

## PARABLES: THE FOUR SOILS

### Matthew 13

This parable has special meaning for me because it was the first real individual follow up input I had after becoming a Christian in late May 1974.

A grad student sat down with me and went over this parable with me.

We'll pick it up with the explanation from Jesus in v. 18 from v.9 "Ears to Hear" of Mk 8:18

18 "Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 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 the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. 20 The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 23 And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

SIDE ROAD – THE TEXT tells us nothing about how the four soils got into the condition they are in. That is part of the mystery or riddle of the parable. Nor can we determine ahead of time what kind of soil someone will be. The parables are not designed to teach systematic theology. In Luke's version Jesus refers to the 'honest and good heart' of the 4<sup>th</sup> soil. WHO WOULD THAT BE? Ps 14, 53, Rom 3

Parables don't say everything that could be said. This is not the only text about soil, roots, fruit and growth.

TODAY I WANT TO FOCUS ON application to those who would evidence traits of the 4<sup>th</sup> soil and expand the 'soil analogy' from other scripture.

EX: if you've ever had a garden or a pool you know that the soil or water can have a healthy or unhealthy chemical balance. At times we need to check and change the soil or water content.

SO too with our hearts, although it is easier with soil or water.

- 1) Cultivating the qualities mentioned in Matthew, Mark, and Luke – to hear, understand, accept, and hold fast to the seed of the Word—requires intentionality.

As Steven Covey states, "Anything less than a conscious commitment to the important is an unconscious commitment to the unimportant."<sup>5</sup> Powell, Jim. *Dirt Matters: The Foundation for a Healthy, Vibrant, and Effective Congregation* (p. 31).

In the parable of the sower, Jesus defines the good soil as the "people who hear the word and understand it" (Matthew 13:23). A more modern definition might be "getting it." People hear the word and 'get it' to the point of being able to apply it to their own lives. The word in Greek is present active – continuous action, not just one-time. Powell, Jim. *Dirt Matters*:

The three versions of this Parable describe the fourth soil this way...

Matt 13:19 "hears and understands and bears fruit"

Mark 4:13 "hear and accept it"

Luke 8 "honest and good heart bears fruit with patience."

What do hearing, understanding, accepting and an honest good heart look like? (Ps. 1)

What are the traits that we can ASK God TO CULTIVATE in our lives so that the soil promotes growth? (it's not automatic).

Dependence On God John 15

4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

Dependence is embracing the truth of Jn 15: 5 apart from Christ I can do nothing.

This is a God confidence, not a self-confidence.

It is God esteem, not self-esteem.

It's an awareness that God shows up with strength when we are weak.

It is the heart of faith that trusts that God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.

\*\*The World's mindset is opposed to those forms of dependence

It is a heart that is willing to step out and break faith barriers. Dependence is not passivity; nor is it the energizer bunny approach. It is walking by the Spirit.

"Fear is a signal to step out in faith." That's not advice to do silly foolish things, but it is advice to break faith barriers. At times that may look foolish to the eyes of the world.

EX: often those faith barriers relate to taking a stand for Christ and biblical truth when friends, family, and the culture are moving unchecked with the spirit of the age.

It may be as simple as acknowledging the role of Christ in your life or it may mean explaining the biblical worldview on life, morality, gender, marriage, or relationships.

Scripture is filled with daily routine steps of faith that push us out of our comfort zone and should move us to call on God in marriage, parenting, being a child who follows the fifth commandment, being a single person who may long deeper relationships, contentment at work, play, or even at rest, etc.

This dependent abiding in Christ is expressed through the obvious means such as prayer, scripture reading, memorization and meditation, worship, service, sharing Christ with others, etc.

But we also need to guard our own hearts in areas that challenge each of us specifically.

**Do you know your areas of spiritual vulnerability:**

**Prov 4:23 Guard your heart with ALL diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.**

Defensiveness, being easily offended, gossip, greed, selfishness, blame shifting, self-righteousness, lust issues; anger, worry, pessimism, abusive speech or behavior, inclination towards control, laziness, impatience, harshness with others, lack of self-control.

Those are toxic to the soil of our hearts, and they are the deeds of the flesh, which war against the Spirit.

Jim Powell points out that "the dependent heart practices the movement of faith to trust God in times that reveal our own insufficiency, such as:

Illness, rejection, criticism, loneliness, failure, interruptions, urgent requests, relational tension, etc."

