

THE FOUR SOILS (3)

Why don't people continue with Jesus? (Part 1)

A. Introduction

1. The parable of the sower explains why it is that people respond to Jesus, ultimately in two different ways.

The story itself is straightforward.

A sower scatters seed which lands on different kinds of soil and produces different results.

"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. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown." (Matthew 13:3-8)

The explanation, for those who hear it, is straightforward too.

"When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables."
(Mark 4:10)

The sower is Christ, and those who go in His Name.

The seed is the Word of God.

The scattering of the seed takes place as God's Word is proclaimed and is heard.

And the soils represent the different ways that the hearts of people respond to the Word of God when they hear it.

Cyril of Alexandria: *"Christ has recounted the three ways of disaster, and... the three grades of glory."*

The first three soils represent the three ways of disaster, and the fourth soil, the three grades of glory.

2. In the parable, the first soil the seed lands on, is the path.

"As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up."
(Matthew 13:4)

This soil draws our attention to two reasons why people don't respond to God's Word and believe in Jesus.

"When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart." (Matthew 13:19)

The first reason is because they have a heart that is hard.

The result is that though they hear the Word of God it makes no impression on them. Their listening amounts to nothing. The Word fails to take root in their hearts and lies on the surface.

The second reason is because they have an enemy that is evil – Satan.

He is poised and ready to, like a bird, swoop down and snatch away the seed.

He wants us to dismiss the Word as soon as we hear it.

He wants to distract us so that we forget about what we hear.

And if someone's heart is already hard, it makes the devil's work easier for him as the Word lies exposed on the surface ready for him to take it away.

3. The second soil the seed lands on is the rocky ground.

"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." (Matthew 13:5-6)

"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." (Mark 4:5-6)

"Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture." (Luke 8:6)

The rocky places refers to ground where a thin layer of soil covers a bed of solid rock (usually limestone).

When the seed the farmer scatters lands on this shallow soil, though the plant may grow up quickly, its roots are unable to break through the rock beneath the surface.

So, while it appears that the plant is healthy initially, without deep roots to draw up nutrients, it will eventually wither away in the scorching sun and die.

4. This soil is another description of how some people respond when they hear the Word of God.

"The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away." (Matthew 13:20-21)

"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." (Mark 4:16-17)

"Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away." (Luke 8:13)

The response of these people to hearing the Word of God is different to those who have hearts that are hard, because these people receive it and do so with joy.

They appear to be converted.

"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." (John 1:12)

"For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with joy given by the Holy Spirit." (1 Thessalonians 1:4-6)

What might this look like?

It looks like someone who hears the Word and makes a profession of faith.

It looks like someone who hears the Word and asks to be baptised.

It looks like someone who hears the Word and is keen to tell everyone about the gospel.

It looks like someone who hears the Word and shows signs of the new life it brings – gathering with God's people, reading the Bible, praying, serving etc.

It looks like someone who hears the Word and commits to a local church in membership.

Many people fit this description.

"Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man." (John 2:23-25)

Even though everything points to them being genuine followers of Jesus, eventually they fall away and give up believing in Him.

They only last for a time.

Why?

This soil draws our attention to two reasons why people who initially it seems respond to God's Word and believe in Jesus, don't continue with Him.

B. They have not considered the cost of believing in Jesus

1. Some people, like the shallow soil, have a shallow understanding of what it means to believe in Jesus.

"The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time." (Matthew 13:20-21)

Why do people have a shallow understanding of what it means to believe in Jesus?

It is because they respond by believing in Jesus too quickly.

"When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:18-20)

It is because they don't take time to consider what it means to believe in Jesus.

"Large crowds were travelling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:25-33)

It is because they don't understand that Jesus is not just their Saviour, He is also their Lord.

"On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" ... From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him... Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:60, 66, 68)

The result is that though they hear the Word of God and respond to it with joy by believing in Jesus, this doesn't last because they have not considered the cost of believing in Jesus.

2. Application:

Be clear with people about what it means to believe in Jesus.

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24)

"To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples." (John 8:31)

Be clear yourself about what it means for you to keep on believing in Jesus.

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” (Colossians 2:6-7)

C. They will not count the cost of believing in Jesus

1. Jesus is clear that following Him will not be easy – it is costly.

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:11-12)

“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2 Timothy 3:12)

Like the scorching sun shines upon the seed sown, so trouble and persecution will come, and when they do, they will test a person’s belief in Jesus.

If someone truly believes in Jesus, they will persevere in the face of this trouble or persecution, whereas those who are not willing to count the cost will want nothing to do with Jesus.

“When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.” (Matthew 13:21)

“They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For it they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.” (1 John 2:19)

2. What kind of trouble is Jesus talking about?

He is not referring in this instance to any kind of difficulty that we face in this life.

These testing situations come to us because of the Word of God.

What might this look like?

It is facing criticism, abuse, discrimination, or another form of suffering for believing what the Bible says is true and resisting any pressure to compromise that belief.

If there has been no consideration of the cost of believing in Jesus, when testing like this comes into a “believer’s” life, they are likely to be surprised and shocked and run from it.

If there has been no counting of the cost of believing in Jesus, when testing like this comes into a “believer’s” life, they are likely to compromise or renounce their belief because they are not willing to suffer for the sake of Christ.

3. Application:

Know that counting the cost is unavoidable for a believer.

“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:38)

Know that counting the cost is worth it for a believer.

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” (2 Corinthians 4:17)