



“Who Hath Ears to Hear, Let Him Hear”

Show Notes & Transcripts

Podcast General Description:

Follow Him: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith & John Bytheway

Do you ever feel that preparing for your weekly *Come, Follow Me* lesson falls short? Join hosts Hank Smith and John Bytheway as they interview experts to make your study for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ *Come, Follow Me* course not only enjoyable but original and educational. If you are looking for resources to make your study fresh, faithful, and fun--no matter your age--then join us every Friday and Saturday.

Podcast Episode Descriptions:

Part 1:

How can riches deceive us? Dr. Daniel Becerra explores the Parable of the Wheat and Tares and examines the themes of the Kingdom of Heaven in Luke and Matthew. Dr. Becerra also examines the role of Jesus’s family and women in his discipleship.

Part 2:

Dr. Becerra continues to examine what the miracles of Jesus continue to teach modern disciples and explores the danger of assuming testimony is an end goal.

Timecodes:

Part 1

- 00:00 Part 1–Dr. Daniel Becerra
- 00:51 Introduction of Dr. Daniel Becerra
- 02:36 Parables in Luke 8 and maternal imagery in Luke 13
- 03:58 Kingdom of Heaven
- 05:13 Jesus and his family
- 06:24 Women and Jesus’s ministry
- 07:56 Jesus actually spoke in parables and names vary
- 09:30 Parables and parabolos
- 11:15 Why parables?
- 13:20 Four Keys
- 17:10 Mustard Seed and Parable of Leaven
- 21:22 Parable of the Net and Parable of the Wheat and Tares
- 32:10 Spiritual sprinters
- 33:46 Opposition in gardening and life
- 36:28 Worldliness and worry
- 40:40 Evidence money doesn’t solve all our problems
- 41:50 *Be Happy: Simple Secrets to a Happier Life* by Hank Smith
- 43:19 How do riches deceive us?
- 44:52 Good ground and good fruit
- 50:11 Jesus encourages followers to listen
- 52:59 Parable of the Treasures
- 54:56 End of Part I- Dr. Daniel Becerra

Part 2

- 00:00 Part II– Dr. Daniel Becerra
- 02:24 Luke 8 and miracles point beyond themselves
- 03:36 Miracles can demonstrate God’s care for individuals, power over elements, etc.
- 04:35 Jesus calms the storm
- 08:03 First Principle is faith in Jesus
- 09:58 Why Jesus takes people out onto the sea
- 12:00 Elder Maxwell and three types of suffering
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- 15:01 Jesus heals a man possessed
- 18:30 Testimony isn’t our end goal
- 21:58 The woman with the issue of blood
- 28:31 Jesus laments Jerusalem and maternal imagery
- 31:14 Scattering and Gathering

- 36:27 Dr. Daniel Becerra shares his journey as a scholar and a Saint
- 41:45 End of Part II–Dr. Daniel Becerra

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Biographical Information:



Daniel Becerra is a scholar of early Christianity and holds secondary specialties in New Testament and in Greco-Roman philosophy. He received a PhD in religion (early Christianity) and an MA in religious studies from Duke University, a MTS in New Testament/early Christianity from Harvard Divinity School, and a BA in ancient Near Eastern studies from Brigham Young University. His primary research interests concern moral formation in Late Antiquity (ca. 2nd–7th centuries CE), particularly within Christian ascetic contexts. He also researches topics relating to theology and ethics in the Book of Mormon.

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Hank Smith:	00:01	Welcome to followHIM, a weekly podcast dedicated to helping individuals and families with their Come, Follow Me study. I'm Hank Smith.
John Bytheway:	00:09	And I'm John Bytheway.
Hank Smith:	00:11	We love to learn.
John Bytheway:	00:11	We love to laugh.
Hank Smith:	00:13	We want to learn and laugh with you.
John Bytheway:	00:15	As together, we follow him.
Hank Smith:	00:20	Hello my friends. Welcome to another episode of followHIM. My name is Hank Smith. I'm your host. I'm here with my parabolic co-host, John Bytheway.
John Bytheway:	00:29	Is that geometry?
Hank Smith:	00:30	Yeah, parabolic. It can be talking about geometry. I looked this up to make sure I was going to use this right. It can be like a parabola or it's expressed in parables. Guess what we're talking about today, John?
John Bytheway:	00:44	Parables, yeah.
Hank Smith:	00:45	Yeah. We're going to be talking about some of the parables of Jesus today and we needed a Bible expert to join us. Who's with us?
John Bytheway:	00:51	We have Daniel Becerra with us and you're going to love this bio. Daniel Becerra is a scholar of early Christianity, holds secondary specialties in New Testament and Greco-Roman philosophy. We had a Greco-Roman wrestler on once, but this is Greco-Roman philosophy.
	01:06	He received a PhD in early Christianity and an MA in religious studies from Duke University, an MTS in New Testament early

Christianity from Harvard Divinity School. We talked briefly beforehand about how David Holland, Elder Holland's son who was there and the BA in ancient near Eastern studies from Brigham Young University.

- 01:27 His primary research interests concerned moral formation in late antiquity, second through seventh centuries, particularly within Christian aesthetic contexts. He also researches topics relating to theology and ethics in the Book of Mormon. So I love reading the bios of people and seeing how wide-ranging our scholars are. So we're really happy to have you, Brother Becerra. Thanks for joining us today.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 01:51 Happy to be here. Thanks for inviting me.
- Hank Smith: 01:53 Dr. Becerra is my friend Daniel, so if it's okay, we're going to call you Daniel, but we know you earned the term doctor.
- John Bytheway: 02:00 Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 02:02 We're grateful to have you. I've been looking forward to this. John, Daniel is as good as a man as they come. We are just about four down, four offices away from each other at BYU, and his door is always open and he's so kind to me. So he's as kind as he is brilliant. I think we're going to have a great day today.
- 02:18 Daniel, how do we want to start this? I was looking to the Come, Follow Me Manual. We're going to be in Matthew 13 and then in the Gospel of Luke as well, chapter eight and chapter 13. We're going to kind of hand the reins over to you and say, "Hey, where do you want to go?" And I'm sure John and I'll have something to say along the way.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 02:36 Well, there's a few things I want to accomplish today. First of all, I'm hoping we can kind of work through the text and get a sense for what's happening and why it might be important for us.
- 02:43 I'm planning on spending the majority of the time on Jesus' parables and explore, hopefully, some different ways to engage with them productively. We'll take a look at a few of Jesus' miracles in Luke eight and then finish it up with a bit of reflection on the maternal imagery that Jesus uses to describe himself in Luke 13.
- 02:59 The good news is that there's a lot of overlap in these chapters, so I'll stick primarily to Matthew and then bring in Luke where it differs.

Hank Smith: 03:05 John, I might as well say this upfront because we want to hear from you, you've written a book on parables, isn't that right?

John Bytheway: 03:10 Did you say John? Yes, I did.

Hank Smith: 03:12 Yeah, John.

John Bytheway: 03:13 And so did you, Hank. We love parables and we love applying parables and as we've often said on this show, there's the interpretation of scripture and then there's the application of scripture. With parables, it really allows us to do a lot of application, doesn't it?

Hank Smith: 03:27 We're going to have a lot of fun here.

John Bytheway: 03:28 Yeah, this is going to be great.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 03:30 Just for the record, I'm the only one here that hasn't written a book on parables, so I fully expect you guys to carry me if I need it.

John Bytheway: 03:37 Well, I've been described by others as parabolic even within the last few minutes. I'm a parabola.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 03:45 So I thought we could begin in Matthew and kind of situate ourselves within the context of the larger gospel. As you guys may know, scholars frequently divide the Gospel of Matthew into five different sections, each of which has a kind of narrative portion and discourse portion.

03:58 One half of each section you have Jesus going from here to there and there to here doing these things, and then the other half of that section, he's preaching a sermon or something like that. The theme of the section that we are in today is some scholars say like the Kingdom of Heaven. This is Jesus's primary message in these chapters. So the narrative portion is chapters 11 through about 13, records Jesus' preaching and miracles around Galilee and then the discourse portion, which is 15. The entire chapter of 13 records teachings about what he refers to as the Kingdom of Heaven.

04:29 The idea of the Kingdom of Heaven is really important to Jesus. In Matthew, he references it about 32 times and he spends a significant amount of time in it, 13, especially. In fact, Matthew's the only book that talks about the Kingdom of Heaven, whereas the rest of the Bible refers to as the Kingdom of God.

- 04:44 Those terms seem to be synonymous, at least in my understanding. One value of understanding the kind of literary structure of the scriptures that we're going to be reading is that it can help us know what to look for and what questions Jesus is trying to answer, can help us to be more informed interpreter of the scripture, which is why I spend a little bit of time on that.
- 05:00 I think this is especially important for Matthew 13 because we get a lot of parables and of all the different genres of literature in the New Testament, parables are perhaps most conducive to a variety of interpretations as both of you know and we'll talk about that in a second.
- 05:13 So in terms of context where we are in the story, Matthew 13, Luke 8, they open up with Jesus ministering to people in every city and every village. He's apparently accompanied by his mother, his brothers, his 12 disciples. And as Luke tells us, certain women which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herrod's steward and Susanna and many others which ministered unto him of their substance.
- 05:40 A couple of things I want to point out here. First is how much of a family affair this seems to have been. Typically, when we imagine Jesus out during his ministry in art or just in our minds, we imagine him maybe either alone talking to a big group or with his apostles, but here we see he had a whole kind of entourage with him, family members, friends, apostles. I think it just would've been nice to come home after a hard day of preaching and just have the support there of your loved ones.
- 06:06 I remember the day my daughter was baptized, I think it was during COVID and we had all of our family Skyping in and just seeing the support there for her. People from all different ages and walks of life with her in that and just like the support she felt. So that's kind of the image I get, just this web and blanket of support for Jesus.
- 06:24 And second, it's important to recognize how integral women were to his life and ministry. They were there at his birth, they were there at his crucifixion. They were the first to see him resurrected and testify that he lives. They were there all throughout his ministry.
- 06:37 In this case, they seem to be supporting him temporarily, whether it was financially or with meals or helping out with

logistical things, but they were there in an integral part of his ministry and I think it's important that we point that out as well.

- Hank Smith: 06:47 Yeah, that's verse 3, "Which ministered unto him of their substance." Sounds like they're working hard.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 06:54 So Matthew 13, it opens up, Jesus goes outside, he sits on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Matthew doesn't tell us exactly why he went out there. We do know from other passages that periodically Jesus often kind of seeks out solitude to go into the wilderness to be by himself, whether it's to pray or just collect himself.
- 07:11 So perhaps this is what's happening here. I have to imagine sometimes he just felt maybe physically or emotionally exhausted and maybe just took some pleasure in taking some time to appreciate the beauty of his surroundings. And I don't know if you've ever been to Galilee, but just sitting on the shore of the sea there, I can imagine just kind of taking it in and the spirit of that place.
- Hank Smith: 07:29 Yeah, it's really nice.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 07:30 So he is sitting there, Matthew tells us, and great multitudes were gathered together unto him. So they came and found him or maybe it was planned. So many so that he went into a ship and sat and the whole multitude stood there at the shore and he spoke many things to them in parables.
- 07:44 Before we get into the parables themselves, I think it might be helpful to maybe provide a kind of brief introduction to what they are, and you guys can correct me or add anything that I forget.
- Hank Smith: 07:53 Sounds good. We love that job, right John?
- John Bytheway: 07:55 Yep. Yeah.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 07:56 Yeah. First important to recognize I think just how often Jesus actually spoke in parables in the New Testament. They're everywhere. People offer different lists of them, but if we were to kind of name all of them, there's quite a few. This is a list compiled by a guy named Klyne Snodgrass. He wrote a book called *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*. And this is a really helpful book.