One of the most eloquent and passionate prayers of dependence is ascribed to St. Patrick, a dedicated, zealous, and highly successful missionary. This prayer gets to the heart of God because it shows diligence in mission, yet genuine reliance upon the Lord.

I arise today  
Through God's strength to pilot me;  
God's might to uphold me,  
God's wisdom to guide me,  
God's eye to look before me,  
God's ear to hear me,  
God's word to speak for me,  
God's hand to guard me,  
God's way to lie before me,  
God's shield to protect me,  
God's hosts to save me

Afar and anear,  
Alone or in a multitude.  
Christ shield me today.  
Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,  
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,  
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,  
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,  
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,  
Christ in the eye that sees me,  
Christ in the ear that hears me.  
I arise today  
through the mighty strength  
Of the Lord of creation.

Another Trait of good soil is a **TEACHABLE SPIRIT**

“It’s what you learn after you know it all that counts” – John Wooden

A teachable spirit is reflected in a posture of humility – an awareness of how little we actually know. Such a person – man, woman, girl or boy- doesn’t have to be the smartest in the room. He or she doesn’t have to be the main character of the story.

The Latin word for soil/earth/ ground is ‘humus’, which is related to “humanity” and “humility”. Good soil is characterized by humility, as created bring.

Phil 2 comes into play:

**3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**

Jesus talks about the different yields of harvest – 30, 60, 100-fold.

Some people come to faith and hit the ground running. Others struggle to grasp the core of assurance and forgiveness and they meander spiritually until it becomes clear. Still others may seem like the life of faith is dormant for years, but the long-term picture of their lives shows a fruitful harvest.

There are some aspects of this that remain a mystery to us. Ultimately, it is God who causes the growth. Don’t compare yourself with others. We don’t know what others have overcome to be where they are.

While there are some aspects of Providential ‘mystery’ in our growth, there are biblical best practices we can apply that will result in growth and fruitfulness:

1. **Till up the soil – prepare your hearts to come to worship or small group or Bible study.** Prepare in advance as needed. You get more out of a sermon or Bible study meeting when you’ve done the spade work ahead of time.

EX: on the prayer list each week I mention the upcoming sermon theme and usually the passage. Read over it before coming on Sunday. Pray that God would make it profitable for me as I preach and for those who are listening.

2. **Get rid of the birds and tend the garden of your soul. Pull up the weeds of unbelief, worry, pride,**

jealousy, anger, etc. Repent and/or forgive before you come to worship so that you can leave your distractions at the door. You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair. Don't indulge the sins that so easily entangle you.

3. Fertilize the soil with prayer - :Ps 119: 36 Incline my heart to Your testimonies And not to dishonest gain. 119:18 Open thou my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

4. Be a Berean - Acts 17

Bereans - Act 17 Self-feeders with the posture of an open heart and reliance on God's Word

10 The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

5. Tend the seedling once it has sprouted - When the seeds in your garden sprout you don't just leave them alone. You must water them and tend to the garden, WITH PATIENCE Luke 8  
Ex: kids who are in a hurry to "grow up". Ex: GLAMOUR SHOTS .... Real growth takes time and patience.

The seed of the Word also needs tending and patience.. ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO DO THAT IS THROUGH scripture MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION. Bring it to mind and pray through it. Linger longer and you get more out of it.

Every time you open your bible or listen on an app, or hear the Word in worship through the songs or preaching, in SS, in family worship, or a bible study, etc "A sower is sowing seed."  
When you review memory verses in your mind, "a sower is sowing seed."

The Pharisees show us that hearing and knowing the scripture is no guarantee of a receptive heart, but even good soil won't bear fruit if the Word is not sown in it.

Ex: a home garden where you remove the weeds, get quality top soil, use the appropriate fertilizer, BUT you don't sow the seed. What kind of harvest will you have???

You will never bear fruit if you neglect the hearing and the reading of the Word. That is the God appointed way to produce a fruitful harvest in your life - PUT YOUR HEART WHERE IT WILL HEAR THE WORD.

Pray that the seed will fall on good soil in your heart and make use of the means of grace for cultivating the soil of your heart.

### GOOD SOIL, LIKE THE SEED, IS SOMEONE WE MEET

Jesus showed all the traits of one who has a heart that is receptive, open, and honest.  
He is the Seed, the Word made Flesh who dwelt among us.  
He is the Word of Good News, the power of God for salvation.

We can't grow in faith and grace if we don't know Christ. We don't come to Him as an example to follow, but as a Savior who gives life through the power of the seed of His Word.

Do you know Him?

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