



NEW LIFE

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“For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9)

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The Thorns

*By Robert Rothwell, Part 3 of 4 of “The Parable of the Sower”
Adapted from TABLETALK from Ligonier Ministries – June 2009*

The greater Miami area, where I was born and raised, is one of the most developed regions in the entire state of Florida. There are hardly any wilderness areas left in the midst of the urban sprawl, but every so often it is possible to happen upon an area in the midst of all the housing developments and shopping centres that has been left as is, a forest oasis surrounded by human construction.

During college I worked at a summer camp situated within one of these rare plots of undeveloped land. At least once a week we would hike through the woods to learn about the native flora and fauna. At one stop on our hike we had to highlight what an invading plant was doing to the indigenous trees. We called this foreigner “the potato vine” because the large seeds it puts forth, though inedible, resemble potatoes. Entire swaths of the tree canopy were covered like a blanket in the vine, obstructing the sunlight needed by the plants that belonged there. Periodically, there was an attempt to rip out the potato vine to save the trees, but by then it was usually too late for some of the indigenous plants. A branchless tree trunk or two, dead and being hollowed out by woodpeckers, were standing evidence of the potency of the potato vine.

Attempts to eradicate the strangling vine were never wholly successful, and at best it was only possible to keep it at bay, since it had seeded the entire portion of the woods in which it thrived. Even if great lengths of the vine were removed, we could return only a day or two later and find the tendrils of the potato vine inching their way up the trunk of a victim, persistently working of overcome a tree and rob it of its life.

The potato vine helps illustrate the point that Jesus is making about the third type of soil in the parable of the sower (Matt 13:7, 22). Just as potato vines and other weeds can strangle healthy plants, so too can certain things get in the way of the light and warmth of the Holy Spirit and lead the professing believer into spiritual death. This third example is especially pertinent to those who have claimed to follow Jesus for a long time, for it cautions us that even the one who seems strong in the faith can eventually buckle under the surrounding weeds. Potato vines and other thorns can bring down even a once-thriving plant.

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Before we examine the thorns Jesus identifies in Mathew 13:22, note the language we are using to describe those who succumb to the thorns and thistles. We have been careful to speak of “the professing believer” or the one who “seems strongest” because we know that the truly regenerate person can never fail to grow into the maturity of Christ. Anyone who commits final apostasy never really trusted Jesus to begin with (1 John 2:19), for the Father always glorifies the individuals whom He justifies (Rom 8:30). That some who appear to be rooted in the Son fall away does not mean that assurance of salvation is impossible in this life, for we can know that we belong to the Savior (1 John 5:13). But true assurance carries with it the realization that none of us has the power in ourselves to remain in Christ, and it moves us to be on guard against sin. Being assured that we are saved, embrace Paul’s admonition to take heed lest we fall, especially when we think we are standing strong (1 Cor 10:12).

Regarding the parable at hand, the thorns that can kill are the cares of the world and the delight in riches (Matt 13:22). With the cares of the world Jesus recognizes the weight of our troubles and needs, a heaviness that can crush even the mightiest people. For better or worse, burdens are the stuff life is made of and they threaten to snuff out what may otherwise appear to be flames that burn brightly for the Lord.

Some weeds grow faster than others, and some burdens come at us more quickly than we expect. Sudden tragedies, for examples, have touched us all. The wife who is killed in a car accident as she travels home after her honeymoon with her husband; the eight-year-old boy who dies after swimming because of a parasite living in the water; the father of six whose heart stops after a basketball game due to an unknown cardiovascular problem; all of these and many others can occur suddenly and with devastating effects. Do any of us not know somebody who left the faith when one of his loved ones dies suddenly and in the prime of life?

Other thorns grow more slowly, making them particularly dangerous because they can go unrecognized until it is too late. Think of the husband who finds married life less than what he hoped for. Resentment toward his spouse can fester unaddressed for years until it explodes into a messy divorce. Had he addressed his disappointment when it first surfaced, he may never have allowed it to justify his extramarital affair. Then the true state of the husband’s heart is revealed when he refuses to submit to church discipline, choosing instead to leave Jesus and cleave to his mistress. How many of us have seen this kind of thing firsthand?

Not all of the thistles and thorns we encounter in life are easily recognizable at first. These cares are probably the most deadly of all. Consider, for example, how we all want our children to grow into well-rounded adults, a desire that is commendable in and of itself. But even this concern can be taken to the extreme. With all the activities that compete for the attention of our families – soccer games, dance recitals, flute lessons, scouting activities, you name it – it can be too easy to fill our time in ways that might ultimately prove to be unhealthy. For example, we might end up with schedules so full that we neglect the Lord’s call to assemble with the brethren (Heb 10:24-25). And if worship is missed, how long before family ethics begin to stray from Jesus’ teaching? Then, is it not possible that our “Christian days” might eventually become a distant memory? Extracurricular activities are certainly not sinful by nature, my point is just that if we are not careful, even that which seems good can end up strangling the life right out of us.

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Yet the cares of the world are not the only thorns that can bring us death; Jesus also warns of the delight in riches that can be a snare (Matt 13:22). Moreover, delighting in riches is one of the chief temptations we face in the affluent West. But this weed often escapes our notice entirely, so we must be ever vigilant lest it roots itself in our lives.