- 08:17 He lists 29 different parables. Here are some of the names. Unforgiving Servant, Two Debtors, Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Prodigal Son, Growing Seed, Wheat and Tares, Mustard Seed, Leaven, Treasure, Pearl, Barren Fig Tree, Two Sons, Wicked Tenants, Wedding Banquet, Two Builders, Good Samaritan, Workers in Vineyard, Tower Builder, Rich Fool. And I mean the list just goes on. So this is one of Jesus's, if not the preferred, method of teaching. So I think it's important that we understand what they are and how they function if we're going to productively engage with them.
- Hank Smith: 08:45 Let me read just a little bit from the manual. It begins the same way. Some of the Savior's most memorable teachings were in the form of simple stories called parables.
- 08:54 These were more than just interesting anecdotes about ordinary objects or events. They contained profound truths about the Kingdom of God. For those who are seriously prepared. One of the first parables recorded in the New Testament talks about the sower, and then he says, this is Jesus, "For whosoever receiveth, to him shall be given and he shall have more abundance."
- 09:14 So as we prepare to study the Saviors parables or any of his teachings, a good place to start is to examine our hearts and determine whether we are giving the word of God good ground. They kind of introduce the idea of parables by using one of these first ones, parable of the sower.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 09:30 Yeah, excellent. And if we were to ask ourselves, I mean you were mentioning this earlier, what are some characteristics of parables? The word parable comes from the Greek word *parabole*, which can also be translated as... it's where we get the English word parabola. It can also be translated as juxtaposition or comparison or illustration or analogy.
- 09:47 If you imagine a parable or a parabola, it has two sides that mirror each other. So we can imagine the text is the one side of the parabola, the meaning is the other. There's a sense in which parables point beyond themselves, they gesture to something beyond what is on one side of them. They also tend to be short and memorable. They are fictitious stories articulating truth. So they're not true and accurate in a historical sense, but they're intended to convey true principles. And what I mean by that is there probably wasn't actually a good Samaritan who found a guy on the road, there probably wasn't actually a prodigal son.

- 10:18 Like these are invented characters in a story. They also tend to often contain multiple layers of meaning. Jesus isn't talking about a guy baking bread necessarily or traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, there's something beyond this. The images that are found in parables are typically drawn from common life, not our common life, but the common life of a person living in the first century, which is why some knowledge of the ancient world I think is important for interpreting them.
- 10:42 And as we go through, I'll try to do my best to kind of fill in some of the gaps maybe as much as I can. Also, parables tend to challenge norms. Oftentimes what you would expect a character to do or what he or she might be justified in doing is not what he or she does. And this is a significant part. When somebody says or does something out of the ordinary, this is typically the place to stop and meditate.
- 11:02 It's like, "What is the significance of this weird unexpected event?" And putting those kind of characteristics aside, some New Testament scholars have kind of suggested different theories to explain how parables function by extension, how we might interpret them.
- 11:15 So let me just give you three theories and then we'll get into the text itself. The first theory is that parables are intended to obscure truth, which is to say they're told with the intent that only insiders will be able to understand their meaning, those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. And this is essentially what Jesus says in Matthew 13. The disciples came and said to him, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" He answered and said unto them, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. But to them, it is not given."
- 11:43 So there were certain things about the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus felt some people weren't ready to hear for whatever reason. So parables are intended to obscure truth in some sense. But the second theory about parables is that they can teach many truths.
- 11:55 They are a fountain of meaning. If we have the tools to just dig down and find the spring and sift out the dirt and rocks and collect the water. I think most Latter-day Saints would be open to this idea, the idea that more can be revealed to us than is written on the page. So they obscure truth, they teach many truths. Some scholars will say that parables have only one meaning, and that the author of the parable, Jesus or Matthew, they intended it to mean one thing and that's what it means.

- 12:20 If we get anything additional out of that, that's great, but that's not what Jesus intended it to mean. Now, obviously we don't have to accept any of these theories as binding or I don't actually think any single theory can account adequately for all of Jesus' parables, but I do think they raise some important questions relating to parable interpretation.
- 12:37 Perhaps the most pressing for us is can parables mean anything? If not, how do we determine what they mean? If we acknowledge that there's more things to learn that's on the page, are there boundaries around that? Can it just mean, is it just a free for all? So things we might consider as we go into these parables, some tips for interpreting them responsibly and then we'll get into the text.
- 12:55 First, as with all things, we want to include the Holy Spirit in our reading of scripture. As a revealer of truth, it's absolutely necessary. The Holy Spirit's not going to do all the work, but with his help, I think we can definitely work better and more efficiently.
- 13:06 Second, we can ask ourselves, does Jesus offer an explanation? Sometimes he does. The Parable of the Sower or the Parable of the Wheat. These are two examples that when Jesus says, "This is what I mean by this." We have a pretty good sense of what to get out of it, pretty straight.
- Hank Smith: 13:18 When he's like, "Here's the answer key."
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 13:20 Yeah. I know. Pretty straightforward. We can ask ourselves what did it mean to them and there? Then we want to pay attention to it. Original context, ask questions like, "To whom was Jesus talking? Why did he address this parable to them? What question or concern is it intended to address?"
- 13:36 Also, some images and metaphors have rich meaning for people in Jesus' time, and they're not that easy for us to recognize living today in the 21st century. And this is why maybe a good study Bible or commentary can help us kind of bridge that cultural and historical gap. You guys are probably aware of the recent change in the general handbook of the church that said, and I'm quoting here, "When possible, members should use a preferred or church published edition of the Bible in church classes and meetings."
- 14:03 And then it continues, "This helps maintain clarity and discussion and consistent understanding of doctrine." And then

it concludes, "Other additions of the Bible may be useful for personal or academic study." I can't stress enough how useful study Bibles can be. The HarperCollins study Bible or the new Oxford annotated Bible. These are super helpful because they give you explanatory comments in the footnotes and it's just easier to understand in my reading.

- Hank Smith: 14:27 I personally use a little website called Bible Hub, just gives me all sorts of translations. I know others have used Blue Letter Bible. It's an app, I think.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 14:36 And those are helpful for looking at different English translations of the Bible, but if you want historical notes saying, "What's a Tare exactly?" Oh, it's a little weed that looks like wheat when it's young, but it changes form when it's older and things like that. So absolutely.
- 14:49 In addition to asking what it meant to them there, then we could also ask what it can mean to me here and now. How can I apply this to my life? What can modern revelation, how can modern revelation compliment my reading of the parable, et cetera?
- 15:02 Three more things. Take notice of surprise details. Certain parables have shocking and unexpected twists in the story that help us understand the point that Jesus was trying to make. And again, sometimes these are hard to identify because we're like, "Well, how much is this much yeast like?"
- Hank Smith: 15:19 What's 10,000 talents?
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 15:20 Yeah. I know exactly, right? Also, I think it's important to remember too that not every minor detail has significant meaning. There's a point at which every metaphor breaks down. For me, it's helpful to think of parables as an arrow pointing to truth as opposed to a detailed sketch of reality.
- 15:36 The Parable of the 10 Virgins, for example. You have five are wise, five are foolish. I think it would be wrong to conclude that exactly 50% of the Earth are exactly, 50% of the church are wise and foolish because of this. These are just images that kind of get the story going. Okay, last one.
- 15:50 Typically, the ending of the parable is where we see the meaning articulated. It's where we see the moral of the story, the Wheat and Tares for example, Jesus says, "Therefore, the

tares gathered in and burned in the fire, so it shall be at the end of this world."

16:03 So this is key for unlocking it so to speak. Maybe we can apply some of these to our reading of the parables in Matthew and Luke. I mentioned before that Jesus's explicit goal in several of these parables is to explain to his audience what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. Okay? This is one of the questions that these parables answer. So regardless of any additional insights we get from them, Jesus clearly designed them to help us understand the Kingdom of Heaven.

16:26 What I want to do is this, I want to read you several parables out loud, two or three at a time that describe what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. Jesus's original audience and as well as the earliest Christians after his death, they wouldn't likely have encountered these teachings in written form.

16:40 They didn't have their own scriptures. Most of them probably couldn't read. So what they would do is they would gather together in house churches, they didn't have basilicas or buildings or anything yet, and the gospels would be read to them. So their encounter with the parables would be orally. They would hear them.

16:56 So in an effort to recreate that, that's what I kind of want to do. After each group of parables, I want you to tell me if you perceive any common themes in the parables that I read to you and what these themes might suggest about the Kingdom of Heaven. Does that make sense?

Hank Smith: 17:12 Absolutely.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 17:13 And I also want to invite you to kind of resist the tendency to define the Kingdom of Heaven before we actually get through the parables, because at least in my reading of this chapter, the Kingdom of Heaven has a broader meaning than we typically give it.

17:24 By assuming that it equals the church or equals the celestial kingdom or something like that, it might limit our ability to understand everything that Jesus is trying to tell us.

17:31 So first group, two parables, Mustard Seed and Parable of Leaven. Common themes in what they might suggest about the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field. Which

indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs.

- 17:50 And it becomes a tree so that the birds of the air, come and lodge in the branches thereof. Second, Parable of Leaven, the Kingdom of Heaven is likened to leaven, which a woman took and hid three measures of meal till the whole was leavened. And just by way of some historical context, three measures of meal is about 50 pounds of flour. So it's enough for about 100 loaves for one woman.
- 18:12 So we have the mustard seed, we have the leaven. Did you notice anything they have in common? And if so, what, if anything that might tell us about the Kingdom of Heaven? What'd you think?
- Hank Smith: 18:22 Both start small and end up bigger than they were when they started. Having more impact than you would think. Something small has great impact. How did I do.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 18:33 It's unrealized. But yeah. And again, there's not one answer to this, but I think that's great.
- Hank Smith: 18:38 I'm kind of nervous like I'm in class here.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 18:40 So both are things that grow from small to big, small beginnings, great endings in terms of size. You have a very small mustard seed grows into a five-foot bush. You have this very small piece of yeast that leavens and is enough for 100 loaves. This unreasonable amount of flour for one person, this might be a place for us to reflect any significance to the abundance produced by this, you think.
- Hank Smith: 19:03 It's way bigger than it started. If you compare a mustard seed to the tree, the tree is massive compared to the seed, especially with the yeast. I don't know who's going to eat. How many loaves of bread did you say?
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 19:16 A hundred, about.
- Hank Smith: 19:17 A hundred loaves of bread. This is for a lot of people.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 19:22 Just the abundance, it's more than we're ever going to need. So maybe the Kingdom of Heaven here, it's something that increases in size. It's something that provides shelter and protection. He mentioned the birds, for example and the trees.

It provides a home and nourishment and abundance, more nourishment than any single person could ever need.

19:39 So kind of these beautiful images. Anything else we would notice that you want to draw out there before I go to the second group?

John Bytheway: 19:45 Just the idea of growing and changing. Small to big, we both said that, but the idea of growth is in both of them. We've also heard leaven used as a negative thing and here, it's a positive thing.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 19:58 Yeah. Good. Okay. All right. Second group. So verses 44 to 46, this is a treasure hidden in the field and a pearl of great price. So the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field. Though which when a man hath found, he hideth and for joy thereof, goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field.

20:15 And then pearl of great price. The Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a merchant man seeking goodly pearls, who when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. Okay. Common themes, what they might say to us about the Kingdom of Heaven.

John Bytheway: 20:30 Value.

Hank Smith: 20:31 Yeah, both sell all that they have.

John Bytheway: 20:35 Yeah, it's worth everything. Yeah.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 20:37 Excellent. Something to be valued, something to be sought after, something to be sacrificed for, rejoiced over. Maybe something that can be difficult to find a little bit.

Hank Smith: 20:48 Yeah. When he had found the pearl of great price, he was looking for it. He was seeking it.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 20:53 Yeah, exactly.

Hank Smith: 20:54 The field is large, I assume treasure hid in a field. The field is large and he's looking for a treasure. Seems small compared to the field, but he's willing to buy the whole field just for-

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 21:07 Yeah. Yeah.

