



MINISTRIES

A Ministry of the Athens Universal Life Church
Dr. Rob White – Senior Minister
<https://aulc.us>

TITLE: Losing a Little & Gaining a Lot!

SERMON IN A SENTENCE: Christ encourages us in ministry, promising an amazing harvest.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Today's scripture lesson comes from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 13, verses 1 to 9 and 18 to 23.

Starting at verse 1:

On that day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea.

Such large crowds gathered around Him that He got into a boat and sat down, while the whole crowd stood on the shore.

Then He told them many things in parables, saying: "Consider the sower who went out to sow.

As he was sowing, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and ate them up.

Others fell on rocky ground, where there wasn't much soil, and they sprang up quickly since the soil wasn't deep.

But when the sun came up they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered.

Others fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them.

Still others fell on good ground and produced a crop: some 100, some 60, and some 30 times what was sown.

Anyone who has ears should listen!”

And then we jump to verse 18:

“You, then, listen to the parable of the sower:

When anyone hears the word about the kingdom and doesn’t understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the one sown along the path.

And the one sown on rocky ground—this is one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy.

Yet he has no root in himself, but is short-lived. When pressure or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

Now the one sown among the thorns—this is one who hears the word, but the worries of this age and the seduction of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

But the one sown on the good ground—this is one who hears and understands the word, who does bear fruit and yields: some 100, some 60, some 30 times what was sown.”

-- May the Lord add His Blessing to the reading of His Word!,,,

-- Hello, I am Doctor Rob White with the A U L C Ministries with our message this week.,,,

-- I am happy that you can take a few minutes out of your busy week to be with us today!,,,

What is the most difficult part of ministry? Is it preparing sermons? Is it getting people to do the right thing? Is it managing the budget? Is it visiting sick people? Is it maintaining harmony among the people in the congregation? No, these are all significant challenges, but they are not the most difficult part of ministry. The most difficult part of ministry is staying motivated when nothing seems to be happening.

Some years ago, *The Wall Street Journal* carried an article about The Reverend Philip A.C. Clarke of the Park Avenue Methodist Church in New York City. Phil had retired after 43 years in the same congregation. He went there straight out of seminary and stayed there 43 years. Can you imagine that! Uncommon anywhere! Unheard of in the Methodist Church!

But that's not the story. There really is a connection with this text. Over the years, this man’s story was pieced together the story of Phil's early years at Park Avenue Methodist Church. When he first went there, the church was on the brink of closing. They had only a handful of members. They would have only a dozen people at their worship service. The building was large and in need of repair. They had no money. That was the picture for ten years! Can you imagine! Ten long, discouraging years!

Then, slowly, the congregation began to grow. It was difficult, because the church is located on the Upper East Side, where a third of the people leave the neighborhood every year. But they would gain a few more than they would lose for the year—and the next year they would gain a few more. Just 20 years earlier, they would have 150 or more for worship. It was a wonderful, caring congregation. The building was fully renovated, and the congregation gave generously to mission and benevolent causes.

One of the members said that, during those early years, Phil had the opportunity to go to other, more prosperous, churches, but he always asked to stay. He had the idea that, if he could turn that congregation around, it would be the most important thing that he could do with his life. And he did it! Phil and the Lord turned it around! They built it up! They made it into a significant, vital congregation that touched the lives of thousands of people over those many years.

How did Phil keep going during the first ten years? How did he maintain his enthusiasm when nothing seemed to be happening? How did he resist the temptation to leave Park Avenue for greener pastures during the years of his life when most people are moving upward and onward? The key was his vision! Phil was able to look at that tiny congregation meeting in that big, old, run-down building and see possibilities. He was also willing to give his life to make those possibilities happen. He did that. He gave his life to make those possibilities happen.

But first, he had to see the possibilities—and see them he did! When he looked at those dozen people gathered for worship, he saw the New York City equivalent of seed corn. He could imagine those people taking root—and multiplying—and spreading—and growing. He could imagine them becoming a dynamic presence for Christ—a spiritual oasis in that very secular setting on 86th Street. He could imagine a harvest of thirty-fold—and sixty-fold—and a hundred-fold. It would take many years for that to happen. It wouldn't even *begin* to happen for the first ten years of his ministry. But he saw it, and the vision sustained him. The vision made it possible.

In our text today, Jesus was speaking to disciples who had reason to be discouraged. The religious establishment opposed Jesus. Even his mother and brothers had failed to understand him. In some ways, Jesus seemed to be going nowhere. But, in the midst of the controversy, crowds followed him, and he healed many people. It was in that context—the discouraging and encouraging context—that Jesus told this parable, the Parable of the Sower. The parable tells about seed falling on various kinds of bad ground: the pathway, rocky ground, thorny ground.

