

God's Batting Average

Does God's Word accomplish *all* that He purposes? Does God ever "whiff"? Does He ever "swing and miss"? The answer, of course, is a resounding "**NO!**" God Himself makes this clear. Speaking already seven centuries before the birth of our Lord, God declares to Isaiah (and to all the Israelites through Isaiah). "*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*" God never whiffs.

I don't know about you, but that's a whole lot easier to believe when I'm actually seeing results. But... you know as well as I do that there are plenty of times when it certainly seems like a big old "swing and a miss." Even the Gospel lesson seems to reinforce this. All that seed that was sown, only to be devoured and choked out and scorched and withered. Yes, the seed that fell on the good soil did produce a hundredfold. Praise God, right? *But what about all that other seed that didn't?*

And let's face it: Looking to "real life" only serves to reinforce the belief that there are plenty of times that God seems to swing and miss. We don't see the fruitful results we're looking for. We only see failure. No matter how much we call upon God; no matter how much we pray and read our Scriptures and come out to church; no matter how much "Jesus" we throw at the situation, *we still only wind up facing emptiness and void.* We see a great big gaping hole in the midst of our hopes and expectations, and God doesn't seem to be filling it (like He said He would).

Just think of all the times you've prayed to God, and you were left feeling like you struck out. The results you prayed for never came to fruition. *It hurts, doesn't it?* Talk about feelings of void and emptiness. God's Word accomplishes all that He wills? His Word and Will always succeeds? There are times that we're left thinking that either that's a lie and God doesn't *always* succeed, or maybe God is just a capricious jerk whose is apparently okay with crushing us once in a while. If that's the case, well...then He's certainly succeeding!

But maybe that's the whole problem. We're not looking for the right things. Maybe we're looking for the *wrong* things. Maybe we're not seeing what God is showing us. In all those apparent failures; in all those times of apparent void and emptiness, we're looking for results—*our desired results.* And when those desired results aren't witnessed/experienced, we're quick to draw conclusions of failure (or worse). *But is that what God would have us to see?*

Back to the parable. It wasn't just the good soil that produced results. *All those other soils and circumstances produced results too.* No, they weren't the results that anyone would anticipate or hope for, *but they were results nonetheless.* The birds are snatching the seed away before it can take root. The rocks provide no moisture or nourishment for the seed to take root and grow. The thorns and weeds are choking out the young growth. And your Lord makes clear what all these different things represent. The devil is snatching away the Word from the heart. The rocky soil represents those who hear the Word and rejoice, but since there's no root, they spring up in belief and then just as quickly fall away when the heat gets turned up. They have no nourishment; no moisture. *It's no wonder they wilt and die.* And as for the thorns and weeds, the cares and riches and pleasures and worries of life rise up and choke out the faith. ***Bottom line: The result is no growth; no harvest.***

Now, before we go too far and turn this into a "how to" lesson on successful mission and evangelism (which often happens), consider the fact that our forefathers appointed this text *to be heard in the weeks leading up to Lent.* Yes, there's no denying that this text speaks to the realities of mission/evangelism. No one disagrees. This is the *reality* of sowing the seed of God's Word. It will (and does) take root in good soil and produce good fruits. It also will (and often does) *not* take root and produce the growth and fruits we hope for. That's reality. However, this lesson is **NOT** a "how to tutorial," as in, "*Sow the seed only in 'good' soil, and don't waste your time sowing the seed in all those other places because it won't produce the intended results.*" ***We don't know that!*** God can plant a tree in the middle of the sea. **Nothing is impossible for God.** The very fact that prostitutes and tax collectors and condemned thieves repent and believe and are saved is proof of this. The very fact that the "good soil" of the Pharisees only proved to be hard as a rock and full of devilish birds and weeds is proof of this. All of this is absolutely true. ***But...that's not why this text is appointed for our hearing on this particular day.***

Before I go any further, I want to take you back to the words of our God and Father; words that He spoke at the baptism of Christ; words that He again spoke at the Transfiguration of Christ. "*This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to Him.*" **Listen to Him.** God has *never* said that our will and our desires will always succeed (or succeed at all). **Never!** What God has so clearly said is that His Word and Will ALWAYS succeeds. What is God endeavoring to show **YOU** by means of this parable? What is God revealing to you **ABOUT YOURSELF** by means of this parable?

Do you sometimes allow the seed of His Word to immediately be snatched away? Do you sometimes immediately dismiss what you hear because you don't like it or because it doesn't sit well with you? "*Things have changed. Times are*

different now. It's different in my case.” **Is it?** God’s Word is eternal and unchanging. Sin is sin. Murder, adultery, promiscuity, gossip, divorce...they’re all just as sinful in God’s eyes today as they were from the very beginning. But rather than repent of the sin, we dismiss it. We condone it. We justify it. And then we wonder why we feel so ***empty and disconnected*** from God. Are you sometimes not rooted in the life-giving good soil of Christ’s Word and Sacraments? When life hits the fan and you’re feeling parched and wilted and empty, ***is it because God has failed, or is it because you’re not rooted in Him?*** The same goes for the weeds and thorns of this life that rise up and choke us out. How many times have you had “more important” things to do? Have the pleasures of life kept you from Christ and His good gifts? Have the worries of life kept you from these good gifts of true life and nourishment? And yet...we lament about how God seems so distant; how God doesn’t seem to be coming through and fixing the problems and the hurts and the sorrows. In all these instances (which we can all certainly relate to) the results are plain to see: ***We aren’t the squeaky-clean Christians and “perfect” soil we think we are.***

Dear children of God: Listen to the words that He Himself has taught you to pray. *“Thy will be done.”* There’s nothing in there about “my will be done.” **“Thy will be done.”** And what is the will of the Father? Thinking in terms of “results,” look to this cross. ***Here is the will of the Father!*** Does this [the crucifix] look like anything we’d ever anticipate or hope for in terms of witnessing the love of God? **But that’s exactly what it is!** This is the incomprehensible love of God for you, nailed to a cross for your forgiveness; for your life; for your salvation. The will of God is that no man dies in his sin. The will of God is that all turn from their sin and hold fast to Him and His undeserved grace, mercy, and peace that surpasses all human understanding. The results of His love for you are ***plain to see***, not just on the cross, but here in your very presence and hearing. *“Take and eat. Take and drink, for the forgiveness of all your sin.”* This love for you will **NEVER** fail! *“My grace is sufficient.”* And it is, for here’s the proof. Here are the results.

That’s all that needs to be said. May this seed of His Law and Gospel take root in your heart and spring up to bear abundant, repentant, God-pleasing fruit. May you ever, by His grace, be the good and receptive soil He desires for all men. May this gracious Divine reality give you the very results He intends—His peace, which surpasses all understanding. And may this same peace guard and keep your hearts and minds in Him, from now unto that time when the Lord of the harvest mercifully calls you home and plants you firmly before His heavenly throne with angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven for all eternity.

To Him alone be all glory, praise, and honor...**AMEN.**