Hank Smith: 21:08 I don't know if that means anything, but...

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 21:10 No, no. Again, I think we hit it. The Kingdom of Heaven, it's something that we have to put in some work to get, it's something to be sought after, to be valued, sacrificed for and rejoiced over when we find it.

21:22 Okay, good. I'll reiterate all these at the end, but just trying to get it all on the paper right now. All right. Third group Parable of the Net, Parable of the Wheat and Tares. So this is 47, 24 to 30 is wheat and tares, and then 47 to 50 is net.

21:36 Okay. So the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea and gathered up every kind, which when it was full, they drew to shore and sat down and gathered the good into vessels. But the bad, they cast away.

21:49 So it shall be at the end of the world, the angel shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just. And then the wheat and tares. I'm doing this one from the NRSV translation, just because I always for the life of me, I can't get through the KJV without stumbling a bunch.

22:04 This is just normal English that I can read better. Okay? Wheat and tares. The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field, but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, the weeds appeared as well, and the slaves of the householder came and said to him, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where then did these weeds come from?"

22:29 He answered, "An enemy has done this." The slave said to him, "And do you want us to go after them?" But he replied, "No, for in gathering the weeds, you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest. And at harvest time, I will tell the reapers, collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn." Themes between net and wheat and tares.

John Bytheway: 22:53 Variety of plants in one, variety of fish gathered of every kind there. And there's a sorting that is coming, it sounds like. Yeah.

Hank Smith: 23:05 That's what I noticed, that sorting at the end.

John Bytheway: 23:07 Sever the wicked from among the just.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 23:09 No. Yeah. Excellent. So maybe some kind of future event of sorting a place or time of reward, punishment, separation. If we're thinking in terms of the Kingdom of Heaven, we might think something akin to the second coming or final judgment.

23:23 Jesus actually says this in several places, that the Kingdom of Heaven is like an event. He says, "Repent. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. It's coming soon." So in summary, we have Jesus speaking about the Kingdom of Heaven in the following ways: it increases in size, it provides shelter and protection and a home and nourishment in abundance, it's something to be valued, to be sought after, to be sacrificed for, to be rejoiced over even though it's difficult to find sometimes.

23:50 The Kingdom of Heaven implies a kind of sorting in which people are awarded according to their works and it's a future event that is near. If we look elsewhere in scripture too, we see that the Kingdom of Heaven has an even broader connotation. So for example, Luke 17:20- 21, Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is something that exists within you. So it has another dimension as well. It's the actual people that consist of this thing.

24:15 My point here is that the Kingdom of Heaven is really multifaceted. It's very hard to define concisely, but if I were to kind of draw out some prominent themes in Jesus' description of it, it would be this. The message of the kingdom is that God has a great work to accomplish and that he wants you to be a part of this great work. In doing so, this is where true joy and flourishing and purpose are to be found.

24:40 These parables in a sense, I think offer an invitation to participate in something that grows from small to large and produces fruit in abundance and it invites us to labor in such a way that brings joy and brings reward.

24:53 If I were to kind of concisely offer an interpretation of what the Kingdom of Heaven, the message of Jesus's parables here, it would be something like that.

Hank Smith: 25:02 That was fantastic, Daniel. That's a lot of fun to put those together like that.

John Bytheway: 25:04 That's awesome.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 25:05 I introduced that summary because this idea of accepting Christ's invitation appears elsewhere in our chapters. The

outlier in Matthew 13 and Luke 8 is the Parable the Sower. And the reason is it's an outlier is it's not explicitly linked to the Kingdom of Heaven, whereas the other parables are introduced, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like..." That's not how this parable is introduced.

25:25 But it does have some same theme. You have this guy, he plants seeds in different places, and because of where the seeds fall, some of them are more able to take root and produce fruit than others. The parable is also distinct in the sense that Jesus gives an interpretation of it. He frames it as representative of the different responses of those who hear the words of the kingdom, of the responses of those who hear this invitation to come and participate in this work.

25:48 The message of the kingdom is preach to them and they respond differently, and he gives four different possible responses to the invitation to participate in this thing that grows from small to large, that brings joy, that bears fruit, that requires labor, et cetera.

26:00 Okay, so the first person Matthew tells us, "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and doesn't understand it, then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away that which was sewn in his heart. This is he which received this seed by the wayside."

Hank Smith: 26:12 So this is Matthew 13:19.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 26:15 Right. So here we obviously see the importance of understanding and helping others to understand God's word. Lack of understanding leaves a door open for Satan, according to verse 19. I think that's fairly straightforward, but it does get a little more complex as we go on.

26:29 Verse 20, let me do this in the NRSV, just because it's a little bit more clear. "As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. Yet such a person has no root but endures only for a while. And when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away."

26:49 You'll notice that that translation cleans up a little bit of some of the more archaic language in the KJV. So for example, "He that heareth the word and anon with it, with joyeth receiveth it anon." I don't know what that means, but by and by. These are both from the same Greek word *euthus*, which is immediately.

- 27:07 Notice first that this person doesn't just hear the word, but he receives it. So unlike the first guy, the understanding seems to be there and something is happening even beyond this hearing and understanding. They're also receiving. The word translated as receive in this passage comes from the Greek word *lambano*, which can also mean to lay hold of something in order to use it. We get a sense that the disposition or attitude that this person has towards the message.
- 27:32 It's not just, "I heard the words." It's not just, "I cognitively comprehend what's going on." It's that I take this into me with the intent to do something with it, and that's what makes a difference. There's an intent to apply. It's more active. And this is important because as we get to the person in whom the seed bears fruit, this act of receiving, this is going to be a prerequisite to that.
- 27:52 Just as an aside, if any of you guys or your listeners are interested in understanding better the range of meaning that different Greek words have, so the New Testament was originally written in Greek, translated into English. There's a website called netbible.org. It's free, and it's helpful because on the left column, there's the English translation of the New Testament or the Old Testament. And on the right column, you can click the word Greek and any word you hover over in English, it illuminates in Greek.
- 28:18 And then you click on the Greek word and it tells you all the different things that that Greek word can mean. So if you see a verb like, "He that receives the word." That's he in whom the fruit comes out. It's like, well, what does it mean to receive exactly? And you look up all the different things that that word receive can mean, and the meaning just explodes. And you're like, "Oh, now I have a better sense for what Jesus was trying to convey when Matthew used this word."
- Hank Smith: 28:40 So that's netbible.org.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 28:42 Right.
- Hank Smith: 28:43 Got it. This is really good.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 28:46 This is something I have my students do when we read... Jesus commands that we should love our neighbor. It's like, well, what exactly does it mean to love? And we look up the word we see that means welcomed into communion and embrace and all these different connotations, and we just kind of see, "Oh, this

is all these things this word can mean," and it gives us a better sense for what do I need to do? And what exactly was Jesus saying?

29:07 And then the problem with this person obviously is that he's unable to endure tribulation, persecution. It offends him or causes him to stumble or fall away. He's scandalized by it. His problem is that he doesn't respond properly to tribulation and persecution. You guys have any thoughts on what the proper response is to that such that we don't fall away, that we don't stumble, that we're not scandalized?

Hank Smith: 29:30 I've thought a lot about this one and what this might look like as I've been teaching it through the years. You're not hard-hearted you don't have this sidewalk. It's hard to grow a garden on the driveway. That's verse 19. This one isn't that way, but something is stopping the roots from going deep.

29:47 I've thought before, perhaps this could be someone who the gospel isn't going into their private life. Maybe it's in their public life, it's above ground, it's really flourishing, but maybe inside it's not taking root.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 30:02 Like a draw close to me with your lips, but your hearts are far from me kind of thing?

Hank Smith: 30:05 Yeah. Kind of thing, something like that where... Because it sounds like the word received means they really intended to do something with it. I don't want to put a bad motive on them, but something is stopping those roots from going deep because I noticed that the sun comes out and the sun should be good for the plant, the tribulation and persecution, if he has deep roots, the sun will be good, but the roots just aren't there. How did I do? Did I do okay? I'm nervous that I'm getting a D or something.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 30:33 No, no. Again, there's not a single answer to... The value of this is that we can use them to explore different options. One of the things that stuck out to me is Matthew uses the word *euthus* or immediately, translated in the KJV as anon and by and by twice. He says, "He has received it immediately. And then when persecution and opposition came, he fell away immediately."

30:55 Do you think there's any correlation between the quickness with which he received the word and the quickness of his fall? Do you think maybe there's something there or am I just reading too much into it?

Hank Smith: 31:06 John, what do you think? I'll let you try.

John Bytheway: 31:08 The thing I loved about this one is there's a couple of footnotes, 21B to Doctrine & Covenants section 40 and 22A is section 39 and both of those are about this character in church history who comes and goes really quickly, Hank, and that's a James Coville.

Hank Smith: 31:25 Yeah, I remember him.

John Bytheway: 31:26 Yeah. Do you remember in the revelations in context, and it talks about he was all excited at first and then the cares of this world, it kind of names the weeds in verse 22, the weeds that are possible.

Hank Smith: 31:39 You're moving ahead to the next one, John.

John Bytheway: 31:41 Yeah, I know.

Hank Smith: 31:42 You are not being-

John Bytheway: 31:42 I know. I shouldn't do that.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 31:45 And again, though, just to be clear, I'm not looking for a specific answer, but these are the questions I have going into this, and I feel like part of the interpretation process is like, "Well, what about..." It's turning the kaleidoscope and saying, "Well, what does it look like if we focus on these words?"

31:59 And as you were talking this idea of a... We all understand what it's like to get super jazzed about the gospel, and then that fades when you get out of the fireside. And then you go back to TikTok or whatever.

32:10 Elder Bednar who describes these people as kind of spiritual spurters. I don't remember if you remember that talk. Let me read a quote from him. He says, "A spiritual spurter is one who is given to short bursts of spectacular effort, followed by frequent and lengthy periods of rest. While a big spurt may appear to be impressive in the short run, steadiness and small things over time is far more effective and far less dangerous and produces far better results."

32:32 The question becomes how do we translate this fire that we feel at the beginning into something that's lasting, into something that's enduring? This seems to be a problem maybe that this guy has. He was super jazzed. He accepted it with his whole

heart, but not in a way that was lasting, not in a way that sustained him. That's kind of my read on it at least.

- Hank Smith: 32:51 Yeah. Was that talk at the women's conference talk back in 2011?
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 32:56 Yeah, I think so.
- Hank Smith: 32:57 Okay. We can put that on our show notes.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 32:59 Sounds good. So any other comments on that one before we move to the next person?
- John Bytheway: 33:02 I like the word received, maybe I'm seeing more than is there, but when I think of a wedding reception, you're receiving guests, there's a receiving line, you're allowing it in and it sounds like more than just the seeds happen to fall here, happen to fall there. Some received it.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 33:21 It's more active than passive. Also, in terms of how one can avoid stumbling when these persecutions inevitably arise, a few things I would say. First expect them as a consequence of your discipleship rather than as evidence of your unfaithfulness or the imperfection of God's plan.
- 33:37 There's really more in scripture that suggests disciples are going to go through some stuff than there is to say that discipleship means your life's going to be all peaches and cream.
- John Bytheway: 33:45 Absolutely.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 33:46 There are books called The Suffering Self because it's this idea that in the gospels, in the scriptures, to be a good person is to invite opposition. And that's something we have to accept. That's probably not how you want to start a first discussion, but it's a reality of...
- John Bytheway: 34:01 Isn't that perfect for the whole idea of a garden is opposition. There's going to be weeds?
- Hank Smith: 34:08 Constant weeding.
- John Bytheway: 34:09 There's going to need to be maintenance.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 34:12 The wind's going to come.

