

The Soil of the Heart
Matthew 13:1-9, Matthew 13:18-23

Slide 1

To hear and truly understand the words of God is no simple task. Think about that for a minute. Think about trying to understand the One who knit us together in our mother's womb.

Who recorded every moment of our lives before one of them came to be. Who holds together the seen and unseen, past, present, and future.

How can our finite, self-absorbed minds ever grasp the wonders of creation, the unseen battles of the spiritual realm, and the eternity God has set within our hearts?

Because of this Jesus chose to speak in stories, or parables, so that ordinary people could glimpse eternal truth.

Imagine standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The morning sun glistening on the water, a cool breeze drifts in, and a crowd is standing around, buzzing with anticipation.

People have left their homes, their nets, and their fields to hear this teacher about whom everyone is talking.

The crowd grows so large that Jesus steps into a boat, pushes off a little from the shore, and uses the water as His pulpit.

He begins, not with a lecture, not with lofty theological terms, but with a story. A story so simple that every man, woman, and child nods their heads in recognition, "*A farmer went out to sow his seed...*"

In that moment, they could see it. They had all watched farmers, with the help of oxen, plow their rocky, sunbaked fields, cutting shallow furrows into stubborn soil.

They had all seen the farmer sowing seeds for the next crop, reach into his bag and scatter them with a wide sweep of his arm, praying something would grow.

Some seed fell on the hardened path, and before it could even take root, birds swooped down and devoured it. Some fell on rocky soil. It sprang up quickly. But just as quickly, the sun withered it because it had no root.

Some fell among thorn bushes, and though it started to grow, the weeds choked the life out of it.

But some, some seed fell on good, rich soil and to the farmer's amazement, it produced a harvest: thirty, sixty, a hundred times what was sown!

When He finished, Jesus simply said, "*Whoever has ears, let them hear.*" You can almost picture the farmers in the crowd nodding in agreement.

They knew the struggle, the sweat, and the disappointment of planting in difficult soil. They lived the curse spoken to Adam in Genesis 3:19, "*By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground.*"

But Jesus wasn't just talking about farming. He was inviting them to lift their eyes from survival in the dust of this world to something eternal.

Because the Sower in His story was the Son of Man. The seed was the Word of God and the soil..., the soil was the human heart.

Here's the key of the story: The harvest never depended on the sower. It never depended on the seed. Christ and His Gospel never change. The difference is the soil.

So, the question isn't just for those Israelites on that shoreline two thousand years ago, the question is for us, today. What kind of soil is in your heart?

Slide 2

Jesus began His parable with the hard soil that had been continuously trampled underfoot, becoming impenetrable, where seeds tossed on it are quickly snatched away by the birds.

This is the picture of a closed heart; a heart where the message of salvation can't sink in or take root. It reminds us that in evangelism we'll meet some who hear the Gospel but will never respond to it.

Creation itself proclaims God's invisible qualities; His eternal power and divine nature and yet, many refuse to retain the knowledge of God. Paul tells us about this kind of person in his letter to the Romans.

Romans 1:28, *"Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done."*

They suppress the truth written into their very souls. They ignore the eternity God has placed in their hearts. To them, the cross is nothing but foolishness.

Worse still, it's offensive. Why? Because the light of the Gospel exposes their sin and their love for darkness.

John 3:19, *"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."*

The sovereignty of God. His holiness. His wisdom. Even His love—offends the natural heart, because the heart insists on walking its own path and chasing its own pleasures.

Even those who appear religious, like the Pharisees, prove that head knowledge without heart transformation is worthless. Their rituals were empty and their motives enslaved to the praises of men.

Yet we don't lose hope since our Father is patient, *“not willing that any should perish.”* We are to bear witness even to hardened hearts. Yet we should do so wisely—not as one casting pearls before swine.

Matthew 7:6, *“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.—but with the confidence that the blood of the Lamb is powerful enough to save anyone who will believe.”*

Therefore, before we think only of others, we must be honest with ourselves. The hard soil isn't just “out there”; it can also be found within our own hearts.

