

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Choking God Out of Our Lives.*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse and we find ourselves at **Luke 8:7**. We're halfway through Jesus' Parable of the Sower, or Parable of the Soils. I prefer, "*Parable of the Soils*" b/c it identifies the focus of the parable: our hearts. Our hearts – and not the Sower Himself – is the focus of the parable.

We've discussed two of the soils and we'll discuss the third this morning. Let me briefly explain the verses so you can understand why we're looking at them out of order:

- In verses 5 through 8 Jesus teaches the Parable of the Sower.
- In verses 9 and 10 Jesus explains why He started teaching in parables.
- In verses 11 through 15 Jesus explains the Parable of the Sower.

What I've decided to do is look at the soil in verses 5 through 8, and then look at the explanation of that soil in verses 11 through 15.

Something else I've tried to do is point out that each soil represents a different group of people. I left two lessons on your bulletins from the previous sermon. Let's briefly look at them to review the first two groups...

LESSON 1: THE SEED ON THE PATH PICTURES HARD HEARTS.

The first soil represents those hostile to the Word of God:

- They are stubborn and rebellious.
- They don't respond positively to the Word in any way.

As a result, the seed doesn't enter the soil – or penetrate their hearts – at all.

- These people don't look like followers of Christ.
- This pictures the religious leaders in Jesus' day, and in our day this would be people hostile to Christianity.

The second soil...

LESSON 2: THE SEED ON ROCKY GROUND PICTURES SHALLOW FAITH.

These people are the opposite of the first soil: they respond quickly and joyfully to the Word of God:

- They look like they can't get enough of church and sermons.
- But their faith is shallow, so when trials or persecution comes, their faith disappears.

And now we can look at the third soil...

⁷ **And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it.**

Although it says **thorns**, most commentators think these are **weeds**. After the ground is plowed, some weeds remain in the soil. When the seeds are planted, the weeds grow up and compete w/ the plants and **choke [them out]**.

Now make sure you notice the similarities between the second and third soils:

- The seed enters both soils.
- The seed produces a plant – or crop – w/ both soils.

So the second and third soils both look like believers for some period of time.

But then the plants died showing these people made superficial commitments:

- They were never truly converted.
- And then the weeds choked out any superficial faith they had.

Now look at **verse 14** to see the explanation...

¹⁴ Now the ones *that* fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

The word **choked** is used in **verses 7 and 14**, b/c it's the key to understanding the problem w/ this soil.

And this brings us to Lesson 3...

LESSON 3: THE SEED AMONG THORNS PICTURES PEOPLE WHO CHOKE GOD OUT OF THEIR LIVES...

The people w/ the third soil perish just like the people w/ the second soil. It happens for different reasons, but the result is the same:

- They hear the WORD, but as life goes on weeds compete for the space that belongs to God.
- Picture the weeds as parasites destroying these people's faith.

Verse 7 says the weeds choked the plant, and **verse 14** tells us what the weeds are specifically: **cares, riches, and pleasures of life**. So the idea is:

- These people never made a clean break from these areas of their lives.
- They never truly repented and removed these weeds.

Because these weeds are so dangerous – b/c they have the potential to choke God out of people's lives – we're going to look at each of them individually...

LESSON 3: THE SEED AMONG THORNS PICTURES PEOPLE WHO CHOKE GOD OUT OF THEIR LIVES (PART I) THROUGH WORRY.

As Christians we're supposed to move from worrying, to trusting God. The problem for the people w/ this soil is they never did that:

- They had concerns and anxieties that slowly overtook their hearts and left no room for God.
- Their hearts were so filled with physical, earthly issues, they had no room for spiritual, heavenly realities.

If you write in your bible you can circle the word **cares** and write “**Luke 21:34.**”

Luke 21:34 [Jesus said], “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and CARES OF THIS LIFE, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.

People can be so consumed w/ the **cares of this life** that the **Day of Judgment** – which is to say the end of their lives or the day they find themselves standing before the Lord – **comes upon [them] unexpectedly:**

- They weren’t living for the next life b/c they were so preoccupied w/ everything in this life.
- As a result, they weren’t prepared to stand before the Lord.

The NKJV says **cares**, but other translations say **worries**. I like the word **worries** more than **cares** for two reasons:

1. First, **cares** don’t have to be negative. There are plenty of things we should care about. But **[worrying]** is negative. We know we’re not supposed to worry.
2. Second, the word **worries** takes our minds to those places in Scripture that address worrying.

Let me get you to briefly look at **Luke 12:22...**

²² Then He said to His disciples, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on.