John Bytheway: 34:13 It's reminding me of the hunger and thirst after righteousness. Well plants, hunger and thirst, and that has to be taken care of every day or they get weak and they die.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 34:21 Yeah, exactly. Just this idea too, that even in this opposition, God doesn't expect it to endure it on our own. His whole plan is in sending his Son is with the goal that He can help us when we need it, when we reach out to him and we can see our oppositions and our persecutions as opportunities for intimacy with God.

34:39 They can be technologies for having a closer relationship with him if we respond in the right way, which unfortunately this person didn't, even though he's made up so it doesn't matter. But yeah.

Hank Smith: 34:49 I think it comes back to the sun. He says later, because in the original parable he said, "When the sun was up, they were scorched. And because they had no root, they withered away." What you said there, my tribulations, the difficulty of being a disciple can lead me to Christ if I have the roots. If the roots are in-

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 35:10 The sun's necessary, right?

Hank Smith: 35:11 Yeah. It's good for the plant.

John Bytheway: 35:13 Yeah. I'm glad you said roots, Hank, because roots take time and that's taking time element, you can get really excited about things right at first, but what will allow you to withstand the sun and the heat of the day and persecution is roots.

35:28 You can't rush that. Roots take time and they take continual nourishment, I guess. Maybe I'm going too far, but I like how often I've underlined roots every time Jesus used it in the first part of the chapter and also in the interpretation. I think yeah, we've got to be rooted and grounded to use Paul's phrase.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 35:48 Yeah, excellent. We're doing it guys. This is good.

John Bytheway: 35:51 That's how it's meant to be done.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 35:56 And again, John said, I hope I'm not going too far or something like that. We recognize Jesus gives an interpretation of this, but at the same time, that could be a springboard for truth.

John Bytheway: 36:03 It was downright parabolic there for a second.

Hank Smith:	36:06	Nice job. You lived up to your name.
Dr. Daniel Becerra:	36:10	All right. So what the first guy doesn't understand, the second guy understands and receives, but no roots. Third guy, so this is verse 22, "He also that receives seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word and the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and becometh unfruitful."
	36:28	All right. So here he receives the world, but his care of the world is the problem. Now, often in scripture, when we see this word, world, we see it as having kind of a negative connotation. We're not supposed to be of the world or worldly or something like it. We acquit it to sinful.
	36:41	I looked up all the instances of this in the book of Matthew and Matthew doesn't seem to use the word in this sense. What he seems to be saying here isn't like he's concerned with sinful things, it's just he has anxiety over or worries about life, making money, taking care of his family, just like normal stuff that we have to do which raises the question, what is the proper attitude to have towards the things that we need to be mindful of, but only to a certain degree.
	37:05	We all know we shouldn't be focusing on sin, but we are commanded to take care of our families. We're commanded to work, we're commanded to be healthy. But again, there's a line between when we go too far with that. How do we interact with these carers in a way that's not going to lead us to not be fruitful, so to speak?
John Bytheway:	37:23	It sounds like the answer comes out of the Sermon on the Mount. Is that what you're thinking?
Hank Smith:	37:27	Yeah. We had a podcast earlier with Dr. Lili Anderson, I think it was verse 34 of Matthew 6. "Take therefore no worry for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." So
Dr. Daniel Becerra:	37:44	Let me read that with the NRSV since I didn't understand what that meant.
Hank Smith:	37:48	Okay.
Dr. Daniel Becerra:	37:49	"So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

Hank Smith: 37:54 Yeah, so it's almost a commandment there where the Savior's saying, "Look, worry is not going to help you in what I'm asking you to do, being constantly anxious." Now, I want to be obviously sensitive because some people I know deal with anxiety and they don't choose it. I don't think that's what the Savior's talking about is stop being so anxious. Oh, okay. Thank you. That really helped everything. I hadn't thought of that.

John Bytheway: 38:19 But it really helps because you use that netbible.org, you will see. I have an old-fashioned thing, you guys, it's called a book and it's called a Parallel.

Hank Smith: 38:29 You're not using a website?

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 38:30 You whipper snappers.

John Bytheway: 38:31 It's a parallel new. "You young folks out there." It has eight bible translations in a book, and King James is the only one that uses thought there. All the rest say worry. In fact, footnote 25B says Greek for anxious concern is what we're talking about. And so of course you're going to think about it, but I mean it sounds like the opposite of faith. The Lord's telling us have some faith about this. It'll work out.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 38:59 What would somebody have to do for you to say you're worrying too much? Because I mean, obviously all of us are concerned about where our paychecks... are we going to be able to take care of our... pay our.... But at what point is it too much?

John Bytheway: 39:09 That's such a good question and that's why I like the difference between thinking and worrying and thinking is something I can do something about right now. Worry could be worry for the future. Regret is concerned with the past, but what can I do right now? And that's what I think that confusing phrase, "The insufficient unto the day is the evil thereof is like what?" There's enough stuff today. Just think about that. Yeah, that in King James throws me too. I'm like, "What?"

Hank Smith: 39:38 I would say also that he connects the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. To me that's easier to see. I'm a fan of what's called the Contemporary English Version just because it speaks my language.

John Bytheway: 39:52 That's in my book too, Hank.

Hank Smith: 39:55 Oh, it is?

John Bytheway: 39:55 Mm-hmm.

Hank Smith: 39:56 It says, "The seeds that fell among the thorn bushes are also people who hear the message, but they start worrying and the needs of this life and are fooled by the desire to get rich." Maybe that's the point where it's gone too far is you've bought into this idea, bought in. That's funny. You've bought into this idea that your money is going to solve your problems. More money is going to solve your problems.

John Bytheway: 40:18 Hank, I like that you said that, money's going to solve your problems, because I like to ask how are riches deceitful? That always is a fun discussion to have and you just hit one of them. If I had money, all my problems would be solved. Well, some of them might be. But how are riches deceitful is an interesting discussion to have.

Hank Smith: 40:39 It is.

John Bytheway: 40:40 I came across a book called Money for Nothing and it was about people who'd won the lottery in Michigan. A bunch of these people said they won a million dollars and not everybody, but a number of them said, "This is the worst thing that's ever happened to me."

Hank Smith: 40:55 Oh, really?

John Bytheway: 40:57 One of them said, "I made some investments. They went bad. I spend every day now with lawyers and lawsuits and it's the worst thing." Another couple said, "People treat us differently and we went to the mom and pop grocery store, they used to give us extra apples or oranges and now they don't."

41:15 And it was fascinating to read these stories about... To me it was just put it under the heading of deceitfulness of riches. It was fascinating, but I think I could do better at it. Don't you, Hank? You think you could do better at it.

Hank Smith: 41:28 Yeah. You give me the million dollars.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 41:33 If you're listening, Michigan Lottery.

Hank Smith: 41:37 I would say, "Lord, give me this mountain. Give me this trial."

John Bytheway: 41:42 Hank, I know you have a bunch of funny quotations about happiness and wealth. Money doesn't buy happiness, but what Hank?

Hank Smith: 41:50 Yeah. Well, I wrote a book on happiness that sold dozens of copies mostly to my mom. But I did learn a lot about this, that money can really improve someone's life at poverty level. Money can really take someone out of those anxieties and those worries and put a roof over their head and give them medicine and food and really can make a difference.

42:09 But when you get up above a certain amount, it really kind of levels off. It doesn't impact your happiness at all. People have said before, they just couldn't believe that a person that makes a million dollars has the same amount of happiness as someone who makes 100 thousand dollars. And I'm like... I've had people say to me, "Those people just don't know where to shop." Or, "Then I'd be unhappy in some really nice places."

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 42:33 I know.

John Bytheway: 42:34 You can look for happiness faster in a really nice car.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 42:42 I know.

Hank Smith: 42:42 I'll be crying in my Ferrari then. I think what we're hitting here in verse 22 is an important thing to stop and think about.

John Bytheway: 42:51 And care of this world. How do people see me? How do I want to be seen? What's my reputation? What kind of vibe am I giving? Well, all the image, all that stuff could go under that heading too.

43:04 I love that Jesus not only talked about our heart, the soil is our heart, but some of the possible weeds, I think is a really good place to go. What are some of the possible weeds that could crowd out the gospel being planted in me?

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 43:19 Back to your question about the riches too, in what sense did they deceive us? There is this kind of seductive thing about riches, like the idea that, oh, it's going to solve our problems, or everybody wants to get rich or whatever. But there's a sense in which it can also pervert our sense of self, which is to say it can deceive us into thinking that we're better than other people. Correspondingly deceive us into thinking that people are less than we are.

John Bytheway: 43:40 The Zoramites.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 43:41 It can distract us from what's most important. And they're tricky in the sense that we tend to view them as our own as opposed

to Gods. If you look in Mosiah, everything that you have belongs to God. We are not owners of our riches. We are stewards, and as such, we are accountable to God for what we do with those things. They're not ours to do what we want with them. They're ours to act as a steward over and God is the master of them. That's awesome.

- Hank Smith: 44:05 Dallin H. Oaks gave a talk in April of 2015, General Conference called The Parable of the Sower, and he said, "Wherever we are in our spiritual journey, whatever our state of conversion, we are all tempted by this." I like that he points that out, everyone is probably going to fall into this temptation. When attitudes or priorities are fixed on the acquisition, use or possession of property, we call that materialism.
- 44:27 "So much has been said," he said, "and written about materialism. That little needs to be added here. Those who believe in what has been called the theology of prosperity are suffering from the deceitfulness of riches. The possession of wealth or significant income is not a mark of heavenly favor and their absence is not evidence of heavenly disfavor." He goes on to talk more about it. Some good clarifying comments.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 44:52 Yeah. Excellent. Should we go to the final person?
- Hank Smith: 44:56 Yeah. This is the one that worked.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 44:57 Yeah. So this is verse 23. He that received the seed into the good ground is he that hears the word and understands it, which also bears fruit and brings forth some 100 fold, some 60 and some 30.
- 45:10 Okay. So obviously he's receiving it in a way he understands it, he hears it and one would assume he responds to opposition and temptations in a good way.
- John Bytheway: 45:18 Just to back up what you say there, there's a little JST note, "Understandeth." And it adds, "And endureth." So it isn't just that he gets it, but he tries to live it and then endures.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 45:29 Right. So one thing that stuck out to me is the amounts of fruit and the order in which they appear. Rhetorically, if you're trying to show that this guy was great, so he bore a lot of fruit, you'd probably go from small to large.
- 45:43 But he goes, "The people who do this, they understand they bear fruit. Some bring forward 100, some 60 and some 30." So it

goes in descending order. I don't know if I'm reading too much into that, but you think that's significant at all? Is it about bearing a lot of fruit or is it about something else, so to speak?

- Hank Smith: 45:59 That's fascinating, that it does go in reverse order.
- John Bytheway: 46:02 It always reminds me of other parables, like the talents that they brought forth different amounts and that was okay. I was going to ask you that actually today, if there's any symbolic meaning in those numbers or that there's three numbers that these are kingdoms of glory or something. I've heard all sorts of things.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 46:20 Yeah, yeah.
- Hank Smith: 46:21 We don't have the Savior's tone, but I suspect and I wish I could hear him tell the story in English by the way, that would be helpful. But I wondered if he says some 100 fold, some 60, some 30. Or if he says some 100 fold, some 60, some 30 as if there's no difference between the three. I just like that it's bringing forth fruit.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 46:45 Some bore apples, some bore oranges, some bore celery. As if there's no qualitative. And that's kind of where I'm coming from. It's less about the amount and more about the difference.
- 46:54 We all respond differently to the call of the gospel and bear different fruit, and that's okay. Jesus doesn't say that the more fruit, the better.
- Hank Smith: 47:01 He doesn't say that. Yeah.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 47:02 Yeah. You're going to bear different fruit. Some of you are going to do 100, some of you are going to do 60, some are going to go do 30 and that's fine.
- Hank Smith: 47:08 They're all good.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 47:09 Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 47:10 The important part is that they received it and understood it and endured.
- Hank Smith: 47:15 And the fruit came. Yeah.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 47:18 So I think that's kind of a beautiful message to this idea that we're going to respond and we're going to bear different fruit.

