

GOOD SOIL

Matthew 13:1-23 & Luke 8

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach.

3 And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them.

Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched.

And since they had no root, they withered away.

7 Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

8 Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 He who has ears, let him hear."

10 Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"

And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

13 This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled saying: "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive."

15 For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, or they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'

16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

18 "Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

20 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

23 As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, in another thirty."

In rural Palestine

- Seed was sown in broadcast fashion PRECEEDING the PLOWING
- The sower DELIBERATELY sowed the seed in the path, in rocky places, and among thorns as well as in the good soil.
- IF the plowing was DELAYED, they got the results Jesus mentioned in this parable.

The WORK of the SOWER – from Charles Spurgeon

“The preacher of the gospel is like the sower. He does not make his seed; it is given him by his divine Master. No man could create the smallest grain that ever grew upon the earth, much less the celestial seed of eternal life. The minister goes to his Master in secret, and asks him to teach him his gospel, and thus he fills his basket with the good seed of the kingdom. He then goes forth in his Master's name and scatters precious truth. If he knew where the best soil was to be found, perhaps he might limit himself to that which had been prepared by the plough of conviction; but not knowing men's hearts, it is his business to preach the gospel to every creature—to throw a handful on the hardened heart, and another on the mind which is overgrown with the cares and pleasures of the world. He has to leave the seed in the care of the Lord who gave it to him, for he is not responsible for the harvest, he is only accountable for the care and industry with which he does his work. If no single ear should ever make glad the reaper, the sower will be rewarded by His Master if he had planted the right seed with careful hand. Our duty is not measured by the character of our hearers, but by the command of our God. We are bound to preach the gospel, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.”

The kingdom of God broke into the whole world when Jesus came. It was the SEED that fell on many different kinds of soil in the human heart. The reception of the seed depends upon the receiver. The message then was received in a variety of ways just as it is today. The number of FRUITLESS HEARERS was very great then even among those who heard Jesus speak in person.

Jesus often used parables or stories to relate spiritual truths to things they were familiar with in their every-day lives. In this case he illustrated the Word of God by calling it seed. The Soil represented the receptivity or lack of receptivity of the human heart to receive the Seed or the Word of God.

Today's scripture in Matthew focuses on the SOIL rather than on the sower. Although there was no harvest resulting from three of the four types of soil, this parable points out that a person's heart, like soil, is CAPABLE OF IMPROVEMENT and CAPABLE of BEARING GOOD FRUIT.

This parable calls to our attention the fact that although the soil is not the way it SHOULD be or the way that it CAN be, it can still be made into productive soil. We can relate the soil of our hearts to this parable and know that change can begin to take place in spite of the

- hardness of our heart
- the shallowness of our experience
- the many thorns that choke out the Word in our lives

Proverbs 24:30 says, “I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyards of the man who lacks judgment: thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds and the

stone wall was in ruins. I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw.”

Today, I believe that we can learn some valuable truths from this parable that Jesus told to the crowds along the shore. The effect of the Word is dependent on the state of the heart. There are many hindrances to people profiting by the Word of the gospel. In so many people it comes short of its end purpose to produce a harvest. Let's think about where we are today. At one time or another we will see ourselves in each of the soil categories. We may say, “Well, I'm a Christian and the seed of the gospel is falling entirely on good soil. However, we may not realize what is really taking place in our lives. Let us take a look and see if we can identify some things that need to be improved and where we need some Miracle Gro in order to produce a better crop. If we find ourselves in one of the soils that is not producing a good crop, let us know that there is HOPE for us—Jesus can add the Miracle Gro to make us what we need to be. He can change the hardness of our hearts, he can give us the stability and root system we need, and he can help us to pull out the thorns that are robbing us of abundant life.

1. The Pathway: It was a common thing for the paths to run through and around the unfenced fields. Any seed that fell on the paths never entered the ground and was trampled down or the birds came and ate it. The path was so packed down that the seed couldn't begin to get into the ground.

Matthew Henry says, “Hearts all unbroken and hard are not fit soil for saving truth” because people don't pay attention to it and don't understand it. However faithful the preacher or the Sunday school teacher or person who sows the seed of the gospel--the EFFECT of the preaching depends upon the HEARER'S HEART. It may be hardened and packed down so that the seed can't get through to them.

There is an Old Testament scripture that speaks of this kind of hardened, packed down ground along the pathways.

Hosea 10:12 says to the people, “Break up your UNPLOWED ground for it is time to seek the Lord until he comes.” This scripture shows us that in spite of the hardness of people's hearts today, it is not hopeless. Something can be done with even packed down soil--something can be done to “plow up” the hard, callused soil of hearers hearts. You might know people who have no interest in spiritual things whatsoever. You might say, “nothing is getting through to them.” The gospel message is not getting below the outer surface.

What will break up the “fallow” or unplowed ground? Many things happen in a person's life that cause the hardness to begin to break up. It is not an overnight process. Most of all the Holy Spirit begins to bring about changes in the outer surface as prayer is constantly sent up for people. In Old Testament history, “Birds” coming to steal the seed is likened to Satan coming to steal the “Word” from people once they do hear it.

Mark 4:15 says, "Some people are like seed along the path where the Word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the Word that was sown in them."