The problem is not money itself, of course, for we can be both wealthy and faithful to Christ. Instead we must look at how we value our money. The love of money, or as may be more applicable to us, the love of the comforts that money can buy, is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim 6:10). We are not talking here about a Faustian pact wherein we knowingly sell our souls to the Devil; rather, we must not forget that even we who claim to follow Jesus can make finances the chief end of man, not God's glory.

Consider the ways in which we may overextend ourselves. Besides the mortgages for the bigger house which, truth be told, we did not really need, there is also the perpetual car payment because we must get a new set of wheels every three years. Add to this the credit-card debt we incur each holiday season because the kids and grandkids cannot do without the latest thingamajigs, as well as the vacation we "deserve" but cannot really afford and the five-hundred channel cable TV with the extra sports package that we cannot live without. The world calls all this the "American Dream"; we must beware the peril of too much debt.

Are big houses, new cars, Christmas presents, vacations, and cable TV inherently evil? Of course not! But the love of such things can lead to working longer hours to pay off the debt they incur. And this can lead to marital problems that might produce an unbiblical divorce and refusal to submit to church discipline. Or, the children might learn to value stuff more than the Savior, finding themselves swallowed by the thorns of riches. Any number of situations might result that can move people who otherwise seem faithful to abandon the goal of Christ Jesus. Even if we never bury ourselves in debt, we must be on guard lest we put acquiring riches above serving our Savior.

How can we escape the thorns, thistles, and potato vines that threaten to destroy us? Besides vigilance, we must recognize that only our Lord Himself can root out the weeds that would overcome us. It takes a gardener to save his flowerbeds and nothing less than our Creator's intervention can keep the spiritual thorns at bay. He must work in us, clearing the weeds and pruning the dead growth within us all (John 15:1-11).

He preserves us by speaking to us through the Word preached and read, identifying the darkness within that we might banish it with His light. He fertilizes us when we see the Word made visible in the sacraments, giving us the grace we need for growth. Finally, our great Gardener protects us by incorporating us in a great garden with other plants that He is tending. Vital relationships with other Christians through which we encourage one another are necessary to remain faithful to our Father's call (Gal 6:1-2). If authentic worship, study, and fellowship are a part of our lives, then we have nothing to fear from thorns and potato vines.

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am** and **4.00 pm**.

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	Today: 19/07/2009	Next Week: 26/07/2009	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. We like to welcome Angela Young, Anna Maria Brown, Rhamil Rane, Francesco Mimafra, Zoe Conlon and Roanne Hawkins to our worship services last Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	John Poh	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Rev Timothy Ki	Rev Timothy Ki	
<i>Message:</i>	What is a Christian? – Part 5	Why do I have to be a Christian? – Part 1	
<i>Text:</i>	Ephesians 2:1-10	Psalm 8	
<i>Organist:</i>	Anthony	Anthony	
Evening			
<i>Chairman:</i>	John Poh	Joey Seow	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Rev Timothy Ki	Rev Timothy Ki	
<i>Message:</i>	What is a Christian? – Part 6	Why do I have to be a Christian? – Part 2	
<i>Text:</i>	Ephesians 2:1-10	Isaiah 43:10	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Grace	Hubert	
Other Duties			NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
	Today: 19/07/2009	Next Week: 26/07/2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calling of Resident Minister: Continue to pray for the Lord's calling for Rev Timothy Ki to serve as our resident minister. Rev Ki will be here for the months of July and August. Pray for his visa application. • DHW Bible Study today: Today, we will cover Lesson 12 (Genesis 15-17). Please spend the upcoming week preparing for Lesson 13 (Genesis 18-19). • Pray for those who are sick: - Yetta's mum (upcoming chemotherapy sessions), Constance (ankle), Douglas (knee pain), Barbara (Alzheimer's), Prema (thyroid and skin condition), Eld Jack Ford (old age and knees), Margaret (Asthma, Hay fever, lost her voice), Yanning (back pain after fall), Brian (awaiting appointment for wisdom tooth extraction). • Pray for those who are on travel: Sophia (Singapore), Lee-Wei (Singapore), Nicolas (Belgium), Rachel (Singapore), Rev Lim's daughter (to London – 26th July), Joy & family (Wales) • Pray for those who are still progressing with their studies: Yetta, Hubert, Joshua • Pray for those seeking employment: Joy • Pray for visa applications: Grace (China and UK), Joshua (Student visa)
<i>Ushers</i>	Sharon / Yetta	Daniel / Jonathan	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	No Sunday School	No Sunday School	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Mrs Ki	Constance	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>PA Crew:</i>	Joshua	Jonathan	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 24 July	7:30pm	Young Adults Fellowship: No YAF	
Sat 25 July	4:00pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by John Poh	
<u>Worship Service Collections</u>			
Offering: £728.47		Lunch: £44.50	
<h2 style="margin: 0;"><u>Our Weak Hours</u></h2> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 40px;"><i>Adapted from "In Green Pastures" by J.R. Miller, D.D.</i></p> <p style="margin: 10px 0 0 40px;">We are not at all times equally strong. There are days with all of us when we throw off temptation with almost no effort. But none of us are so every day. There are hours with the strongest of us when we are weak. These are the times of peril for us, and our adversary is watching for them. In your weak hours keep a double guard, therefore, against temptation. Keep out of its way. Throw yourself with mighty faith on Him who was tempted in all points as we are, and knows therefore how to deliver us when we are tempted. In time of special weakness run to Christ for shelter.</p>			