable of
the Sower. Consequently, they never believe in the right sense in the Word, less they “be saved.” Satan then comes and snatches the little bit of knowledge they have of Jesus’ doctrines. Jesus’ words, as a result, never truly penetrate the faith-alone zealot. In this limited state, the faith-alone “believer” has no more saving knowledge than demons have. And James correctly said mere true beliefs about God would not save any demon. Likewise, similar sincere beliefs by those convinced in faith-alone cannot save them either, without more.

Then what is the right approach of the fourth seed which Jesus is holding up for us to imitate? Dods goes on, and says the “good and noble” heart “had deeper character,” and “receives the word with deliberation, as one who has many things to take into account and weigh.” (That is, the fourth seed properly considered the costs involved.) Dods adds: “He receives it with seriousness and reverence and trembling, foreseeing the trials he will subjected to, and he cannot show a light minded joy.” Then, despite these costs, the Word of Jesus is “held fast” by the fourth seed. As Dods closes the point, the “fruitful hearer” realizes Jesus means he “must keep the word.”

Jesus’ point is obviously that we must imitate the fourth seed. This is the seed which Jesus says holds the word down. It protects Jesus’ Words as that of its “Sole Teacher.” (Matt. 23:8.) If we likewise mirror this focus on Jesus’ words alone, we are holding to the Root — the doctrines of Jesus Christ — which the second seed failed to do.

Accordingly, the Parable of the Sower puts an end to the idea of salvation by a one-time faith alone. It puts an end to the idea that producing fruit is not essential. It shows the folly of thinking you can get to heaven having believed and withered, or having grown significantly and then having been choked, never bringing your works to completion.

Thus, Jesus in this parable shows the error of the Modern Gospel’s starkly different doctrines. If you read what is claimed by Cheap Grace adherents, it is all over once the seed is successfully sown, no matter what happens next. Faith
alone will supposedly save despite your falling into temptation, despite you failing to maintain a clear-growth area, and despite failing to endure in bearing fruit.

It should then not surprise us to find out this faith alone doctrine arose by ignoring Jesus’ teachings. To justify this minimalistic view of Jesus’ Gospel, the Cheap Grace Gospel pays almost exclusive attention to the doctrines of a disciple (Paul) rather than to the Master. This focus on other teachers than Jesus is directly contrary to what Jesus taught. Besides telling us he was the “Sole Teacher” (Matt. 23:8), Jesus taught the proper attitude toward apostles:

I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the Apostolos (messenger) more important than the One who sends the messenger. (John 13:16 NLT with Greek Apostolos revealed.)

As Kierkegaard pointed out in 1855 in his work My Task: “it is of great importance, especially in Protestantism, to straighten out...[the] inverting [of] the relationship, and in effect criticizing Christ by Paul, the Master by the disciple.”

Which leads us to the quandry posed by the famous philosopher Jeremy Bentham in his work Not Paul But Jesus (London: 1823) at xvi: “it rests with every professor of the religion of Jesus, to settle within himself, to which of the two religions, that of Jesus or that of Paul, he will adhere, and, accordingly, either to say, Not Jesus but Paul,—or, in the words of the title to this work, Not Paul but Jesus.”

Thus, the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace has a different voice than our Lord Jesus. It abandoned Him as “Sole Teacher.” (Matt. 23:8.) Its themes are alien to Jesus’s message of salvation. Its doctrine undercuts, if not destroys, the message of Jesus. The sheep of Jesus recognize His voice, and will not follow another. (John 10:27-29.) Who are you following? Or have you elected instead as your savior and teacher Not Jesus but Paul? If that is the case, I urge you as Bentham did almost two hundred years ago to take the opposite road: Not Paul But Jesus. Your eternal life depends on it.