As Christians we must be just as alert to losing out on receiving the seed into our hearts because we have allowed our hearts to become hardened and callused by indifference and apathy. Are we guilty of taking a "ho hum" attitude toward the things of God?

"It's only church. Don't have to go today. It's not all that important. I can go to church anytime. Got other things to do.--the surface of our heart becomes hardened and when we do hear the Word, it doesn't effect us one way or another anymore. Satan quickly comes in and steals what we have just heard.

Jesus says in John 10:10, "the thief comes only to STEAL and KILL and DESTROY; I have come that [you] may have life and have it to the full."

It is up to us to give proper value to the things of God--to jealously guard the Word as we receive it--to plow up the unplowed ground that is in our lives. In what ways is your heart like the soil along the pathway? In what ways have you become a little bit hardened and indifferent?

2. ROCKY SOIL: This represents soil that is OK but it has a lot of rocks just beneath the surface. The seed takes root quickly in the shallow soil but there is not a secure root structure. People often go to revivals and crusades and receive the word in a thoughtless way. Maybe they are too eager to receive but it doesn't last over the long haul. They hear and receive with joy and at first give promise of a good harvest but something happens. When trouble or persecution comes, they quickly fall away. These "temporary" disciples are numerous in times of revival when things are going great. Sometimes people receive the Word and for a time are doing great. Then they become "offended" by something--could be just little things. Going to quit the church. The sun beats down and the plant withers and dies out. There is no moisture. The plant is scorched by the heat? Why? Because there are no roots.

Luke 8:6 says, "Some [seed] fell on rock and when it came up the plants withered because they had no moisture."

Hearts SUPERFICIALLY impressed are apt to receive the truth with readiness and even with joy, but the heat of TRIALS or PERSECUTION dries up their interest and withers all the hasty promise of fruit. Many people are glad to hear a good sermon and they hear it and don't turn their backs on it. Yet they don't profit from it. Their lives are not changed by it. They are pleased but not changed. I believe too many people today just want a little "taste" of Christianity.

STORY: One woman decided to send her two sons to a Christian school so they could get a "little taste" of Christian values.

Matthew Henry says, “many may melt under the Word but not be melted down.” Many “taste” and endure for awhile but don’t ENDURE TO THE END.

Mark 13:13 says, “...but he that shall endure UNTO THE END, the same shall be saved.”

Galatians 5:7 says, “You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?”

Have you made a firm decision to serve the Lord over the long haul--rain or shine. Putting your roots down firmly in good soil? Getting the rocks out of the way? Establishing good habits that will help you to grow a good root system that you will not wither and die out when the trials come? Today where do you find rocks in your life that are preventing your roots from going down deeply and securely?

3. Thorny Soil: This represents the ground that has not been thoroughly cleansed of the thistles. There is softness enough in the soil and depth but OTHER THINGS draws the moisture and richness away from the plant--and it starves the plant out. This speaks of the cares of the world coming in and choking out the plants that are trying to grow making the plants unfruitful. Today in our society there are so many choices--these things use up so much of our time that only the leftover time remains for spiritual things. Our spiritual lives are being choked out so subtly that sometimes we are not aware of what is even happening. Although there is some growth taking place with a promise of fruit--it never materializes.

Hebrews 6:7, 8 says, “Lands that drink in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful for those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God...but land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed.”

Don’t you want your life to receive the BLESSING of God? Don’t you want to know that your life is producing a harvest of good things--not just thorns and thistles?

What cares of this world are using up all your time. It could be lots of things and not necessarily bad things. The DECEITFULNESS of riches means TRUSTING IN riches or putting our CONFIDENCE in them so that we are no longer trusting God very much. When we allow thorns to take over our life, we have never allowed the message of the gospel to be a priority. Too many other things are the priorities and too many other commitments. Wrong priorities choke out the struggling plant and it never matures.

Jeremiah 4:3 says, “Break up your fallow ground and sow not among thorns.”

What thorns are choking out your spiritual life today making you unfruitful in your Christian experience?

4. The Good Ground: hears and accepts and produces. It doesn’t say that the good ground doesn’t have stones or thorns in it but it is ground that has been cultivated and is

CONTINUOUSLY being tended to. The ground is jealously guarded from allowing anything to come in and take over, choking out the intended harvest.

Our spiritual life is an ongoing process. You can't stay away from church weeks at a time and expect to see the harvest spoken of here--30, 60, 100 times as much as was sown. The soil of your heart can't just be neglected and expected to automatically produce a good crop.

How do we know that we have good ground? John 15:5, 8 answers this question. "If a [person] remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. This is my Father's glory that you BEAR MUCH FRUIT showing yourselves to be my disciples."

The soil that produces only a small crop is still called good. The 30 fold small crop is OK as well as the 60 or 100 fold crop.

CONCLUSION: The kingdom of God advances slowly with varied responses. What kind of soil are you today? Remember that soil can be cultivated, Miracle Gro added and with patience and change a crop can be produced. We must renounce the things that choke off the fullness of life. We must follow through with our commitments over the long haul. We must say "no" to what crowds out God and "Yes" to a way of life that will begin producing a good harvest