

February 19, 2007

## THE PARABLE OF THE SOILS

Matthew 13:1-23

The seed is the Word of God!

The Bible is the Word of God!

The Bible is preached. The Bible is studied. The Bible is in every home. But, sad to say, in many homes, it's on a shelf, or, seldom opened.

Everyone wants to claim they are like the good soil. But... Everyone, at different times, can also be like the hardened path, or, the rocky soil, or even, the thorns. This parable is about hearing more than it is about sowing seeds "*Let anyone who has ears to hear, listen!*" (v.9) This is one of the few parables that is explained by Jesus. It is basically explained as an allegory. The seed is the Word of God. Everyone hears it, but...Different types of soil receive the seed differently.

The fact of the matter is that Satan sometimes keeps us so tuned out that all we hear is static, incomprehensible. Sometimes, we are shallow, and what we hear just can't sink in and take root. And, sometimes, we are so busy that our spiritual lives are choked off by the cares of life or a love for wealth. I think that, more often than not, people are just too busy. Or, they think they are too busy...too busy to remember the Sabbath. Too busy to feed their spiritual lives!

Concerning the issue of spiritual life, I'd like to share a devotion by Joni Eareckson Tada:

*"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." (Colossians 3:1-2)*

In this verse we are twice commanded. First, we are to set our hearts; then second, set our minds on things above. In other words, things above are to capture our imaginations, emotions, thoughts, feelings, ideas, and on and on.

Most of us consider this command to be not as necessary as other mandates in Scripture. But it is! When you consider that the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all your heart and mind, it follows naturally that we should set our hearts on things above "*where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.*"

C.H. Spurgeon once said, "Some of you, right now, could not be happy if you were allowed to enter heaven. Shall I tell you why? It is because heaven is a land of the spirit and you have neglected your spirit."

It is the spiritual person who can most readily set his heart and mind on heaven. So live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, abide by the Spirit, pray in the Spirit, and you can't help but glean a real and deep longing for heavenly glories above.

What enriches your spirit? Filling your heart and mind with whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, or anything excellent or praiseworthy. What enriches your spirit? Accessing the means of grace through prayer, worship, the reading of God's Word, and fellowship. What enriches your spirit? Trusting and obeying your Lord.

*I want to be a truly spiritual person, Lord, so help me to keep in step with Your Spirit today. May my flesh diminish and my spirit increase as I set my heart and mind on things above.*

~~ Taken from Diamonds in the Dust, 1993

There is no drought with respect to the Word of God. In our own congregation, there have been ample opportunities for Bible study. The preaching is Biblical! There are Christian radio stations in our area where the Word of God is offered. The same is true with regard to

television. But...we have to tune in! We have to listen! We need to know the frequency!!! Hmmm...Frequency can matter! *"To you it has been given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven; but...to them it has not been given!"* (v.11) Tune in...listen!

Back up to the beginning of the story that leads up to this Chapter. *Great crowds* (13:2) had gathered around Jesus. It was the *same day* (13:1) as when He had been teaching in their synagogue (12:9) where He cured the *man with the withered hand*. (12:10-13) When He left that place, many crowds followed Him and He cured all of them. (12:15) Then Jesus healed *a demoniac who was blind and mute*. (12:22) Pharisees and scribes were also in the crowds, listening, but...they were only trying to hear something in what Jesus said or did that would be incriminating (in their eyes). They then wanted to see some sign from Jesus. (12:38)

Why were all those people in the crowd? Most of them, once they received the blessing of His healing and heard the truth of His Word, why didn't they just go their separate ways? I think they had discovered that one of the secrets of the Kingdom has to do with the teaching of Jesus. They were being fed...daily...hourly. And the Word of God is our spiritual food. Remember, when Christ was tempted, He said, *"One does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God!"* (Matthew 4:4) They recognized in Jesus the mouth of God!

So...they listened. And yet, some hearts are so hard that the Word can't sink in. Some minds are so shallow that the Word can't get roots in their lives. Some days are so busy, so full of the cares of the world and the lure of wealth that the Word gets choked out of their lives. Most people don't know they are hard-hearted, or, shallow, or, too busy. But each of us, at different times, can be. We all want to claim that we are like the good soil. But...do we *indeed bear fruit*, thirty, sixty or a hundred-fold?

The different types of soil in this parable reveal the hearts of different types of individual, and the different types of receptivity to the Word of God. Notice that, when Jesus explains the seed sown on the path, He says that *"the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in the heart."* (v.19) This parable is not really about a careless sower, broadcasting the seeds just everywhere and anywhere. It's really about four different types of soil. The point Jesus is making is that we all need to be good soil in order to hear and understand the Word He preaches.

Gauge for yourselves what type of soil you might be. Can the Word of God sink in? Can you receive it joyfully, and then lose its relevance because of a shallowness in your heart? Are there distractions that keep you from letting the Word of God grow, or is it choked out by worldly cares? If you feel so confident that you are good soil, think of others. Do they feed on the Word of God at all? If so, does it sink in, are they shallow, are they distracted? If you detect any of these symptoms, what are we supposed to do? Well, if you want to plant on the path, first, it must be tilled, overturn the soil, dig into it a ways so that the seed can germinate, so the birds can't get it all. If you detect rocky ground in someone's life, where the soil is shallow, there's even more work to do. Seeds can grow in the rocky ground, but the ground needs depth. How can we give someone depth? We somehow need to let those who are shallow know that they are missing the depth of the truth. One of the things that makes people hard or shallow spiritually is that they think that, because they are so intelligent in a worldly way, they are already *with it*, so to speak. They have specialized in their area, they are experts, they are special, but...that's not enough to get them into heaven! The secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven are often completely missed because we think we are okay in some other way.

If you detect people who are too focused on worldly cares and the lure of wealth, well, their lives need some weeding. The same thing happens with people who have wealth as with people who are so darn smart...they think they don't need the seeds, they don't think they need to realize that we don't live by bread alone. Life is good, they have no needs. But...in an ultimate way...all they've really got is thorns...from the heavenly perspective.

What are the tools that can till the soil that can't truly receive the Word of God...yet? Encouragement. Reassurance. Inspiration. If you can be inspired, you can be inspiring. If you receive any reassurance from the spiritual food you receive, you can reassure others that it is a wonderful gift to receive as well. And if you can be encouraged by what you hear, you can encourage others with it too. Jesus tells us that we can be fruitful. It is not that we will automatically become wealthy. Don't forget, the seed is the Word of God. The harvest of any seed is...more seeds! You can produce an abundance because the seed has roots in your life. But those seeds need to be sown beyond your own life...into the lives of others. Cultivate those soils that need a planting. Pray that seeds will sink in, their roots will go deep, and their shoots will not be choked. But...spread the Word!