When Matthew wrote this Gospel, the situation had gotten worse. Christians were subject to persecution. Some were falling away. Others were being imprisoned or killed. It was a difficult time to be a Christian. When Matthew related this parable, he knew the discouragement of these persecuted Christians. By recording this parable, he was passing along the encouragement that Jesus had given to the original disciples.

Jesus was saying, "It might seem that the Good News is falling on the pathway—or the rocky ground—or among thorns. It might seem that nothing is happening—but it is. Part of the seed has fallen on good soil. You can't see the results yet but, trust me, things are happening. The seed is lying there, getting ready to germinate. When the results come, they will knock your socks off. You will reap thirty-fold or sixty-fold or a hundred-fold."

Now, to our ears, that sounds about right. A farmer sows a pound of seed and reaps a hundred pounds of grain. That's the whole idea! Right!

Would that it were so simple! In Jesus' day, a typical harvest would have been seven-fold to ten-fold. A farmer could get rich on fifteen-fold. Thirty-fold was nearly unimaginable—so just imagine a hundred-fold. Getting a return of thirty-fold or sixty-fold or a hundred-fold would have been like starting an IPO today and being worth more than Google tomorrow! It would have been amazing! Fantastic! Stupendous!

So Jesus was saying to the disciples who might become discouraged at the opposition, "Don't worry! Yes, you will see people reject the Good News. Yes, you will have days and weeks and years when nothing seems to be happening. Yes, you will experience opposition—even persecution. But, no, that is not the whole picture. Just keep your eyes open, because you are about to see an eye-popping harvest! It won't be seven-fold—or ten-fold—or even fifteen-fold. The seed that is lying just under the good soil is getting ready to explode. The harvest will be thirty-fold, or sixty-fold, or even a hundred-fold."

The disciples of that day needed to hear that, and we need to hear it too. It's all too easy to get discouraged when doing Christ's work.

- We get discouraged because the church seems so marginal. The headlines all go to Amazon or Hollywood. The church doesn't inspire many headlines these days.
- We get discouraged because Christ's work goes so slowly. We tell people about Christ, but nothing happens. We pray for our children, and they continue to act like heathen. We invite our husband or wife to church, and they sit at home with the comic strips.
- We get discouraged because some of the Christians with whom we have to work are enough to make us wish for a good heathen.
- We get discouraged because there is never enough money. Just think of the kingdom work we could do if we had a little money. If God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, why can't he sell a few and fix the church roof.
- And then there are church boards and bishops and denominational headquarters—but I won't even go there.

But Jesus says, "Don't worry about it! Don't worry about any of that! Just keep on keepin' on! Just continue to plant—and cultivate—and water! Just continue to believe! Just continue to proclaim! The harvest is coming, and will it be a surprise! Get ready, because it will be a barn-buster!"

And that's Good News!

- It's Good News for wives who are praying for their husbands. It is Jesus' word of encouragement that says, "Never give up—because there's a harvest coming—and it is going to be a surprise! Keep praying!"
- It's Good News for parents who pray for their children. It is the news that there is ferment going on in the child's heart. The Word of God is lying there, just waiting for the chance to bust things open.
- It's Good News for people who serve on church boards—people who carry on the lonely struggle to keep the church alive and moving. It is Christ's promise that it is all worthwhile.
- It's Good News for little churches where *nothing* seems to be happening. It is Christ's promise that a great day is coming!
- It's Good News for big churches where *everything* seems to be happening. It is Christ's promise that you ain't seen nothing yet!

- It's Good News for denominations that are having a tough time recruiting clergy—or Sunday School teachers—or board members—or youth leaders. It is Christ's promise that the day will come when *every* knee will bow and *every* tongue confess that Christ is Lord!
- It's Good News for those of us who get discouraged when we watch the news. It's Christ's promise that terrorists and serial killers and the other evils that fill our living rooms every evening—that they will be forgotten in the great harvest that is to come.
- It's Good News for all of us who love the Lord. It's his promise that our labors in his behalf are never in vain!

So today, as we hear the Parable of the Sower, let's not worry too much about the seed that falls on the pathway—or among the rocks—or among the thorns. Yes, when we proclaim the Word of God, some will be lost. But that's only a footnote to the greater truth, which is that God will see to the increase. Let us not be *discouraged* by the little that is lost. Rather, let us be *encouraged* by the great harvest that Christ has promised.

-- That's our Lord's message for this Lord's Day and I hope you got a blessing out of it!,,,

-- Go out this week and be a blessing and be blessed! -- For the more you are a blessing, the more you,,, will be blessed!

-- Thank you all for watching and listening and we will see you all next week!

Copyright © 2025 – Athens Universal Life Church – All Rights Reserved!