That's the plan. That's not our weakness, that we don't bear as much as the other person.

Hank Smith: 47:26 Maybe the principle there is don't compare. "I wish I was more like my neighbors who do so much for the gospel, and I'm here just barely doing my gospel doctrine calling."

John Bytheway: 47:38 Trying to keep up with 100 folds across the street there.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 47:41 Right. Exactly.

Hank Smith: 47:44 Yeah. And it can be a certain time of your life. I've thought before, there's time where you give everything all your time and energy. So you might be 30 now, maybe sometime in your life you're going to be 100. Maybe sometime in your life you're going to be 60. There's different times of life that could correspond to the amount of fruit.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 47:59 All right. In summary, Jesus has kind of given us a model for an ideal response to hearing his word, to hearing the message of the kingdom. We listen, we understand, we receive it thoughtfully and deliberately and informedly with the intent to apply it.

48:14 We don't allow things to distract us from it. We acknowledge that the fruits of our engagement with the gospel message will look different and that's okay. I think this is kind of one message we might reasonably derive from these parables.

Hank Smith: 48:27 Absolutely. I had my students at BYU saying, "Let's check our own heart. Let's not look around and go, 'Well, they're a rocky soil. Oh, that guy's definitely a weedy soil.'" Check your own heart. If you need to remove some rocks, remove some rocks. If you need to get rid of some weeds. I've asked my students, what app did you delete because it took too much of your time? I've got all sorts of answers, Instagram and-

John Bytheway: 48:54 Hey, this candy isn't going to crush itself, Hank.

Hank Smith: 48:57 Yeah. Yesterday when I asked this question, it was Clash Royale. So many said, "Oh yeah, it just took all my time." So they were weeding their own life. I think that's what, if you look at yourself, that can be really helpful. If you look at others, it's probably... I don't think maybe that's the point of the parable is to say, "Well, John has a hard heart. I'm sure glad I'm good soil."

John Bytheway: 49:20 No, I kind of do. It makes me sad because the hard ground is called by the wayside and it just makes me sad. That metaphor is right in there.

Hank Smith: 49:30 Yeah. The Lord threw that in there just for you, John.

John Bytheway: 49:32 Can I add something about this? Is that we commonly call it the Parable of the Sower. Elder Talmage and Elder McConkie have called it the Parable of the Four Kinds of Soil, which kind of is more what it's about, than not really the sewer. He comes and goes, but it's the four kinds of soil where it lands.

49:49 Like you're saying, each of us has to say... I think I've heard Elder Bruce C. Hafen, who's been on the podcast, call it our heartland, which I thought was a cool way to put it. It's our heart and it's land and this is about the four different types of heartland. And maybe we need to get rocks out. Maybe we need to get weeds out and prepare for planting better.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 50:11 Yeah. Excellent. So moving on through the story, Jesus certainly recognizes that there'll be people who don't understand what he's saying because of the way he's saying it in parables. And in fact, again, as we mentioned earlier, that's part of the point. But he also suggests that his intent is to not keep them in ignorance. It's not that, "Oh, you guys don't understand, so you're not going to get this." Rather it's encourage them to learn how to listen.

50:32 He says in Luke 8:16-18, and I'm reading the NRSV again. No one after lighting a lamp hides it under a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a lampstand so that those who enter may see the light for nothing is hidden, that will not be disclosed. And he says this right after he gives a bunch of hidden stuff. Nor is anything secret that will not become known and come to light.

50:55 Pay attention or then pay attention to how you listen. And the reason I say this is because it can seem kind of counterintuitive that... Or just like if we were to ask why Jesus gives parables, one of the reasons likely wouldn't be, "Oh, he wants to hide stuff from people."

51:08 Jesus doesn't seem like the kind of guy who wants to hide truth from people. I think this verse allows us to see what his intent is here. It's like well, maybe the fact that you don't understand this should spur or spark your desire to learn differently. It should spark your desire to want to know more. Nothing I'm

saying that it is not going to be made clear at some point, but you have to learn how to listen.

- John Bytheway: 51:29 Do you know what I love about that, is he gave the Parable of the Sower and immediately, it doesn't sound like everybody but the disciples came and said, "Why are you speaking in parables?" And they're the ones who got to hear the interpretation. They got another level to it. And starting in verse here, the Parable of the Sower in verse 18, and I've always found it interesting that Jesus quotes the calling of Isaiah in answer to, "Why are you speaking in parables?" Where that's verse 15. "This people's heart is waxed gross. Their ears are dull of hearing. Their eyes, they have closed, lest at any time..."
- 52:10 This phrase is just the gospel. "...they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and should be converted and I should heal them." I've noticed that that calling of Isaiah appears in every one of the gospels and in the Book of Acts. So it must have been something that they had thought about a lot because it sounds like exactly what the Savior hopes will do with the gospel, see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, be converted and be healed, which is just kind of a beautiful way of putting it all.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 52:46 Yeah. Excellent. Jesus finishes up in chapter 13 by telling another parable that's a bit more difficult to understand, but which the message seems to be that essentially it's important to recognize the authority of what God has revealed through scripture and what God reveals through Christ.
- 52:59 This is the Parable of the Treasures, new and old in 51-53. And then you have some people rejecting him and Jesus saying, "A prophet is not without honor save in his own country and in his own house." So he's having not as much success as he'd like among people who know him best, who grew up with him. That kind of concludes the parables there.
- John Bytheway: 53:17 I love the reaction. "Whence hath this man wisdom?"
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 53:22 He's like, "Man, I changed your diapers. I know you."
- Hank Smith: 53:26 Is this Matthew's version of the Nazareth rejection that Luke gives us. So in Luke 4, they were offended, which is what he said would happen. He becomes offended back in verse 21.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 53:41 Yep. I think it's the same verbs, *skandalizo*. Yep.

Hank Smith:	53:43	Yeah. Oh wow.
John Bytheway:	53:45	Scandalous. That was an interesting word. Say it again.
Dr. Daniel Becerra:	53:49	<i>Skandalizo</i> . So scandalized or offended or they're caused to stumble. Yeah.
John Bytheway:	53:56	Please join us for part two of this podcast.



- John Bytheway: 00:00 Welcome to part two with Dr. Daniel Becerra. Matthew 13 and Luke 8 and 13.
- John Bytheway: 00:13 This story, it starts with soil and if you're going to plant something, that first question that you should ask is: What kind of soil do I have? Is my soil prepared? for anything you're going to plant. And I love that Jesus starts with the soil. And when you look at the footnotes, and it kind of ties this to other scriptural stories and parables, and Jesus starts with the soil, and getting your ground prepared. And Alma speaks to the Zoramites about a seed. You'll remember that the people he speaks to are those who have been humbled and they're kind of like, good soil walks up, hey, what about us? We're poor. We built these synagogues. They won't let us worship. And Alma sees that they're good soil and then talks to them about planting this seed, which is basically Christ. It's Christ and His mission, which they said they didn't believe in up on the Rameumptom.
- 01:05 But then he spends the rest of his time talking about time to grow roots. And the season, he calls it faith, diligence and patience. And then if you grow roots, and at one point he even says, now, if this doesn't grow, it's not because the seed wasn't good. This is a good seed. It's because your ground is barren. And the footnotes point you back to Matthew 13, preparing the soil. Soil, seed and then a season, time to grow roots. And he says, if you don't apply faith, diligence and patience and take care of this, you'll never partake of the fruit of the tree of life. And then you go, whoa, we're growing the tree of life here. And maybe I'm seeing more than is there, but it sounds to me like there's soil, then there's the seed, and then there's a time for growing season.
- 01:52 And then lastly, and the only word I can think of that starts with S is supper, is that you can partake of the fruit. And it even says if you don't do this, you'll never partake of the fruit of the tree of life. I feel like parable of the sower is part one of a four-part story. Soil, seed, season, supper, which is kind of fun to put them all together. And the footnotes do it. It's all there. And I

love it because it's an agricultural metaphor that we've all had a little bit of experience with.

- Hank Smith: 02:21 Must be a lot of gardens in heaven, because they talk about it a lot.
- John Bytheway: 02:24 Yeah. Bruce R. McConkie talks about the gardens of God, the Garden of Eden, the garden of Gethsemane and the garden tomb.
- Hank Smith: 02:32 And Hugh B. Brown said, I am the gardener here.
- John Bytheway: 02:35 God is the gardener. Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 02:37 Daniel, anything before we move on?
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 02:40 No, I'm ready to transition. Maybe we could talk a little bit about Jesus' miracles.
- Hank Smith: 02:44 Okay, let's do it.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 02:45 Luke eight, where we got some of the parables. It concludes with a few stories of miracles. Miracles in scripture are important, because they point beyond themselves just like parables. So Jesus's miracles are sometimes referred to as semeia, or semeion in the singular. And this is the Greek word used to describe what he's doing. And another way to translate this word is sign or token, because it's a sign, it's something that reveals or signifies or demonstrates something about Jesus, in addition to helping those who receive them. Jesus's miracles are signs, they're tokens, they're demonstrations of something. In the Old Testament, miracles stories function in several ways. They demonstrate, for example, God's power over his opponents. So think Elijah and the priests of Baal, think Moses and Pharaoh's magicians, they demonstrate God's care for Israel. So, think Moses parting the Red Sea to protect Israel from Pharaoh's armies.
- 03:36 And they also show or demonstrate God's care for individuals. So think of the healing of Naaman, for example. In the New Testament, they serve similar functions, but they also attest specifically to Jesus' divinity and authority over creation. Jesus is different from miracle workers in the Old Testament, because rather than praying for miracles to occur, He himself is empowered to heal people, cast out demons, and command the elements. And this is because he's the Son of God. He sends miracles signal, this part of his nature. Jesus performs four kinds

of miracles in the gospels, exorcisms, which is just in casting out evil spirits. He performs healings. So somebody with a physical, a mental impairment is made better. He raises the dead, and he also does, for lack of a better term, nature miracles. So in which he exercises power of the elements. So storms, big trees, feeding the 5,000, water to wine, this kind of stuff.

04:26 And I would suggest that in each case, in each miracle that Jesus performs, these miracles signal something again beyond themselves. They can teach us something about Christ and His gospel. So we might keep that in the back of our mind as we go through some of these stories. And I'll periodically ask, what does this story teach or signal about Christ in addition to just being kind of a cool power that he has. So one of the miracles mentioned in Luke 8, is Jesus calming the storm. As you know, the story goes, Jesus is on a boat with his disciples. He falls asleep, a storm comes, the boat is filling up with water. Master, we perish, Luke records.

05:00 And the disciples came to him and awoke him saying, "Master, Master, we perish." Then he arose and rebuked the wind and the raging water and they ceased and there was a calm and He said unto them, where is your faith? And they being afraid, wondered, saying to one another, what manner of man is this? For he commandeth even the winds and the water to obey him. First question that comes to my mind, what does this story teach or signal about Christ in your mind? What do we see revealed about Christ here?

John Bytheway: 05:28 As with all the miracles, it's just one more thing that he has power over. Not just men, not just women, not just children, not just plants, but boy, the elements, the weather. And also tying that back to faith.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 05:42 Yeah, the most powerful forces that these probably men would've witnessed. The forces of nature.

Hank Smith: 05:48 I wonder, I don't know if Luke meant this or the other gospel authors, but it seems that there may be making a reference to the storms of life, that when a Christian of their day is reading these works or hearing them, that they could make that personal leap to, Master help us, we perish. And he calmed the sea and said, where is your faith? The modern day reader and even the late reader, 2023 reader, can still get that same lesson.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 06:15 Yeah, absolutely. And I like the juxtaposition. You have a very human Jesus, his body's like ours. He got tired, he's sleeping. He's so tired, he's sleeping in a boat during a storm.