The people w/ the third soil are never able to do what Jesus says here. They can’t move past worrying about even the most basic necessities in life – food and clothing – that we’re supposed to trust God to provide.

²³ Life is more than food, and the body *is more* than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? ²⁵ And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

Jesus says even if you do worry, it doesn’t accomplish anything; it doesn’t help the situation.

Tying it back to the parable, the people w/ the third soil never really learn to trust God. He ends up being squeezed out of their lives b/c of all their worries and anxieties.

With all that said, let’s be honest for a moment...

If I said, “Raise your hand if you never worry,” who’s going to raise their hand? I’m pretty certain none of you would...and you shouldn’t! If you raised your hand, everyone would think you’re lying.

All of us worry to some extent. Although this soil characterizes an unbeliever’s heart, we can all be like this:

- Think of all the earthly, temporal issues that tug on our hearts enticing us away from the Lord.
- Think of all the cares and concerns of this life that tempt us not to trust God, thereby choking Him out.

We have to resist these temptation to worry instead of trusting God.

Consider this verse Paul wrote TO BELIEVERS, showing that this is something we all need to guard against...

2 Tim 2:4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the AFFAIRS of *this* life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

Paul is using a military analogy. Soldiers have very specific missions, and people who are consumed – or **entangled** – in all the **affairs** – or **cares** – of this life won't be able to accomplish the missions God has for them. They'll be so preoccupied w/ everything else that God takes a back seat.

So Peter tells us what to do so we can avoid having this soil...

1 Peter 5:7 Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

You might remember when Pastor Doug taught through 1 Peter and covered this verse. He gave the analogy of walking toward the ocean w/ a huge load in your arms and just throwing – or **casting** – in all your cares. You let it sink and forget about it. That's what we're supposed to do.

Now let's look at the second weed that can choke God out of people's lives: the **riches** of this life or we could say cravings for wealth. And this brings us to the next part of Lesson 3...

LESSON 3: THE SEED AMONG THORNS PICTURES PEOPLE WHO CHOKO GOD OUT OF THEIR LIVES (PART II) LOVING RICHES.

These people never truly repented of their love of money and possessions.

In **Luke 6:24** Jesus said, **“Woe to you who are rich, For you have received your consolation.”**

We're looking at one of the main reasons Jesus said this!

- For some people, they covet greater riches, and in that pursuit God gets choked out of their lives.
- Some people are more in love w/ possessions than they're in love w/ Christ.

There's a perfect picture of the people w/ this soil later in Luke's Gospel. Please turn to **Mark 10:17**...

Mark 10:17 Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”

How does this young man look?

He looks humble and genuine! He looks religious. He believed in God. He wanted to go to heaven. He was interested in spiritual matters. He had a sincere question for Jesus.

18 So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, *that is*, God.

Jesus isn't saying He isn't **good**. Instead He's saying there's only **One** who is **good** and **that's God**, so if this young man calls Him good he better also recognize He's God.

19 You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Do not defraud,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother.’”

The man asked how to **inherit eternal life**, so Jesus told him one of the two ways:

- One way is you never sin...you obey God's commandments perfectly.
- If you do this, you can go to heaven.

The problem is, none of us can do this, which is why we need the other way to be saved – which is really the only way to be saved since we can't be saved the other way: salvation by grace through faith in Christ.

Rom 3:20 says **by the law is the knowledge of sin**. In other words, the Ten Commandments reveal our sinfulness to us.

Basically, Jesus shared the Ten Commandments w/ this man to help him see his need for a Savior from his sins.

But something truly remarkable happened. After Jesus asked this man if he obeyed God's commandments perfectly, look what he said in **verse 20**...

20 And he answered and said to Him, “Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth.”

I don't know why the young man said this, but there's no way it was true.

Personally, I think this is probably one of the best examples in all of Scripture of the power of pride to blind us. I don't think the young man is lying. I think he really believed he had been this good.

Since he didn't see his sinfulness Jesus said something that He knew would help him see it...

21 Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.”

This isn't prescriptive, but it is descriptive. This isn't commanded of us. When people repent and turn to Christ, it can look different for each person, b/c we all have different things we need to remove from our lives.

Jesus knew this man's heart, and for him to repent and come to Christ, it required breaking from his riches. In other words, riches were the weed that needed to be removed so as not to choke Christ out of his life.

²² But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

²³ Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

So despite how sincere this young man was, and despite how much he wanted to go to heaven, he didn't want to go to heaven ENOUGH to part w/ his riches:

- As soon as he had to choose between God or wealth, his wealth choked God right out of his life.
- For people like this, earthly riches are more important to them than heavenly riches.

Now let's discuss the third weed...