There are places where we resist the Gospel, where God's Word can't take root because the ground has been trampled down and grown hard.

But what makes a path hard? Repeated sins, unchecked attitudes, and worldly habits pack down our hearts until the truth of God cannot penetrate.

It's one thing to agree in principle with Matthew 22:37, that we are to *“love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”*

But it is quite another to invite the Potter to put His hands on us, to soften and reshape our attitudes and behaviors so that they align with His righteousness rather than our own pleasures.

Like Paul, we all struggle with sin. We all have areas of life that are resistant to God's Word? Yet James reminds us that when we *"draw near to God, He will draw near to us"*

That's not a casual invitation, it's a humbling call to ask our Creator to soften what's hard within us, so that His truth might take root and transform us.

Here's the good news: no heart is beyond God's reach. The hardness of sin, pride, or distraction can be broken up by the Spirit of God.

When the soil of our heart becomes humble and submissive, the Word of Christ takes root and begins to bear fruit.

So, the question is this: will you let the Spirit soften your heart, or will you remain hard soil where the Word cannot take root? The seed is the same. The Sower is the same. The difference is the soil.

Slide 3

If the hard soil warns us of a closed heart, the rocky soil warns us of a shallow one. One that's alive for a moment, but withers in the heat of trials.

It's like a plant that looks healthy in a shallow pot, but when the summer sun scorches it, it withers because it has no root.

In ancient Israel, farmers often dealt with thin layers of soil covering thick limestone.

When seed landed there, it would sprout quickly—almost too quickly—but because the roots couldn't sink deep, the moment the sun rose, the young plant withered and died.

Jesus explained that some people respond to God's Word in the same way. Hearing the Gospel, they rejoice, and for a time it looks like life is great.

But, because there is no root, no depth of faith, when hardship, persecution, or trials come, they quickly fall away.

This warns us to be careful, especially in evangelism. David Platt and other ministers caution against what they call "*easy believism*."

This is a mindset that focuses more on securing a quick response, a sinner's prayer, or even baptism, rather than seeking whether God's Word has truly taken root in the heart.

George Whitefield once said, when asked if a certain person was saved through his preaching he responded, "*We'll see in a few years.*"

He wasn't questioning salvation by grace. He was reminding us that genuine faith proves itself over time. Our calling is not only to sow the seed, but to nurture it.

We must walk alongside proclaimed believers, encouraging them when trials come, and pointing them again to Jesus. Without deep roots in Christ, joy will wither in the heat of testing.

Herein lies our hope: Christ can take what is shallow and give it depth. He can break the rock, deepen the roots, and make a faith that endures.

Sometimes our lives are like a mountain stream, rushing swiftly over the stones, sparkling and beautiful at first glance, yet shallow beneath the surface.

How many times have we been stirred by a sermon, when God's Word felt so alive that our hearts leapt for joy and we resolved to obey every command?

In those moments, it seemed as if strongholds were falling, as if by God's power we were finally breaking free from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Inspiration floods in, and for a time we felt clothed in His grace as we walked with unspeakable joy in the footsteps of our Master. Inspiration is good, but inspiration is not endurance.

Joy is real, but joy without roots won't last. Too often, when the comforts of this world are threatened or trials press in, our reliance on the One who sustains us begins to falter.

To live lives worthy of the Gospel, our obedience must sink deeper than fleeting emotion. Our roots must reach down into the very soul and this depth doesn't come by willpower alone.

It comes when we invite the Potter to place His hands on the rocky places of our hearts, reshaping them into fertile ground.

It comes when we seek first His kingdom, trusting that His ways are higher than ours, and believing that the blessings of His Spirit are of infinite worth compared to the fading treasures of this world.

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Yet, not every heart fails from shallowness. Some fail because they're too full, crowded with the thorns of worry and wealth.

It's like our phones buzzing with endless notifications. The noise never stops, and in the chaos, God's whisper is drowned out.

In farming, when seeds fell among thorns, both would grow together, but the thorns always won, stealing sunlight, nutrients, and water until the good plant withered.