Hank Smith:	06:26	How tired is this guy?
Dr. Daniel Becerra:	06:28	I know. Exactly. His body needed rest. So he's very human, and then all of a sudden he commands the strongest forces of nature. He's incredibly powerful. So just this balance here. One of the questions that comes to my mind too, with regard to faith, you mentioned this, John, is why exactly does Jesus rebuke them for not having faith? In what should they have had faith do you think, exactly?
John Bytheway:	06:49	Yeah. Good question. Should they have done that, or should they have thought, it's okay, Jesus is on our ship, nothing's going to happen. What is he wanting of them? That's a good question.
Dr. Daniel Becerra:	07:00	Should they have had faith that Christ could or would save them, that God would save Christ? And by extension, them? Did they lack the faith necessary to still the storm themselves? And what do we make of the fact that they were surprised when Jesus actually does it? Why were they saying, save us, and then they're surprised when He saves them.
John Bytheway:	07:19	So it's like-
Dr. Daniel Becerra:	07:19	Yeah, I'm not quite sure what's going on.
Hank Smith:	07:22	There's a lot of fun details in there.
Dr. Daniel Becerra:	07:24	The reason I ask this is because, when I read this, it's like, okay, they should have had faith that Jesus would save them. I think that's the most plain reading maybe or something like that. But at the same time, I ask myself, is that something that we can have faith in as well? Can I have faith that God is always going to deliver me from temporal danger? And I don't think the answer is, yes. So what can we have faith in? If we can't have faith that God's going to save us from all the things that threaten our lives, what exactly can we have faith in?
Hank Smith:	07:49	Yeah. Because I don't think that's the meaning of it. Is, oh, don't worry, you'll never experience a failure or sinking. But in this moment he seems to suggest you should have faith that I was going to save you. Is that a faith that all of us can have?
John Bytheway:	08:03	The first principle of the gospel is not faith. It's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And sometimes what happens to us, as our lives unfold is not the way we wanted it to happen. We wanted God to do this for us and he doesn't. But sometimes we see, oh, he had something better in mind or he had something else in mind.

Doesn't seem better. But if I have faith in Christ, there's got to be... "He doeth not anything, save it be for the benefit of the world.' And there must be something better he has in mind, and that's harder kind of faith to have. But we all have stories like that.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 08:42 And that's a beautiful idea. The idea that we can have faith, not in what's going to happen, but in him and in the fact that whatever he does, it's going to be for our benefit. If he lets us sink to the bottom of the ocean, we got to have faith that that's what had to happen, or something like that. We can have faith in God being with us in our suffering, and the fact that he wants the best for us, the fact that he knows what's best for us, and in his love and justice and mercy, even if we can't have faith, that he's going to deliver us from every trial that we have.

John Bytheway: 09:07 And that's a leap to make. I think that it's easy to think faith is not in the way I want things to work out, but it's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And some of the wonderful prophets, modern and ancient that we talk about have gone through amazing trials and things. And God is really good at turning hard things into good things sometimes. And some of us are probably listening still out there asking, why me? Why this? Why now? And really backs us up against that wall of faith in Christ.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 09:37 And I think all of us have had experiences where, we're asking for deliverance of some sort and we pray, and there isn't a kind of transfer of information, or anything like that. We just feel and participate in the love of Christ. And that's what helps us to know that whatever happens, he's going to be there. Whatever happens, there's going to be this love.

Hank Smith: 09:58 Yeah. One Christian pastor wrote this, "Jesus does not take people out into the middle of the sea to drown them. He takes people across the sea so they can participate in His work of redemption. He does not stand afar off to do this. He enters the darkness, the evil, the suffering of this world, and he transforms it from within. If we are following Him, then we too will enter darkness. We need to keep Jesus in sight. We need to understand who this is asleep in the boat. The storm is not where you face the enemy. The storm is where you meet God." I like that kind of turn on it a little bit, that you meet God in these storms. This is where, like you said, something comes over you. Maybe the storm isn't calm, but something happens inside of you that changes you.

John Bytheway: 10:41 The storm is where you meet God. We all know that story of the man that was in one of those handcart companies that heard

some people critical of the timing of when they left. And he said, what was it? We met God in our extremities. Do you remember that story? He said, I ask you to stop this criticism, you know nothing what you talk about, I was there. And he said, sometimes I felt, I can go to that next hill and that's no further. And then he said, the angels would start to push me. And the price we paid, was worth it to pay because we became acquainted with God in our extremity, which is... Must have quieted. I wish I could have seen the Sunday school class after that, and said that.

- Hank Smith: 11:20 Yeah. Okay.
- John Bytheway: 11:22 Okay. Class dismissed. We can't improve on that.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 11:27 I think that raises a kind of important theological question, which is, I think all of us agree that suffering can function to help us to find intimacy with God, right? Suffering opposition that give us opportunities to be close to God. Does that mean, do you think that we should assume that all of us, all of the suffering we face is sent to us by God for that reason? So for example, did God give my son diabetes to teach him something, or to teach me something? What do you guys think? And it's not as if people for 2000 years have been asking this question. So you guys go ahead and-
- Hank Smith: 12:00 Yeah. If I want to answer it with, why suffering? Well, I got the answer right here. I remember Elder Maxwell said that, trials come in three types and one is, our own decisions, we just make our own lives hard. He said two is, some come because we are living on an earth and we signed up for a fallen world, fallen planet. And then there's loss and-
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 12:25 Earthquakes happen, cancer happens. Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 12:28 And third he said, is when we have a God who deliberately tries to teach us. But then he said something to the effect of, don't get so caught up in trying to distinguish between two and three, because it's really hard to do. Like, did God send this or is this just part of me coming to earth? Instead, just try to learn what you can from those experiences. So it's always helped me a little bit instead of trying to figure out that question using all this time and energy to figure out this question of, is this a two or is this a three? Just kind of say, well, it's a two and a half. I don't really know, but I'm going to move forward anyway.

John Bytheway: 13:04 And whatever it is though, he can always turn that to good. That's the nice part. I think even sometimes when we cause our own problems, he can still help us out of them. Even when we know, I did this to myself, that was dumb. And that's what we can count on, rather than focusing on, is this category one or two trial I'm having here?

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 13:24 And being careful also in our albeit well-intentioned efforts to comfort other people. If we were to say something to the effect of, well, God does everything for a reason, that could mess up somebody's relationship with God if they think God gave their mother cancer, or something like that. So we want to be careful about when we attribute agency to God, and the intentionality to some of the unfortunate things that happen to us.

John Bytheway: 13:45 This reminds me of years ago, I was trying to do some research on Job and I called Robert Millet, our friend and said, what have we got on Job? He said, go get this book by Philip Yancey, a fine Christian author, called the Bible Jesus Read. And he used to write for the Reader's Digest in those stories called, Drama in Real Life. I was jogging and a bear attacked me, or I was skiing and an avalanche came and... So he used to visit people in hospitals a lot to get these stories. And he said that, he interviewed them because he was a Christian. He said that most of the people said, when the Christians came to visit them, they felt worse, not better.

14:20 And the reason they felt worse is they tried to explain what God was doing. Well God did this for this reason, or God's doing this, or God needed them, or something like that. And what I loved about the story of Job is, at least at first, the friends just sit with him, and they don't try to explain it. As soon as they try to explain it, that's when everything went south.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 14:40 And that mirrors, I think how God ministers to us.

John Bytheway: 14:42 In the Book of Job, he never really does explain why he did it. He just says, "Were you there when I set everything up, when I created everything?" And it's a fascinating way to look at it that way, that we can get in trouble when we try to explain it, and instead just anchor our faith in Christ. Maybe one day we'll have a reason, but maybe we won't.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 15:01 Yeah. Excellent. So another miracle mentioned in Luke 8, is Jesus's healing of the man possessed by several evil spirits. So we're told this guy, he lived out naked among the tombs, he's not in his right mind. And sometimes people would bind him with chains as a result of his affliction. Maybe to keep him from

hurting himself or others. I don't know. And I want to point out something I found interesting here, and I'm sure there's other things that you guys can point out as well. But when the evil spirits see Jesus coming, one of them says, what have I to do with thee Jesus thou son of God most high? So right away, they see Jesus from afar off. They recognize who he is and the power that he has from his Father. And this isn't an isolated incident in the New Testament, you see the same thing occurring throughout his ministry.

15:44 So Mark records, Mark 3:11, "The evil spirits saw him. They cried out thou art the son of God." Luke elsewhere, Luke 4, the spirits call out, the holy one of God when they see Jesus. And I highlight this, because I actually went through the New Testament once and wrote down everything said by an evil spirit. And when I had the list in front of me, I was surprised at how much it looked like my testimony. Because it was essentially an articulation of knowledge of who Jesus is and what he can do. And it hit me in this moment, as important as testimony and necessary as testimony is, it shouldn't be my end goal, and it shouldn't be the ultimate measure of my discipleship. Because if the demons know the same things about Jesus that I do, and it's not doing them any good, then it can't be knowledge in and of itself that is going to transform us, right?

16:27 We have to interact with this knowledge in a way that's transformative. Elder Oaks said it better than I can. He says, "This process of conversion to becoming who we need to be, requires far more than acquiring knowledge. So the Gospel, it's more than a system of belief, it's more than a code of conduct. It's a system of becoming intended to transform us into more Christ-like persons. So testimony and obedience, these are means by which we accomplish this change that God wants to affect in us. They're not the end goal." Elder Oaks continues, "Many Bible and modern scriptures speak of the final judgment at which all persons will be rewarded according to their deeds or works or the desires of their hearts. But other scriptures enlarge upon this by referring to our being judged by the condition we have achieved." So that all has very little to do with demonic possession, I realized. But this is what kind of jumped out to me as meaningful in this passage. Is this idea that, knowledge of Christ is not as sufficient in and of itself.

17:20 And it's important to say, how is my testimony? How's his testimony and stuff like that. But it's also important to recognize, testimony is not the end goal. It's a means to an end. It's intended to get us to a point beyond itself.

John Bytheway: 17:31 Is it in the book of James, where James says that, the devils also believe and tremble and it's not just about believing, but it's about doing? Yeah. James 2:19, "Thou believest that there is one God, thou doest well, the devils also believe and tremble, but wilt thou know, O vain man that faith without works is dead." And so knowing is great, the devils know too, but what have you done with it? And that's kind of what you just said, Daniel, what are you becoming?

Hank Smith: 18:02 Right.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 18:02 And what do you think are the dangers in assuming testimony and obedience at the end goal of the discipleship? Because unfortunately, as I talk to my students about this kind of stuff, those are kind of the metrics that they use to determine how they're doing. It's like, okay, how's my testimony? Am I obeying the commandments? And again, those are good things, but what dangers do you see in assuming that those are the only things?

Hank Smith: 18:22 Yeah, that doesn't seem to be where the scriptures end anything. Seems to be, when He comes again, we'll know him because we will be like Him.

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 18:30 And I think we could also fall into the danger of maybe just going through the motions and just assuming that if we're doing these things then we're good. Moroni and Paul talk about this idea that if a man prays but not with full intent of heart, it doesn't profit him anything. If a man gives a gift and does so grudgingly, then he might as well have retained it. And this idea that, we have to have the disposition that informs obedience for it to be transformative. And that's a much taller order, I think.

John Bytheway: 18:56 My dad used to talk about the difference between being convinced and converted. Conversion's, a lifelong ongoing process and-

Dr. Daniel Becerra: 19:07 Excellent.

Hank Smith: 19:08 I think it was Elder Bednar who said, "Testimony alone is not and will not be enough to protect us in the latter-day storm of darkness and evil in which we are living. Testimony is important and necessary, but not sufficient to provide the spiritual strength and protection we need." And he says, just what you said, Daniel, "Some members of the church with testimonies have wavered and fallen away. Their spiritual knowledge and

commitment did not measure up to the challenges they faced." And then he talks about being converted unto the Lord, not just a knowledge of the truth, but being converted to the Lord, which Elder Bednar says, I understand to be conversion to the Savior and his Gospel. Testimony and conversion unto the Lord, produce firmness, steadfastness and provides spiritual protection.

