

The Story – The Sower and the Soil

I said last Sunday was the last look at the parables of Jesus but I felt drawn by the Holy Spirit to take a look at one final parable. Turn with me to **Matthew 13** and I want us to look at what we call the parable of the sower. I've actually called this the sower and the soil because as you will see, it's not just about the sower of seed, it is actually a story about four kinds of soil. Let's take a look at the parable. This parable is also told in **Mark 4** and in **Luke 8**. Let's read from Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23.

This is one of the few parables that we don't have to speculate concerning the meaning. Jesus explains it to his disciples and to us. All we really need to do is make application to our lives. But let's make sure we understand. Luke tells us clearly the seed sown is the word of God. The farmer is Jesus, or anyone sowing the word of God, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and the seed of God's word is sown into four different kinds of soil.

A quick word about the sower of the seed. **The sower didn't prejudge the soil.** He didn't withhold seed because he thought the soil lacked potential. He didn't drop a seed here and there, he was scattering the seed. He wasn't test-marketing the area to see where it had the best chance for success, he was just sowing seed. How can you know when the conditions are right in a human heart to receive the seed of God's word? You can't! You never know when or where the seed is going to find the right kind of soil. We look at people and judge them by their appearance or their past and think, "there is no point in talking to them about Jesus, no point in inviting them to church. They won't listen to me." Sow the seed and let God take care of the harvest. You never know what kind of soil the seed might fall into.

Sowers aren't necessarily called to be successful, they are called to be faithful. The sower had a responsibility to sow the seed. That was all that was asked of him. The soil in a sense has a responsibility to receive the seed and to allow it to germinate and produce a harvest. **The problem isn't with the seed it's with the soil!** Look at the four soils Jesus mentions.

The seed on the path. The first soil was actually the path around the field. It had been walked on and packed down until it was hardened. When a seed fell on it, it never even got down into the soil, instead the birds immediately came and ate the seed. Jesus says for some people, the message of the kingdom is like this seed on the path. It is never received or understood. It appears their heart may have been hardened by life, by circumstances. Their attitude and heart is just closed off. The word is preached but they never even consider that God

is real and that he might be trying to talk to them and before they even give God a chance, the enemy comes in and snatches away the message that was sown.

You may be here because your parents or spouse or friend insisted that you come to church. Or you may be here because it's the right thing to do, but the last thing on your mind is that God might want to talk to you! So you are checking facebook, texting friends, surfing the web on our wifi, taking a nap, reading a book trying to act like you're reading along in the bible, making excuses. "Church is boring. His sermons are boring. He talks over my head. He doesn't connect with me." All of that could be true, but it might be like saying, "The seed that farmer was sowing just wasn't any good. That's why nothing grows. That's why there's no crop." Remember the problem isn't the seed because the seed is God's word. There can be something wrong with me, the sower, but there is nothing wrong with the seed. Understand, from the standpoint of the parable, the problem is not with the seed, it's with the soil.

So we need to ask ourselves, **"Have I prepared the soil of my heart to receive the life-changing, life-giving word of God?"** How do I do that? How about starting here: **Believe God has something to say to you.** Listen for the voice of God. He wants to save you and give you a life worth living! God has something he wants to do in you and for you. **Put yourself in a place where you are more likely to hear from God.** In other words, open your heart and tune in. Sitting at home wallowing in self pity is probably not the place. Partying at a club may not be the place. In church on a Sunday morning, praying and worshiping and listening to God's word being taught...that might be a good place. Taking time to pray and read your bible, that might be a good place. Remember, the seed is okay, check the soil!

Understand as well the life is in the seed, not in the soil. God wants to plant the seed of His living word in you so it and you will come alive. The seed of God's word, God's truth, will grow and change your life and produce fruit in your life. It's amazing what God wants to do. Will you break up that hard soil so the seed can get in there and start to grow? Will you guard against things that harden your heart and keep you from hearing God? Listen and pay attention because God has something to say to you! Don't let your heart be hardened.

The seed on rocky soil. The second soil Jesus mentioned was a rocky place where there was just a thin layer of soil on top of the rock. It was impossible for the seed to put down deep roots because there wasn't enough soil there. Jesus compares this to people who receive the word of God with joy when they first hear it, but they don't allow the word to take up root in

their life. In other words, their heart may not be hardened, but it may be shallow. The commitment isn't there. No discipleship. People go from saying, "This is great, I've found Jesus" to thinking, "This is hard. Jesus expects me to take up a cross and follow him and obey his word." The sacrifice is too much. Or Jesus says a time of testing comes, or a time of persecution comes, and these folks give up and fall away. They move on to the next thing.

People receive Jesus as their Savior thinking this will fix all the problems. They are excited about church and new friends, but trouble comes and they are thinking, "God was supposed to take care of all the trouble now that I'm a Christian. Why am I having problems? What's the point in living for Jesus?"

Trouble is going to come to everyone. There are still consequences to your actions, but the final consequence to those who refuse to repent and live for Jesus will be judgment and hell for eternity. The final consequence for those who repent of their sins and live for Jesus will be forgiveness and heaven for eternity. The point is, trouble is going to come so you had better dig down through the rock. Repent, pray, commit your life to Jesus. Dig deep, get your roots planted deeply in the word of God so when trouble or persecution comes, you will hold on to your faith and keep serving Jesus.

