

**The Parable of the Soils**  
**Luke 8:4-15**

In my sermon from last week we looked at the Parable of the Wheat and Tares. Today we look at another agricultural parable, the parable of the soils. And here Jesus teaches us that the seed sown is not the people, as it was in the wheat and the tares, but rather the seed of the word of God. The question we are going to be left with at the end of the parable is, what kind of soil, are we? And that all depends upon how well we hear and listen to the Word of God and attend to it all our days.

The passage says:

*And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: <sup>5</sup>“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. <sup>6</sup>Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. <sup>7</sup>And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. <sup>8</sup>But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.” When He had said these things He cried, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”*

*<sup>9</sup>Then His disciples asked Him, saying, “What does this parable mean?”*

*<sup>10</sup>And He said, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that*

*‘Seeing they may not see,  
And hearing they may not understand.’*

Notice what Jesus is doing. The crowd came from every city, from far away to gather around and hear Jesus’ word. And he gives them a very short parable about *how to hear* to His word. But he doesn’t give them the explanation of what the parable means. He gives the parable, and leaves.

What gives? Why wouldn’t Jesus at least explain it the people? I mean, doesn’t Jesus want the people to be good soil hearers of his word?

What we actually discover is that Jesus purposely makes his teachings hard to understand and difficult to discern. And the reason he does that, is so:

*'Seeing they may not see,  
And hearing they may not understand.'*

Jesus is making his word more difficult to receive and to understand, so that those who have honest and good hearts will reveal themselves to be good soil. While the rest will prove themselves to be unworthy of eternal life. Christ's preaching and teaching are meant to reveal that distinction. As old Simeon said when Jesus was presented at the temple for his circumcision: *"This child is appointed for the rise and fall of many in Israel, so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."*

One example from John's gospel is when he taught that he is the bread of life and that unless you eat his flesh and drink his blood you have no life in you. And the people responded, saying,

*"This is a hard saying, who can listen to it?" And Jesus then asked them, "do you take offense at this? It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh is no help at all. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe. This is why I said to you that you cannot come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." And after this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God."*

Jesus reveals the hearts of people with his Word. His Word is refiners fire, which burns up the dross, and refines the gold. His Word reveals your heart.

The parable of the soils is therefore a parable about how to hear sermons. When you hear the word of God preached, how do you respond to that word? Are you critical of the preacher? Do you not listen to the guy who is preaching because you like some other preacher better? Do you sit in

judgment on the word being preached because the guy up there just repeated himself 5 times? Do you care more about how polished the message is and whether or not it has three distinct points and a good application? Do you get upset because the preacher preached too long? Or he looked too many times at his notes, and didn't sustain good eye contact?

Or perhaps you hear the word with contempt by thinking that every sermon you hear is for somebody else. "Ooh, you know who really needed to hear that sermon? Sally." No. You know who really needed to hear that sermon? You. And if you don't take heed to the Word of God preached to you, then you are spurning the Holy Spirit of God who gives life to those who listen and hold it fast with good and honest hearts.

Every time the word of God is preached and you are listening, Heaven and Hell hang in the balance in your heart.

So we must therefore ask ourselves, do we have ears to hear?

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In the first three scenarios, Jesus warns of the major obstacles in a persons life which prevents the Word from working its saving purpose in us. They correspond well to the unholy trinity of the devil, the world, and the flesh. And they happen to go quite well with Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (Lk 4:1-13).

**So let us consider first the Seed sown along the Path – Hard Hearted Response – No Response.** Sowing seed in the ancient world was not like how we sow fields today. The sower would have a bag full of seed, and he would walk through the field and scatter the seed broadly. This is the original broadcasting. He cast the seed broadly with his hand as he walked.

And some of the seed when it is scattered, lands on the path. I am sure you all have travelled a well-worn and hardened dirt path. Its soil has become so compacted and hard due to all the foot traffic it receives, that nothing grows there. In some places, water is barely able to even penetrate its

hardened surface; when it rains the water simply puddles up on the surface, and is not absorbed into the earth. It doesn't drain well. When seed falls upon such hard packed soil, it just sits right on top and becomes food for the birds.

The seed that falls on the path never has a chance to get started. For even though the Word is heard, it is immediately snatched away by *the devil*. The devil does not want the Word to germinate and produce faith and its fruits in our lives, for he knows that those in whom the Word lives through faith will be saved on the Last Day.