You can almost see the farmers in the crowd nodding as Jesus spoke, remembering their own crops lost to thistles and weeds.

Jesus warned that many would hear the grace-filled offer of salvation, yet reject it, not because they openly oppose it, but because the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it out.

As ambassadors of Christ, we must never forget how easily people are ensnared by what they can see and touch, while neglecting what is unseen and eternal.

It is far easier to trust in money that we have in the bank than to live by what the author of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 11:1, "*confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*"

So how do we reach the crowded heart? Not by dazzling the world with a more polished program or a slicker event, but by offering what Isaiah promised—"*food without cost.*"

We show them, not with marketing but with our lives, the surpassing worth of the Treasure hidden in the field and the Pearl of great price.

For when people see Jesus alive in us, our joy, our contentment, our sacrificial love, they see a testimony far more powerful than words alone.

But before we point to the world outside, we must admit that the thorny soil often grows in us too.

How easily the busyness of life, the demands of work, and the pursuit of comfort crowd God out of the very center of our hearts.

What is it that competes for your love? Your time? Your trust? For some, it's the drive for financial security or the endless race to keep up with the "Joneses," working ourselves to exhaustion.

For others, it's fear that consumes us with protecting an unknown future. Still others are enslaved by the desire to belong, spending every waking moment trying to impress people rather than please God.

The motivations may differ, but the result is the same: noise that drowns out the still, small voice of God. Think of a crowded restaurant. The clamor is so loud, you can't hear the person across from you.

That's what happens when the noise of life drowns out the voice of God. Just as thorns choke a plant, so busyness and misplaced priorities suffocate our hunger and thirst for God, leaving us barren and fruitless.

But Jesus gives us a better way. Matthew 6:33, "*Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*"

When we take time to be still before God, to let His Word and Spirit speak, our lives are no longer choked by thorns but filled with fruit, and the joy of His presence satisfies our deepest needs.

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Yet, even though much seed falls on hard paths, rocky ground, and thorny places, Jesus reminds us that not all is lost for some seed falls on good soil. When it does, the harvest is far greater than we could ever imagine.

The farmers in the crowd knew all too well the heartbreak of failed crops. These words must have sounded like music to their ears.

In ancient Israel, a normal yield was five to ten times what was sown. But Jesus spoke of thirty, sixty, even a hundredfold. That was more than good farming, that was the unmistakable blessing of God!

The same is true for us. As we sow the Good News in this fallen world, where “self” has become the god of choice, it can feel discouraging.

We look around and see soil that’s hard, rocky, and thorny, and we’re tempted to give up. Satan whispers, *“It’s all pointless. Your efforts are in vain,”* but God’s Word answers differently.

1 Corinthians 15:58, *“Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”*

Our calling is not to make the seed grow, that’s God’s work. Our calling is to plant and to water faithfully. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:6, *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”*

So, we must press on encouraged by God’s promise in Galatians 6:9, *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”*

The question Jesus leaves us with in this parable is not only about the harvest out there, it’s about the soil in our heart.

If the seed is the Word and the Sower is Christ, then the real question is this: Is my heart good soil where God’s Word can take root and bear fruit?

Slide 6

Conclusion

Are there corners of your heart so entangled with worldly habits that you no longer hear His call to repent? Have the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, or the pursuit of comfort choked out God's presence in you?

Do you find yourself stirred for a moment, only to have the enemy snatch away your passion? Don't give up. You aren't alone in the struggle.

Even Paul cried out in Romans 7:24, *"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"*

And yet in verse 25 he answered his own question with hope, *"Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*

Our Father, the Master Potter, can break the hard ground, uproot the rocks, and remove the thorns. He alone can make our hearts soft, deep, and fruitful for His kingdom.

So, ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Open your heart to Him, and He will make your life into good soil that bears much fruit for His glory.

Four soils. One seed. One Sower. The Word never changes. Christ never changes. The difference is the soil. The question is not ancient. It's here. It's now. So, what kind of soil is in your heart?