The seed sown among thorns. The third soil Jesus mentions is rich enough to support the good seed, but the soil hasn't been cared for. There are so many weeds and thorns that have been allowed to grow that they compete for water and nutrients. Over time they choke the life out of the good seed and keep it from bearing fruit. Jesus tells us what those thorns are. He mentions, "**worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth**". Mark's gospel adds "**desires for other things**." Luke mentions "**riches and pleasures**". These are some of the thorns that keep the seed from maturing and being productive.

Jesus often cautioned his listeners about the cares of this life and their ability to pull us away from our devotion to him. The things of this life compete with the things of God for our time, attention, and our devotion. Before we know it we allow our life to get out of balance. Believe me when I tell you God has good things for you. He desires that your life be full of his blessings and that your life would bear the fruit of His Spirit, qualities like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Instead of desiring what God has for us and wants for us, we start desiring what we want. We want to please ourselves. We don't care that God has the best for us, we want the shiny imitation stuff the world offers. As we

move out of balance we allow the scales to tip in favor of what pleases us rather than what pleases God. The life of His Holy Spirit, the fruit that he would produce in our life, the good things he has for us, all of that starts getting choked to death by the thorns we allow to grow and thrive and dominate our life.

Consider the things that choke the life of God in us. Are you tolerating things in your life that you know are contrary to the will of God for you? Those things are working against what God wants for you. They are working against God's best for you. It's time to get the thorns out of your life. Those thorns, those sins, regardless of how insignificant they may seem at the time, eventually they'll choke the life of God out of you! They'll destroy you. Get rid of the thorns!

Jesus speaks of the deceitfulness of wealth. How does wealth deceive? Wealth deceives by making you think you have all you need apart from God. You don't need God or his salvation because you've got millions in the bank. Your future is secure. Wealth deceives you into believing it's about what you have in this life. It blinds you to the reality of your poverty because without God and his saving grace, you have nothing! All your wealth is temporary and will be gone someday. Don't be deceived by temporary or temporal things. It's the things of God and your relationship with Christ that will last for eternity.

Don't be deceived by wealth, by the cares and worries of this life. Don't be deceived by seeking after pleasures, by allowing anything to pull your life out of balance. Don't let things distract and pull your attention away from God and obedience to his word. Brian White said, **"Anything that takes too much, controls too much, costs too much, or consumes too much can distract from God's good plans for you."** ...Brian White. Keep the soil of your life, your heart free from thorns and sin and anything that will choke the life of God out of your life.

Don't let any desire, for anything or anyone, crowd your love for Jesus out of your life. **If you are satisfied with your relationship with God, but never satisfied with your material possessions, something is choking the life of God out of you!** May God help us to be satisfied with what we have in the way of the world's goods but always seeking more and more of Jesus!

The seed on good soil. Some of the seed fell on good soil, soil that was prepared and eager to receive it and accept it and the result was a fruitful and abundant harvest! Jesus said, **"But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."** Matthew 13:23

I want to prepare the soil of my life, that is my heart and my mind and my spirit, I want to prepare myself to be good soil. That means when the seed is sown, when God speaks to me I will be quick to hear and receive it so the enemy can't snatch it away. I want my heart prepared so that when the seed is sown I will do all I can to see that its' roots grow deeply into my heart and life. I will obey God's word and honor him so that his word is planted deeply. Then when trouble or persecution comes my faith will remain strong. I want the soil of my life prepared so that the thorns and weeds are pulled out. I want my heart and mind and life cleared of the stuff that would distract me from serving God with all my heart. I want the thorns and sins out of my life so I can bear fruit.

Jesus said in Matthew 7 **“Thus by their fruit you will recognize them.” Matthew 7:20.** The fruit we bear reveals the character of the tree. Jesus said good trees bear good fruit and bad trees bear bad fruit. We are all supposed to be bearing fruit. If the seed of the gospel is planted in our heart and life but it isn't bearing fruit, there is a problem! It's not the seeds' fault, it's our fault! We need to get the soil right. We need to get the thorns out. We need to get the roots planted deeply. We need to be quick to allow that seed to germinate and grow in our life.

There may be different and varying amounts of fruit produced in each person -- some thirty, some sixty, some one hundred, but all of us are to be producing fruit. Don't you want to be fruitful? If you will prepare your heart and allow the word of God to take root in your life; if you will give God the place of prominence in your life, God will transform your life and make you productive and fruitful, beyond what you could imagine. 30, 60, even 100 times what you might have expected. God has something good in store. Prepare your heart. Guard it from sin and thorns and distractions. Commit your life to Jesus and let his word get deep into your heart and life and then watch the life of God and the fruit of His Spirit grow with abundance and blessing in your life.

How about if we do some soil preparation this morning? Examine the soil of your heart. Is it ready to receive the seed of God's word? Have you gotten rid of the thorns or anything that is choking the seed before it can grow? Ask God to sow that good seed in your heart once again!