Jesus already defeated the devil in the wilderness , using the Word of God as His sword. Thus it instructive that the Devil seeks to keep the word of God from implanting itself into us, because he knows better than we do, that the word of God is his undoing.

As we sing in A Mighty Fortress is Our God:

*And though this world, with devils filled,  
should threaten to undo us,  
we will not fear, for God has willed  
his truth to triumph through us.  
The prince of darkness grim,  
we tremble not for him;  
his rage we can endure,  
for lo! his doom is sure;  
one little word shall fell him.*

The church therefore should continue to preach and broadcast the Word of God in the complete confidence, that the Word is the means where by Devil is defeated, and faith takes root. But we must also remember the Devil does everything he can to prevent that from happening.

But how does the Devil take the word away from us? When the soil of the human heart becomes hardened by the perpetual foot traffic of sin, it becomes hardened to the Truth of God's Word. Just as the hard packed

ground is incapable of receiving the seed, and even actively refuses and rejects the seed, so does the human heart become impenetrable and actively rejects the word of God. The devil does all he can to make sure it never germinates.

Thus James says, *“Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”* (James 1:21)

And so, if you come to this parable and think, ‘Ah yes, I am glad that I am not like those people whose hearts are hard and who do not receive the word’ then you are already missing the point. This word is not for the unbelievers out there. This is for those who already think of themselves as Christians, as belonging to the People of God, but whose hearts are hardened by their sins that they refuse to repent.

So, you should ask yourself, ‘How do I reject the Word of God when I hear it?’ ‘How has my sin hardened my heart so that I do not receive the word, but reject it.’ That is the appropriate response to have. Not to think it applies to someone else. But how does it apply to you.

**The next soil is the rocky soil. This refers to those who have a Shallow Hearted Response – Superficial Response:**

Most of the stones in Israel are just underneath a thin layer of soil. This is why Jesus says that the seed springs up immediately when scattered. People hear the word and receive it with joy. But because they have no root, when a time of testing comes, they fall away.

The second scenario therefore represents those who hear the Word with joy but do not have the roots of faith which sustain them with the moisture and life giving water of the Spirit during the times of trial, which they will experience in this world. These times of testing include the persecutions that the disciples will experience for following Jesus.

The end of Luke's Gospel portrays the testing of the disciples. Following the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus will say to them, "*You are the ones who have remained with me in my trials*" (22:28). Then, in the Garden of Gethsemane he says, "*Pray that you may not enter into temptation*" (22:40). And after the disciples fall asleep, Jesus exclaims, "*Why are you sleeping? Rise up and pray, in order that you may not enter into temptation*" (22:46).

The hearer of the Word should also recall at this point the theme of persecution from the Sermon on the Plain, particularly when Jesus says: "*Blessed are you when men hate you and when they exclude you and insult you and throw out your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for behold your reward is great in heaven; for according to the same things their fathers did to the prophets*" (6:22-23; cf. also 6:27-34, 46-49).

This then is a warning against Superficial Christianity. A Christianity that is only surface deep, and does not really penetrate down into the deep parts of one's heart and soul, is one that does not pray during difficult times, and falls away when the going gets tough.

Perhaps you have known people who have gotten real excited about the Word of God for a brief moment of time, and they may have even looked like they have the life of the Spirit in them by their joy. But just as quickly as their zeal appeared, so does it fall away.

I've met a number of guys like this. People who want Christ for what he could give them in this world, but they didn't want Christ for who He is. And when they realize that being a Christian is actually much harder than they thought, and that being a Christian requires more than they are willing to give, they fall away.

We try to be up front about what that means here at CTR, by reading article 28 of the Belgic Confession before every new membership vows; where I say, that **"it is the duty of all believers, according to God's word, to separate themselves from those who do not belong to the Church, in order to join this assembly wherever God has established it, even if civil**

**authorities and royal decrees forbid, and death and physical punishment result.”**

Jesus likewise warned his apostles, saying, *“if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”*

If you have any reservations for coming to Christ and His Church, which stem from a fear of dying, then you need to remember what Peter said, *“Lord, to whom else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”* If you are more concerned about your earthly life, than you are your eternal life, then you might be in danger of being a superficial Christian.