LESSON 3: THE SEED AMONG THORNS PICTURES PEOPLE WHO CHOKE GOD OUT OF THEIR LIVES (PART III) PURSUING PLEASURE.

These people never truly repented of their love of what the world offers. They never made a clean break from the world.

And this is what James says...

Jam 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

The reason James says this is there's not enough room in our lives to be friends w/ the **world** and friends w/ God. We have to choose one or the other.

So here's what it looks like...

- These people start off well...
- They're going to church...
- They're plugged in to the body of Christ...

But at some point they return to their old ways b/c everything the world offers is so attractive to them.

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Apparently we can't love the world and be loved by God. When people love the world, they're showing they're not really children of God.

John Piper said, *"When you become so blind that the maker of galaxies and ruler of nations and knower of all mysteries and lover of our souls becomes boring, then only one thing is left—the love of the world. For the heart is always restless. It must have its treasure: if not in heaven, then on earth."*

John Piper's point is if you're not satisfied w/ God – if he's not enough for you – you're going to love something else, and it's probably going to be the world.

I want to share w/ you what I consider to be the best example of this in Scripture...

Col 4:7-15 contains Paul's final greetings to the Colossians. He mentions a bunch of wonderful servants:

- **Col 4:7 Tychicus** (pr: tich-i-kiss), **a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord...**
- **Col 4:9 Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother...**
- **Col 4:10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner...**
- **Col 4:12 Epaphras...a bondservant of Christ,**

Then in **Col 4:14** Paul says **Luke the beloved physician and DEMAS GREET YOU.**

That's a big deal when you get mentioned by the Apostle Paul himself!

A number of these men were also mentioned at the end of Paul's letter to **Philemon 1:23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,** ²⁴ **as do Mark, Aristarchus, DEMAS, Luke, my fellow laborers.**

The one man I want you to notice is Demas. Paul mentioned him in **Col 4:14** and **Philemon 1:24.**

Needless to say **Demas** demonstrated a substantial commitment to the Lord's work. Paul praised him to two different churches.

Now listen to this...

2 Timothy is the last letter Paul wrote. For that reason alone, it's fairly significant. These are the final words we have from one of the greatest men who ever lived.

In the last chapter of **2 Timothy** Paul said...

2 Tim 4:10 Demas has forsaken me, HAVING LOVED THIS PRESENT WORLD, and has departed.

Demas had been one of Paul's closest associates along w/ Luke and Epaphras:

- But he loved the pleasures of the world more than God.
- He had no room for God in his life.
- God was choked out.

The really interesting thing is it doesn't even say **Demas** abandoned Paul b/c of persecution or suffering. There's a list in **2 Cor 11** of everything Paul had been through: **beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, perils, robbed, sleepless, starving, cold.** You'd think if anyone abandoned Paul, it would be for THESE reasons! Traveling w/ Paul was difficult. It meant suffering...a lot!

But no mention of that w/ Demas. It says he **forsook Paul**, b/c he **loved this present world.**

The Greek word for **forsaken** means, "utterly abandon." John MacArthur said it has "*the idea of leaving someone in a dire situation.*" Demas left Paul when Paul really needed him.

And one thing you should notice about **Demas** – which is the same thing you notice w/ the Rich Young Ruler – is he really, really looked like a believer:

- He looked like a wonderful servant of Christ:
- It's hard to believe someone who served w/ the Apostle Paul and was spoken of so highly by him, could later turn from Christ.

But this shows just how strong the pull from the world really is.

Now let me ask you a question...

Is there application for us w/ this soil?

- Do we have to resist the world?
- Does the world pull on us like it pulled on Demas?

Definitely!

Even after we become Christians, we have to keep resisting the world. Like Lot's wife FAILED to do, we have to make sure we don't turn back to it.

Now that we've looked at the three weeds that choke God out of people's lives, I want to share something interesting w/ you that really stood out to me as I was studying this week. I found this to be challenging and convicting, and I hope it might have the same impact for you...

When we think of people who stop following God, we often think in terms of sinfulness. For example:

- We think of murderers...
- We think of thieves...
- We think of adulterers...
- We think of people addicted to drugs or porn...
- We think of cruel or abusive people...

We think of people turning from God b/c of these evil, sinful actions.

But if you look at the weeds that choke God out of people's lives, you notice they're not bad or immoral at all.

And this brings us to Lesson 4...

LESSON 4: GOD DOESN'T HAVE TO BE CHOKED OUT BY SOMETHING SINFUL.

