

Jesus' Greatest Hits

The Sower and the Soils

Part 3 – May 13, 2007

FOUR TYPES OF SOIL

Q: When it comes to gardening, do you have a green thumb, or do you struggle just to keep your plants alive?

As *good* gardeners know: it's all about the soil. I like plastic plants ... they thrive in my neglect!

Once, when Jesus was speaking to a large crowd, He told them a parable about a farmer who planted seeds in four different types of soil ... but only one produced a healthy crop.

Q: As we read, let's ask ourselves: What type of soil am I giving God to work with?

He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: "Listen! 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, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times." Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. ... Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word. 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. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive 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. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept [retain] it, and [by persevering] produce a crop – thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown." - *Mark 4: 2-10; 13-20 NIV*

It's curious that Jesus compares us to different types of soil. Genesis 2:7 says, "God formed man of dust from the ground ..." and Genesis 3:19 says, "For dust you are and to dust you will return."

In Jesus' day, farmers sowed their fields by scattering seed over an entire plot, and then scratching it into the soil with a wooden plow.



Pathways were trampled and compressed like cement. In some patches, the soil was shallow over the limestone that's beneath the surface. Those areas hold the heat, which helps the seeds germinate faster; but the moisture evaporates quicker. And, surrounding thorns relentlessly encroached on the fields.



Jesus reveals the three big weapons – in the enemy's arsenal – to interfere with our reception of God's Word: He prevents it from sinking in; He assaults it with hard times; He smothers it with good times. Same sower; same seed; all the difference is in the receptivity and the response of the "hearer" of the Word.

When Jesus finished telling this parable, He called out:

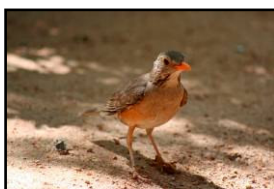
He who has ears to hear, let him hear. - *Mark 4:9 NIV*



This means it's not enough to have ears on the side of our head. Words can go in *one* of those and out the *other*! They can be forgotten in bad times, and drowned out in good. We need ears on our head *and* ears in our heart. Spiritual ears perceive the *beauty* and *truth* and *power* of God's Word, and it sinks in, and establishes itself, and stays strong. Do *you* have ears that hear?

The pecking, the scorching, the suffocating; these are the tactics we face when the Lord calls us to new growth, a deeper walk, or adjusted priorities. First, the "pecking". When God calls us to new growth:

1. Our soil can be **impenetrable**



This is the closed mind, the calloused heart, and the noncompliant will. Satan may peck the seed, but he's only able because of our own hardening. Sometimes our minds are closed because of fear or pride: We're too afraid of what God will ask us to change; We're too proud to face up to our faults and flaws.



Sometimes our hearts are calloused from anger or bitterness. We're mad at God or another believer for hurts we've suffered. Sometimes we fail to surrender our will. It's not outright rejection as much as lack of interest. We pay attention to what we value.

Q: Do you deliberately get a good night's sleep on Saturday, so you're awake and alert on Sunday? It takes more discipline to go to bed on time than to get up on time!

Q: Do you intentionally postpone Sunday morning quarrels until *after* the worship service? Angry attitudes *always* change when we worship God and ask Him to show us the log in our own eye.

Don't play into the enemy's hands by refusing to trust God, or humble yourself, or forgive others, or surrender your will. The tragedy of the impenetrable soil is that it stays barren, unfruitful, and unproductive. And it's robbed of what *could* be.

Putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. - *James 1:21 NAS*



The key words here are: "putting aside" and "receive". We must make a conscious choice, and take an active role. If the soil is hard we need to cultivate. We must open our minds, and soften our hearts, and surrender our wills in order to prepare ourselves to receive the Word *implanted*.

Next comes the "scorching". When God calls us to a *deeper* walk:



2. Our soil can be superficial

This is when we emotionally, impulsively welcome God's instruction with short-lived enthusiasm. The truth sinks in, but the roots don't establish.



These plants are the first to germinate and the first to terminate! The *same* heat that helped them sprout causes them to wither. Our feelings are good, but not as a foundation for faith. If I receive out of emotion, I can reject out of emotion.



Q: Do you know how to tell if you're soil is shallow?



Trouble is the acid test. How do you typically respond when the heat is on? If you've got good roots you *blossom*. If not, you *wilt*. If the soil is shallow we must increase depth. This means scheduling time to push our roots down into His promises, counsel, grace, and love, so we'll be equipped to handle the "scorchers".



We've dealt with the pecking and the scorching; now comes the "suffocating". When God calls us to adjust our priorities:

3. Our soil can be spoiled

This is when two crops compete for the same soil. It's when we're preoccupied, and we allow worries and worldliness to crowd out what God has started.

It's Mother's Day; just think how many callers are going to get the dreaded recording: "We're sorry, all circuits are busy now. Will you please try your call again, later?" Imagine how God must feel when He wants to speak to you, and He gets this message. How often do you give Him this recording?

- We must beware of the busyness of the brier patch.



Jesus describes three types of weeds

- A. The worries of this life
- B. The deceitfulness of wealth
- C. The desires for other things

Daily pressures and problems will tempt us to blur the line between that which is urgent and that which is truly important. Wealth isn't wrong, but it *does* deceive. Money will always tempt us to trust in our own resources, and to feel self-empowered. And even the good things, recreation, hobbies, sports, vacations, family - things God has blessed us with - will rob us of intimacy with Him, if we allow them to dethrone Him.



Our soil can only be loyal to one kingdom: The Kingdom of seeds, or the kingdom of weeds. How much effort does it take to grow weeds? None! They grow wild. I have a lot of varieties in my yard and I didn't even have to do a thing! Weeds are a sign of neglect. If the soil is neglected we need to weed

This means eliminating the thorns of distraction, disruption, and diversion that slowly suffocate, and leave us with only leftovers for the Lord.



- Q: Are there some weeds that need to be pulled from your life?
Q: Do your roots go deep enough to protect you from the heat?
Q: Is your mind open, your heart soft, and your will surrendered?

- If so, your harvest will be both bountiful *and* eternal.

Let's see how well you've been listening. I want you to answer out loud: "True" or "False". In this parable, we learn that:

1. God-given blessings can get in the way of spiritual growth.
2. If adversity doesn't work, the enemy will try prosperity.
3. The farmer should be more careful where He throws His seed.
4. Manure happens.