

# By the Wayside

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When Jesus told the Parable of the Sower, He wanted His hearers to examine their hearts and determine what kind of reception they were giving the word of the God. He was also preparing His disciples for what they should expect when they went into all the world to preach the gospel. They were going to encounter all kinds of people: from those who would immediately accept the seed to those who would immediately allow the devil to take it away. The problem was not with the message or the messenger; the failure was the condition of the soil.

When Saul of Tarsus became a Christian, the Lord told Ananias that Saul was His “chosen instrument to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel” (Acts 9:15). That prophecy is fulfilled in Acts 24–26. Three chapters. Three rulers. Three hearts that could be classified as wayside soil.

What is it that causes men to reject the gospel? What kind of responses should we anticipate as we spread the seed of the kingdom in the hearts of men today?

**FEAR.** “Felix became frightened” (Acts 24:24-27). Felix was the governor of Judea. He was married to Drusilla, the daughter of Agrippa, and is described by historians as “self-indulgent, dishonest, unjust, and immoral.” (He’d fit right in with our politicians today!) When Paul preached to him about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix’s response was one that many have used to escape accountability. He became frightened.

The proper response to fear is love. Fear is a stepping stone, a beginning place. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 1:7). But we must grow in our knowledge and understanding to the point that we are motivated by love. Why should we obey the Lord? Because we love Him. Why do we serve Him? Because we love Him. “Perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:8).

Felix didn’t let his fear go far enough. He sent Paul away. What he should have realized is that it is a “fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

**PRIDE.** Festus was the successor of Felix. He said, “Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad” (Acts 26:24). He didn’t want to send Paul to Rome without any formal charges, so he gave Paul the opportunity to lay out the facts of his case. Paul’s defense was to tell the story of how he became a Christian. But the seed was not sown in Festus’ heart. It was gobbled up by pride. “The problem is not with me. It’s with you.” You are out of your mind. You are mad. The Greek word is “mania,” where we get the word “maniac.”

The answer to pride is submission. The problem is not with the message or the messenger or anyone else; the problem is me. As Cornelius said to Peter, “We are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord” (Acts 10:33). Paul’s response to Festus was that he was in his right mind and speaking words of sober truth (Acts 26:25). Let God be true and every man a liar. His word is right whether you choose to submit or not.

**INDECISION.** Herod Agrippa II was the great-grandson of Herod the Great. His father, Herod Antipas, had John the Baptist beheaded. Agrippa told Paul, “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian” (Acts 26:28). His tone of voice and inflection are lost in translation. We don’t know if he said this sarcastically to protect himself in front of the other guests or sincerely. Either way, the emphasis was on time. In a little while. In a short time. Not now.

The response to indecision is urgency. We must see that time is of the essence. In a short time or in a little while is running a risk. To refuse to decide is to decide. When we think that delaying our decision will relieve the burden, all we have really done is chosen, “no.” To almost accept it to reject. To almost obey is to disobey. To almost go to heaven is to go to hell. Agrippa’s response inspired a hymn by Phillip Bliss that we often use as an invitation song. “Almost cannot avail, almost is but to fail. Sad, sad that bitter wail. “Almost—but lost.” See the urgency of obedience. Today is the day of salvation.

How receptive is your heart to the seed of the kingdom? That will determine what kind of response you can expect from Jesus on the day of judgment.