Let's briefly consider each weed:

- **Cares** aren't bad.
 - The Greek word for cares is *merimna* (pr: merry-na). It's the same word Paul uses in **2 Cor 11:28** when he said he had a **deep concern** (or *merimna*) **for all the churches**.
 - We generally care about good things. People we love. Situations that are important to us. It would almost seem like there's something wrong if we didn't have these cares.
- **Riches** don't have to be bad. We all need some amount of wealth and possessions. They're given to us as gifts from God. We're told to pray that God gives us what we need to take care of ourselves and our families.

Regarding **pleasures of this life** my suspicion is you're probably saying, "*Well, that's gotta be evil. This is referring to sinful stuff.*"

It could be, but it doesn't have to be. Here's what I mean...

The **pleasures of life** can be divided into two categories:

- Those that are sinful or immoral in and of themselves: drunkenness, drug addiction, gambling, sexual immorality, certain forms of partying, certain movies and entertainment.
- Those that are amoral or spiritually neutral. There are plenty of activities, hobbies, and pleasurable things that are not sinful.

Now here's the question I want to ask you...

Is it only the **pleasures of life** that are sinful that choke God out of our lives? Is there potential for non-sinful activities to choke God out of our lives?

Definitely! And here's the very, very important thing to know...

- It's not the activity or hobby that's sinful or immoral.
- It's our relationship TO that activity that's sinful or immoral.

The activity is amoral, but

- When people overindulge in it...
- When it chokes God out of their lives...

Then it becomes sinful.

- It has become a snare...
- The person's relationship to the activity has moved from being amoral to immoral.

Whenever we have something in our lives and it doesn't leave room for God, we know it has become sinful.

And here is the big problem...

When God is being choked out of people's lives by these sorts of activities that are not sinful, it is particularly hard to address w/ people...and here's why...

Rare is the person who will argue that drunkenness, addiction, or gambling are okay.

But if you confront people about non-sinful activities that have become sinful b/c of their relationship to those activities, what sort of responses are you going to hear?

- *God's Word doesn't forbid that!*
- *Show me chapter and verse!*
- *You're so legalistic!*
- *You can't tell me I can't do this.*

Let me give you some practical examples of what this can look like...

- There's nothing wrong w/ automobiles, but there are some people who spend so much time and money on vehicles it's more like an obsession or addiction...
- There's nothing wrong w/ social media – it can be used for some good purposes – but when you say:
 - *I don't have time to read my Bible...*
 - *I'm too busy to be part of a home fellowship...*
 - *I just don't have the time to be more involved in my church...*
 - But you spend hours on Facebook, there's something wrong.
- There's nothing wrong w/ sports. But for some people sports choke God out of their lives. Could be sports they watch on TV or sports their kids participate in.
 - Some people spend more time watching football Sunday mornings than they spend in fellowship.
 - Some people spend more time at their kids' sporting events than they spend w/ their church families.
 - Sports take a front seat while church and the body of Christ take the back seat.
 - But if you confront these people, guess what they're going to say?
 - *You're such a Pharisee.*
 - *The Bible doesn't say we can't do this.*

So all these amoral or spiritually neutral activities or hobbies have the potential to choke God out of people's lives:

- Some people can have healthy relationships w/ these things.
- But for other people they become idols.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude w/ this...

This third soil is very intriguing to me, b/c it gets SO close to salvation. This soil reminds me of Jesus' words in **Mark 12:34** when He said, **"You are not far from the kingdom of God."**

The people w/ this soil weren't far either. They seemed very close to being saved.

But look at the end of **verse 14...**

It says they: **bring no fruit to maturity.**

If there's no fruit, there's no salvation. And it doesn't matter how close you get to salvation if you don't get saved.

The reason these people don't produce fruit is the weeds choke them out. I think there's a good lesson for us in this, and I put it on the bottom of your inserts:

"Cares, riches, and pleasures of life are three of the greatest obstacles to fruitfulness."

If you've ever wondered why some people don't produce fruit in their lives, **Luke 8:14** reveals the answer:

- They have too many weeds competing w/ God.
- They have too many weeds choking out the things God wants them to do and the things He wants to do through them.

Maybe you've seen people and they have a lot of talents or gifts from God, but they don't seem to produce much fruit:

- This is often why: **weeds choke out the fruit.**
- They have too many things competing w/ the things God wants them to do.

So what's the solution? I don't want to go through this whole sermon describing the problem w/o also describing the solution...

If this soil characterizes your life and God is being choked out, you need to repent!

What would repentance look like? It would look like making room for God by removing those weeds that compete w/ Him for the soil of your heart. Which weed can you relate to the most?

- Cares or worries?
- Riches?
- The temporary pleasures of this life?

The Lord wants to help you make room for Him. Pray and ask Him to help you remove these weeds so He isn't choked out by them!

Let's pray.