We therefore must settle in our hearts and minds now, that if anyone ever tries to stop us from following Christ, and worshipping with the Church, then we will be willing to face imprisonment, physical punishment, or even death to stay true to Christ. Those who are not willing to make such sacrifices, are not worthy of Christ’s sacrifice for them.

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**The third example is the Seed sown among Thorns – Cluttered Heart Response – Temporary Response:** Along with persecution, Jesus teaches elsewhere that the cares, riches, and pleasures of life (*the flesh*) pose a serious temptation to the Christian. Concerning riches, Jesus says in the parable of the rich fool, *“Life does not consist in the abundance of one’s possessions.”*

In the parable of the Dishonest Manager, Jesus taught *“Nobody can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and Money.”* In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the rich man suffered in fire because the riches and comforts of life hardened his heart towards those who were in need of comfort and mercy in this life. And Jesus also said in response to the Rich Young ruler’s rejection of him,, *“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter into the kingdom of God.”*

Now notice that Jesus gives the sense that the life God's Word might survive alongside these things in a person for a time, but obsession with riches, and the possessions of life, and the love of pleasure can lead to its slow death by suffocation.

When you wake up in the morning, do you first check the stock market, or your Roth IRA, and how your investments are doing? Are you constantly fighting with your spouse about money? Is money your god?

Yes, it is good keep before your heart and mind that your possessions are not yours, but have been given to you to manage and steward for the glory of God and His kingdom. But we must be honest with ourselves, and not mask of love for money under the guise of stewardship.

Never forget that Judas, who had control of the money bag, stole from it frequently, and desired to take the gifts given to Christ and spend it on himself, under the guise of feeding the poor. If one of Jesus' closest disciples, could betray his Lord for thirty pieces of silver, then certainly you too can be deceived by the love of riches. Truly, the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

But you don't even need to love money to have it control you and your decisions. Many of us struggle to get by, and so we are constantly looking for ways to make more money. Again, not a sin in and of itself. But if it is the internal obsession you have with how you can make more money, then that reveals that money is becoming your god.

But these is a difference between saying, on the one hand, 'I am going to work hard as unto the Lord, and trust him to provide for me', with, 'I gotta make that money anyway I can.' And God takes a back seat to your desire to have more money so you can be more comfortable. Truly the riches and pleasures of life will choke out ones faith in Christ.

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**And finally, we have the Good Soil – Honest Heart Response – Fruitful Response:** Some of the Seed sown fell in good soil and eventually produced



fruit. Jesus said that these are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

Fruit is never a matter of an overnight exercise. It takes nurturing. Thus, Jesus' teaching does not look at our reaction to God's Word in a single moment, but over a period of time. It takes time to bear fruit, just as it takes time for weeds to choke the seed or for the lack of root in a plant to become evident. Jesus' point is how our response to the Word manifests itself over time. A plant does not sprout forth overnight, nor does the harvest of the heart.

But we must never use the idea of patience deceive us into being negligent with what God has spoken to us. In the end, the good soil are those who hear the word and persevere in following Christ. Such hearers bear fruit for the eschatological harvest. Salvation is the *goal* of hearing and believing the Word (8:12). But it will manifest itself in small ordinary obedience every single day.

The rocky soil and the thorn infested soil demonstrate that reaching the goal does not come easily, or quickly. Holding fast to the Word in tribulations and trials with persevering faith is necessary for salvation. That is the reason for living in a community that regularly hears the Word of God together, week after week. So that we might encourage one another to hold fast to Christ Monday through Saturday.

Jesus himself is, of course, the ultimate paradigm of the good soil, who through steadfast endurance withstood the temptations of the devil, overcame the temptations of the world, and eschewed the desires of the flesh. He is the one whose heart is noble and good because he heard the Word of God from his Father in heaven and was perfectly obedient in every way. His fidelity and perseverance are the model to all who hear the Word of God.

But Jesus is far more than the model; he is the one who makes possible your response of faith to the Word, and the bearing of fruit, *for the true secret of the mystery is Christ in the believer* (Col 1:27). Those who bear fruit in

maturity do so because Christ is in them (Rom 8:10; 2 Cor 13:5; Gal 4:19) and they are in him. And those who hold fast to the Word in perseverance do so because he faithfully *holds them* in his hand and through his Spirit in the life and ministry of the church *keeps them* steadfast in the true faith.

May God therefore grant that we would be good soil, who, hearing the word, hold it fast in honest and good hearts, and bear fruit with patience.

Amen.