

Johnny Appleseed vs Alvin and the Chipmunks

By Mary J. Ferrill



I grew up on a 26-acre tree farm in Ashford, Connecticut. You're probably wondering what I mean by "tree farm." My father was a forester: he planted over 100 varieties of trees on our property and he supported *Tree City USA*, the organization that instituted the National Arbor Day Foundation. My favorite trees were of the apple variety, especially Macintosh. I used to love picking season and the joy of selecting the perfect apple each day to take to school. During the off season, I would grab one from the cellar or enjoy some apple cider. That experience has spoiled me to the extent that I can no longer eat grocery store apples; they taste like plastic fake fruit to me.

Having such a fondness for apples, my most beloved children's story growing up was Johnny Appleseed. In case you're not familiar with the story, it is about a young pioneer from the early 1800s who loved God and apples and wanted to share both with people. He traveled around with a bag of apple seeds on one arm and a Bible in the other, sowing apple seeds while sharing the Good News. The children's book states that "Johnny left the shadow of his deeds behind. The shadow grew until it stretched across the whole frontier. And in that shadow everywhere were love – and faith – and the apple tree." The Johnny Appleseed story reminds me of the *Parable of the Sower* in the book of Matthew 13:1-8 (NIV):

"That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

In the Bible story, we are the Sower (or Johnny Appleseed). Our job is to spread the truth of God's Word. In the parable, there are four types of places upon which seeds can fall. When sowing, we might not realize where our seeds have fallen. Jesus provides some insight as He explains the meaning of the parable in Matthew 13:18-23 (NIV):

"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

Regardless of where our seeds land, we must continue to generously spread them and leave the conviction (growth of the seed) to God. As a child, I didn't realize that the reason I liked the Johnny Appleseed story wasn't just because it was about apple trees and God's love, but it was also about God's design for all of us.

Now let's turn our attention to Alvin and the Chipmunks. Alvin was another favorite character of mine when I was a child. He lived in the forest amongst the trees, and gathered and stored nuts and seeds to survive the cold winters. He also sang funny songs with other chipmunks in a comical falsetto voice, but let's focus on the nuts and seeds. Instead of spreading the seeds around so that they would produce more trees, Alvin hid them away... much like the parable of the talents found in Matthew 25:14-30 (NKJV):

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had



received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' "Then he who had

received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

The Parable of the Talents complements the Parable of the Sower. Both urge us to share the blessings God gave us for His glory and to direct people to Him, rather than hoarding them for ourselves in pursuit of our own gain.

What are the talents and spiritual gifts that God has entrusted to you? If you are unsure, you can read about them in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, and 1 Peter 4:10-11. There are also websites that provide surveys and assessments to assist in the discovery of your spiritual gift. We should not totally rely upon those tests, but they can be helpful. You can also ask someone who knows you very well – they can often recognize your abilities more objectively. Whatever your talents and spiritual gifts might be, are you using them to further God's Kingdom? Or are you keeping them to yourself as a private matter? We can all strive to make better use of our unique God-given talents and gifts, and to spread the Good News to a dark and hurting world that is desperately in need of light. God designed our specific talents and gifts to perfectly match the unique purpose He created for each of us. It is by using our talents and gifts in pursuit of that purpose – and being empowered by the Holy Spirit – that we are able to shine for God's glory. In this regard, we can all benefit from the simple lessons in those two children's stories: Johnny Appleseed and Alvin the Chipmunk. Let's make it our business to spread seeds of faith by using our spiritual gifts and talents – not hoarding them – so that Jesus may say the words we all long to hear: *Well done, good and faithful servant.*

Why Study the Book of Revelation?

By Nena Lindrose and Daniel Spadaro

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,² who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.³ Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near." (Revelation 1:1-3, NKJV)

Have you wondered what is going on in our world today? Have world events

caused you to ask, *God where are You in all this?* Do you question how anything good can come from what is happening? If so, have you considered that the book of Revelation provides answers to these questions?

Recently, I began to wonder if I'm alone in my resistance to read and study the book of Revelation. In exploring this question, I concluded there are other Christians who also feel the book of Revelation is mostly symbolic, difficult to understand and unnecessary for ordinary people

to read. However, God says in Revelation 1:3, *"Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near."* This is the only book in the Bible where God says He will bless you if you read it and take it to heart.

Last fall I began a weekly Bible study at Calvary Church in Jupiter, Florida. Each Sunday, the teaching covered one chapter in the book of Revelation. Prior to this study, I had never taken