- John Bytheway: 19:51 I did a study in the Book of Mormon once about the word converted just for fun because, I've used the phrase about, "oh yeah, my dad was a convert to the church." And then I discovered the Book of Mormon never uses that phrase. We're converted unto the Lord. It's a very consistent, the object of our conversion is to Christ, not to the church. And Elder D. Todd Christofferson gave a wonderful talk called, Why the Church? Where he emphasized that idea we're converted unto the Lord and we're united with the church. It's like, 3 Nephi 28, I think. And that was an, aha moment for me. The object of our conversion is to Christ, and that continuously... We're not going to arrive at that, at the end of this life. And that's why it's such a continuous thing as you're saying Daniel, it's not just about believing but trying to become like him as a process.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 20:43 And it's really informed the way I view other people too. Sometimes we think, oh, somebody isn't a member of the church or they're struggling in their testimony, or something like that, but they're just genuinely good people. If we have a family member who leaves the church and we're concerned, oh, you're not doing this. They don't believe this anymore. But at the same time, they're Christian individuals, I think it can help us see what's important. And what's important is Christ's likeness. Again, the other stuff's important too, but at the end of the day, I think what's most important is Christ's likeness.
- Hank Smith: 21:12 Who was it that said, it's not about who has your membership, it's about who has your heart.
- John Bytheway: 21:17 Stephen Robinson. This part about what is thy name? And he said, Legion. And the devils entered into the swine and they ran violently down a steep place in verse 33 of Luke 8, and were choked. So the other day I heard something that Elder Maxwell said, he called it, The Gathering Swine Law. And the Gathering Swine Law is, just because a group is moving in formation, does not mean they're going the right way.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 21:47 You could all be singing the wrong note in harmony. Right?
- Hank Smith: 21:52 That's great.

John Bytheway:	21:53	The wrong note in harmony.
Dr. Daniel Becerra:	21:54	Yeah.
Hank Smith:	21:55	I think we're ready to move on to the next one.
Dr. Daniel Becerra:	21:56	All right, so another miracle, in Luke is the woman with the issue of blood 43-48. In this story, we're told that there's a woman having an issue of blood for 12 years, which she had spent all her living upon physicians and neither could be healed of any. Some scholars suggested the woman suffered from an abnormal menstrual flow, which would've meant that this issue wasn't just physiological for her. Because according to the law of Moses, a contact with certain bodily emissions, including blood, would've made one richly unpure and able to communicate that impurity to other people. So by her touching another individual, she would've been able to communicate that impurity. Now, ritual impurity isn't a moral thing, but it is something that would've prevented somebody from going to the temple and offering sacrifices and things like that. So there would've had to have been a washing process and waiting for a few days.
	22:44	But if you're continually ritually impure, then you can't go. And anybody who comes into contact with you can't do certain things. And as a result of this, her prospects for marriage and maybe intimate relationships would've been limited or non-existent, as would her opportunities for worship at the temple. So again, it isn't just a physiological thing, this is a social issue. This has social implications for her life. We're also told that she spent a lot of money trying to get better, so maybe she's impoverished. So Jesus is in the crowd. And then, "She came behind him and touched the border of his garment and immediately her issue of blood stanchd or dried up. And Jesus said, 'Who touched me?' When everybody denied Peter and they that were with him said, 'Master the multitude, through thee and press thee, and sayest thou who touched me?'"
Hank Smith:	23:28	Everybody touched you.
Dr. Daniel Becerra:	23:30	Yeah. I know. "Somebody has touched me, for I perceive that virtue has gone out of me." So virtue, dunamis, power or force or energy, has gone out of me. "And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling and falling down before him. She declared unto him before all the people for what cause she has touched him." You have to remember, she knew she was ritually contaminating Jesus by doing this. So you can understand why she would've been afraid. "And she was healed

immediately. And he said unto her, "Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole, go in peace. So I mentioned earlier some of these miracles or signs can indicate something to us about Jesus and his character. They can represent, they can demonstrate, they can symbolize. Anything that jumps out to you here about Christ based on this story?

- John Bytheway: 24:16 There's so much in verse 12, "She had spent all her living upon physicians. Neither could be healed of any." This is a lifetime of probably isolation for her. And I love that she had the courage to touch him. Do you guys really think he didn't know who touched him or was this for everybody else?
- Hank Smith: 24:38 I'm not sure. Maybe it was for her to see what she was going to do, or to get the attention of everyone else.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 24:45 Or maybe a different question is, would it be problematic if he didn't? Like what's at stake if he didn't? If this was somehow intentional, does it complicate our theology? Would we be against the idea of him doing this somewhat unconsciously, so to speak?
- Hank Smith: 25:03 I don't think so. He's real. He's a human being. He could be like, something just happened.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 25:10 I like that. I like that he stopped. One of the points that I think the manual makes and everything else is that, he wanted her to know that it was her faith, not his garment. It wasn't that his garment has some special power or some relic from the past have some special power, which some kind of believe, but thy faith hath made thee whole, and I think that was an important point for everybody to hear, and for us too. And I think we'd all agree that, if she wasn't worthy to be healed, she could have touched him all the day long and probably not been healed, right?
- 25:43 What stands out to me is kind of the initiative of her. Again, this is the only time in scripture of which I'm aware in which Jesus performs a miracle, seemingly unintentionally. I assume he would've wanted this to happen because it happened, right? But at the same time, she had the faith to be healed and she was healed. She knew what it took to do it, and she took the initiative and it happened and Jesus ratified it. And daughter, because of your faith, you've been made whole. You did the right thing. He looks past the whole ritual impurity thing too. That wasn't even an issue for him. He's like, no, don't worry about that. You made the right choice. Which is kind of comforting, because sometimes there's a little bit of wiggle over

him when we don't want to be too legalistic to where it stunts our expressions of discipleship and faith.

- John Bytheway: 26:22 And that makes me want to ask, is that a law of Moses thing or is that a tradition of the elder's thing?
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 26:27 That's in Leviticus. So it is a Law of Moses thing, but he doesn't seem to care about it.
- Hank Smith: 26:32 Interesting.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 26:33 Yeah. Ritual impurity isn't necessarily an immoral thing, so it wouldn't have compromised his sinlessness or anything like that. Men become ritually impure too, if they come into contact with certain skin diseases or corpse or bodily emissions. So it's something that Jesus would've experienced before. So it wasn't the end of the world, but at the same time, it's like me shaking your hand when I'm sick. I wouldn't want to do it, but if I was falling off a cliff and I need somebody to help me, and I grabbed your hand, you probably wouldn't be mad at me for transferring germs. So maybe it's like the same kind of thing going on.
- John Bytheway: 27:04 What are you doing?
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 27:05 Your priorities are in the right place here.
- Hank Smith: 27:08 Yeah. I've always thought this emphasized his one by one ministry as well, because we often hear he healed crowds. He fed 5,000, and then at this moment he's like, Nope, there was one person here I need to talk to. Reminds me a lot of President Monson all the time, one by one, he'll go visit those widows. Our relationship with the Lord can be us and him. An individual relationship. It doesn't have to be the crowd and him.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 27:35 And not just that, she was trying to deliberately kind of hide herself from him, it seems like. Touch him without her knowing, and he still perceived that she was there even when she felt like maybe she wasn't worthy, or wasn't able to approach him face-to-face. And he said, no, I recognized you there and you did the right thing. In contrast to the calming the sea storm, or wherein Jesus is concerned with their physical survival, here it's much more concerned with her social survival. It's not just, he wants her to be healthy, it's the social thing again. Her thriving, living with other humans and happy and fulfilling relationships, the healing affected that as well. He cares for that stuff too, which is comforting for me.

- John Bytheway: 28:12 And when I see that verse, "Spent all her living upon physicians," that still happens today. We love what our medical knowledge, where it's at and what doctors can do, but sometimes we can't figure this out and you're suffering. And I just love the compassion that he had there.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 28:31 So the final thing I wanted to address is Jesus' lament over Jerusalem in Luke 13. You get it in 3 Nephi also. So Jesus, He finished telling the parables. Some Pharisees inform him that Herod wants to kill him, and Jesus responds with some choice words and then he says... This is verse 33, Luke 13, "I must walk today and tomorrow and the following day for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem which killest the prophets and stoneth them that are sent unto thee. How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen dost gather her brood or chicks under her wings, and you would not!" Couple of things. First, I just want to point out kind of the beauty of the imagery here. And it's worth saying that Matthew isn't unique in his portrayal of deity, or a Christ as a maternal figure.
- 29:20 Numerous biblical authors, they compare God or Christ to a mother who comforts her child, a mother bear, a mother eagle, a nursing mother, a woman in labor. So it's actually not that uncommon. And there's a kind of softness and tenderness to the image of a mother hen, I'm no chicken scientist, or whatever the actual term, a term zoologist or whatever. But I don't know much about hens. But to me, it seems like hen is an animal without much offensive or defensive capabilities. It's not like a fox or a porcupine or something like that. And her chicks are even more vulnerable and she uses her own body as a place of gathering and protection for these vulnerable chicks, despite the fact that it would make her more vulnerable. She could probably move around less, less protection. So in a sense, she's recognizing that, okay, I might be sacrificing myself in this.
- 30:15 And I just kind of love the juxtaposition between the powerful God of the universe we encounter in scripture as well as this kind of more mother hen trying to care for our chicks. Scripture does a really good way of showing us the spectrum of the multifaceted nature of Christ, and I think it does it in a way that allows us to relate to him in different ways according to our different needs. Sometimes we need the powerful God that calms the storm, and sometimes we need the mother hen. Sometimes we need to see Christ as vulnerable and like us, and in solidarity with us, in our own vulnerability. And then we kind of had this heartbreaking part, and you would not. There was no exclamation points in ancient Greek, but the author here is

trying to convey this idea of frustration, I tried so hard, and you wouldn't do it. Some of his children have chosen to make it on their own despite his consistent desire to gather them. And that's kind of the image we see here. I don't know what speaks to you, if anything in this passage?

- John Bytheway: 31:14 I underlined gather twice, because we see such a theme of scatter, gather, scatter, gather throughout the scriptures. And that's what the Savior wants to do. He wants to gather us. But I underlined, he would not, too. Always, when I see that, I like to say, what's the difference between would not and could not. And there's so many times when particularly in the Book of Mormon, you would not, and you chose. And so you do have a choice, but he's lamenting that. Why would you choose that? This is a no-brainer. Let me gather you. I know.
- Hank Smith: 31:49 I want to help you. Why won't you be helped? Yeah. I love the imagery. I think Christ taking on the feminine there is very touching. Kind of like when Isaiah does it, when he says, I will not forget you, like a woman doesn't forget her newborn child.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 32:06 Isaiah actually, he says, "Even if a woman were to forget her newborn child, which she wouldn't-
- Hank Smith: 32:11 I would not.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 32:11 Implicitly, I will not for you. He's like, this impossibility, if hypothetically speaking that were to happen, I still wouldn't. So it just goes beyond the nursing mother.
- John Bytheway: 32:22 This gathering, a metaphor, Hank, that you mentioned is in 3 Nephi too, before he comes. And he does a past, present future with, how often would I have gathered you in the past? How often will I gather you in the future?
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 32:36 So John's going to read the 3 Nephi reference for us. You see that the lament is extended in 3 Nephi and I'm wondering if it adds anything that we don't see necessarily in Luke and Matthew. So pay attention to that. It's three times as long. I think.
- John Bytheway: 32:48 Before Jesus actually appeared in person, they heard a voice in 3 Nephi 9 and 10. I think in 3 Nephi 10:4, "O ye people of these great cities which have fallen, who are descendants of Jacob. Ye who are of the house of Israel, how often have I gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and have nourished you. And again, how often would I have gathered you

as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings? Yea, O ye people of the house of Israel who have fallen. Yea, O ye people of the house of Israel ye that dwell at Jerusalem as ye that have fallen. Ye, how often would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens and you would not. O ye house of Israel whom I have spared, how often will I gather you, as a hen gatherer her chickens under her wings if he will repent and return onto me with full purpose of heart?

- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 33:40 So you feel anything different like rhetorically what's go... The fact that you have these different tenses, I gathered you, I will gather you or would've gathered you.
- John Bytheway: 33:50 Yeah. Kind of a constancy of purpose there, huh? This is what I do. I want to gather you, I want to protect you.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 33:57 It seems like he's saying, I've done everything I can. I've done this, I'll continue to do it. I'll do it as... My hand is always outreached. Just take it, right?
- Hank Smith: 34:07 Yeah. This is from Jane Allis-Pike, she wrote an article called, How Often Would I Have Gathered you as a hen gathereth Her Chickens, the power of the hen metaphor in 3 Nephi.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 34:17 That's Dana's wife. Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 34:20 Christ's hen metaphor is explained further in Alma's open invitation, that whosoever will, may come and partake of the waters of life freely. And whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come. Like a mother hen Jesus Christ is ever concerned for the physical and spiritual needs of his children. And because his infinite atonement stretches wide as eternity, he will always remain capable of providing shelter and protection to all who willingly come unto him. He promises and affirms how often will I gather you. Future tense. It should be also recognized that, even though this metaphor pertains to God's dealing with House of Israel, his efforts here and now at gathering, including his children within his covenant are boundless. All who are willing to be baptized in the name of the Lord as witnessed before him, that they have entered into a covenant with him will be immediately enfolded and included in his loving arms.
- 35:17 Then we can go into scripture and look at how often Nephi says, will circle me about in the robes of righteousness. It feels very similar to this idea of shelter me, keep me safe. I've often asked

people, I'm teaching, to think about the endowment ceremony, "Wilt thou encircle me about in the robes of thy righteousness."

- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 35:38 And not just that, going back to your comment about the inclusivity he's addressing, Oh, Jerusalem thou that killest the prophets. He's not saying, oh, all you special righteous ones, he's saying, no, even you guys that are trying to kill the prophets. How often would I have gathered you? He's reaching out to the-
- Hank Smith: 35:54 People, we would say, wow, that's an evil thing to do.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 35:57 A repentance message in there.
- Hank Smith: 35:59 I noticed in verse 35, of Luke 13, he does not like to see the consequences that come. Your house is left unto you desolate. Like, oh no-
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 36:09 You end up with nothing.
- Hank Smith: 36:10 You don't see what's coming down this road. And you feel that way as a parent often. I've seen this road. I know how this story ends. Don't go down this road. Please don't go down this road. The invitation is always there. Come back.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 36:26 Right.
- Hank Smith: 36:27 Before we let you go, I think our listeners would love to hear your journey as both a scholar and a faithful Latter-day Saint. What has that journey been like for you?
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 36:37 It's a hard question to answer. I didn't grow up wanting to do this. I didn't really have a good understanding of how college worked and things like that, when I was in high school. My plan was just either be in a band or join the military. And I started out going to community college, and I was studying fine art photography. And I did that for a couple of years, and then I went on my mission. I just kind of fell in love with the scriptures, and I had some experiences on my mission in which I kind of realized the disparity or the gap between who I was, and who I wanted to be. I would see the goodness in the people I ministered to, and in my fellow missionaries, and the saints we served. And I would just want that, and I'd be able to perceive keenly and painfully the difference between who I was, and the kind of ideals I aspire to.

- 37:17 I also happened to have a companion I didn't get that well along with, and we didn't talk that much in the morning. So I just read the standard works and all the institute manuals and seminary manuals associated with them, and just kind of again, fell in love with the scriptures, and I decided that I wanted to be a scientist of virtue, which is to say if I wanted to be educated in anything, I wanted to be educated in how to bridge that gap between who I am and who I want to be. So I got back and I changed my major to biblical studies, and as I went through graduate school, I started focusing my research on moral formation. I studied how Christians understand perfection, and the means by which they conform themselves to those ideals. And one of the things I learned throughout the course of my studies is just that, there is so much goodness in other religions.
- 37:59 There is so much goodness in studying. So I specialize in the writings of ancient Christian authors who lived after Jesus during the time that we typically refer to as the great apostasy. And there's just such gems of goodness and truth in that kind. And I see my scholarly endeavors as a kind of natural outgrowth of my commitment to be a disciple of Jesus, which is to say, we're all different and God has given us all different gifts and inclinations and desires, and He's given me the gift to be able to appreciate beauty in whatever form. I see it in ancient Christian literature, and the morality of monks living in Egypt and 400 A.D. And it's beautiful to me and it speaks to me. It speaks to my soul in the same way that I assume many of you have, or you guys have ancestors that are pioneers and things like that.
- 38:44 I don't have that kind of background, but I do see in my ancient Christian the people I study, I do see a kind of spiritual kinship there. Graduate school didn't do anything to challenge my testimony. If anything, it strengthened me. It gave me additional tools to be able to bring to scripture and to understand it better, to ask new questions and just the more I learned, or even when I learned things I didn't agree with, or that didn't sit well with me sometimes, those were opportunities to be intimate with Christ, opportunities to reach out to him and say, look, this is something that I might struggle with a little bit, and help me out. And He stepped in, and I didn't always have all the answers obviously, but I felt him there and that was enough.
- 39:25 I think the more you learn too, especially about the scriptures, the more you realize that you don't know. And it's that kind of hunger and motivation and curiosity, these gifts that I've seen God to give me, they kind of keep me going and keep me

reaching. And whenever I screw up, which I do fairly regularly, they keep me turning back to God. So...

- Hank Smith: 39:43 That's perfect. That was beautiful. We loved it. What a great day, John Bytheway. We've been in the parables, and the miracles. Nothing better than spending time in that, and a Bible scholar like Daniel. Just a lot of fun.
- John Bytheway: 39:56 And great questions that you were asking us, Daniel, that was fun to kind of talk about it together. What do you see in there? And we all discovered something, so thank you for the way you did that.
- Dr. Daniel Becerra: 40:07 Yeah, and thanks for opening my eyes to some things I didn't see before, and I think the way we excavate the text is through questions and just being comfortable to talk about it and acknowledge what we don't know and testify for what we do, and come together and learn together.
- Hank Smith: 40:21 Yeah. Beautiful. We want to thank Dr. Daniel Becerra for being with us today. We want to thank our executive producer Shannon Sorensen, our sponsors David and Verla Sorensen, and of course we want to remember our founder, the late Steve Sorensen. We hope you'll join us next week. We have more coming up in the New Testament on followHIM.
- 40:40 Today's transcripts, show notes, and additional references are available on our website. Followhim.co. Followhim.co. And you can watch the podcast on YouTube with additional videos on Facebook and Instagram. All of this is absolutely free, so be sure to share with your family and friends. To reach those who are searching for help with their Come, Follow Me study, please subscribe, rate, review, or comment on the podcast, which makes the podcast easier to find. Thank you. We have an amazing production crew we want you to know about David Perry, Lisa Spice, Jamie Neilsen, Will Stoughton, Krystal Roberts and Ariel Cuadra. Thank you to our amazing production team.

WHY DOES JESUS SPEAK IN PARABLES?



- Hank Smith: 00:04 Hello, welcome to another followHIM Favorites. My name is Hank Smith. I'm here with the incredible John Bytheway. Hello, John Bytheway.
- John Bytheway: 00:11 Hi, how are you? I'm feeling incredible.
- Hank Smith: 00:14 You are incredible. You know the drill on followHIM Favorites. We're going to take just a single question from this week's lesson to analyze. The question this week, John, is, what's up with Jesus and parables? Why does Jesus like parables so much? It depends on how you define a parable, but I think there's around a total of about 55 parables in the four gospels. So, Jesus is always talking in parables. He's always telling stories. Why do you think he did that?
- John Bytheway: 00:40 See, one of the best answers for that is given by Jesus himself in Matthew 13. Right after he tells the parable of the sower, the disciples say, "Why are you speaking in parables?"
- Hank Smith: 00:50 Yeah, "What are you doing?"
- John Bytheway: 00:51 He explains the calling of Isaiah of all things, that some will see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, be converted and be healed. And then he says, after he kind of explains, the Bible Dictionary, I think, says both to reveal and to conceal. But those who come up afterwards and say, "Why are you doing this?" He says, "And hear now the parable of the sower," and he gives them more. So, I think the key is read it, think about it, ponder about it, and you'll get even more. I suppose that some heard the first parable and went, "Huh," and walked away. But those who actually thought about it got more. And I love them because they're fun, they're visual, they're stories. You can picture it in your mind and understand it more than just statements or principles or doctrines. And so, I love the parables. But what do you think, Hank? Why would he do that?
- Hank Smith: 01:43 This, to me, is something that is miraculous. These stories that Jesus told 2000 years ago, we still talk about them and get so

much out of them. The parable of the prodigal son, the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, the parable of the Good Samaritan, Lazarus and the rich man, the king's feast. All of these stories that aren't that long. They're not page-turners. You're not like, "Ooh, what happens next? Where does he plant the seeds next?" These stories have lasted through millennia, and they're going to keep going. So, in the Bible dictionary, it says, "The parable reveals to the hearer gospel truths exactly in proportion to their faith and intelligence." So, you hear a parable or read a parable, you get nothing out of it.

- John Bytheway: 02:27 What does that say about you?
- Hank Smith: 02:28 Yeah, what does that mean? Yeah. So, we dive into these parables and we start to look at the details. The fun of the parables, I think, is in the details. If you just read the story and say, "Oh, okay, a guy planted some seeds. Some of them grew and some of them didn't," that's not the parable. Go in the details. Look at the specific soils, what he says about them, and try to analyze, "What is that? What does he mean?"
- John Bytheway: 02:50 And how do I grow roots so that I can have fruit one day?
- Hank Smith: 02:55 Yeah. I want to be the good ground. There's four different types of ground. I want to be to be the good ground. How can I be the good ground? And really, after the parable of the sower, you can really analyze your own heart and make some changes in your life and in your personal worship that really can have influence for the rest of your life.
- John Bytheway: 03:11 In fact, the detail's there. He even tells us what the weeds are. The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and in Mark, the lust of other things. So, we can actually go, "Ooh, do I have any of those weeds?"
- Hank Smith: 03:23 "How do I weed my life?" Most people have had the trial of trying to grow something with rocks all the way around and pulling out those rocks, and how hard that is, and sometimes the rock is huge and you just got to dig it out and take it out. And how long that takes and how difficult it is can play into how you feel about this story. You can say, "I know I've taken rocks out of the ground. That's hard to do. That's really hard to do. How am I going to get these things out of my own life? How am I going to get these sins or addictions or problems or ideologies, how am I going to get them out of my heart so I can grow deep roots?"

John Bytheway: 03:55 So, I think what you're saying there is just what Jesus said, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." So those who really want to hear something and are willing to think about it and look at the details, like you said, ponder it, even pray about it, they're going to get more out of it. And so, I love that he spoke in parables. They're some of my favorite stories.

Hank Smith: 04:12 Me too. I could spend all day just reading through the parables and talking about them with friends like you, John, and saying, "What are you seeing here? What does he mean?" And it's amazing to me that I've read them dozens of times and still people will show me things I've never thought of.

John Bytheway: 04:26 Yeah, me too.

Hank Smith: 04:27 Absolutely wonderful. So, love the parables. Learn to love the parables, and you're going to get to know the Lord, and the parables of Jesus can really change your life. We hope you'll join us on our full podcast. We're talking about the parables this week with Dr. Daniel Becerra. Come over. It's called followHIM. You can get it wherever you get your podcasts. And then come back here next week, we'll do another followHIM Favorites.