

## THE FOUR SOILS (4)

### Why don't people continue with Jesus? (Part 2)

#### 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.

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)

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.

"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)

The first reason is they have not considered the cost of believing in Jesus. 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 – they haven't taken the time to do this.

The second reason is they will not count the cost of believing in Jesus. When testing situations come into their lives because of the Word of God, they compromise or renounce their belief because they are not willing to suffer for the sake of Christ.

4. The third and final soil the seed lands on, representing the "ways of disaster", is among the thorns.

"Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants." (Matthew 13:7)

"Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain." (Mark 4:7)

"Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants." (Luke 8:7)

At first this soil appears to be good soil.

But what the farmer would not have realised at the time he sowed the seed, was that there were other seeds in the soil competing with this seed for its nutrients.

When the good seed began to sprout, so did the other seeds – thorns/weeds – which took up most of the space, moisture, nourishment and sunlight for themselves, stopping the plant from growing up and bearing fruit.

5. 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 among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful." (Matthew 13:22)

"Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful." (Mark 4:18-19)

"The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature." (Luke 8:14)

Just like those represented by the second soil, the response of these people to hearing the Word of God appears to be promising.

They received the Word. It looks like they are converted.

But there is no growth and no fruit, and gradually they drift away from the Lord Jesus.

Why?

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

## **B. They allow their hearts to be crowded**

1. Some people, like this soil, have hearts that are crowded.

They allow thorns and weeds to grow alongside their desire to follow Jesus.

"Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desire for other things come in..." (Mark 4:18-19)

This is often a gradual process. These thorns and weeds grow up slowly.

"The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way..." (Luke 8:14)

## 2. What are these thorns that take up residence in a person's heart?

They are their worldly attachments.

There are two particularly dangerous thorns: "the worries of this life" and "the deceitfulness of wealth" or "riches and pleasures".

Both these things in themselves can be good.

"For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving." (1 Timothy 4:4)

"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share." (1 Timothy 6:17-18)

But they can also be deadly, as we see from the numerous warnings in Scripture about them.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21)

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" (Matthew 6:25)

"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them." (Matthew 6:31-32)

"Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possession." And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God." (Luke 12:15-21)

"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." (1 Timothy 6:10)

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives for ever." (1 John 2:15-17)

## 3. What might a hearer of the Word whose heart is crowded look like?

It looks like someone who cares more about what's happening on social media than Bible reading and prayer.

*"One of the great uses of Twitter and Facebook will be to prove at the Last Day that prayerlessness was not from lack of time." (John Piper)*

It looks like someone who spends time with God's people regularly, so long as nothing more pressing comes along or they don't get a better offer.

It looks like someone who allows a hobby to take up increasingly more of their life – in terms of time, effort and money.

It looks like someone who never seems to be content with anything.

### **C. They allow their faith to be choked**

1. When a person's heart is crowded, it is more than likely that their love for God will be choked, and these other commitments and interests and concerns will take precedent over following Him.

"The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful." (Matthew 13:22)

"No-one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." (Matthew 6:24)

There are two striking examples in the Bible of individuals where this had happened.

"Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica." (2 Timothy 4:10)

"Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter eternal life, obey the commandments." "Which ones?" the man enquired. Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honour your father and mother, and 'love your neighbour as yourself.'" "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth." (Matthew 19:16-22)

### **2. Application:**

Recognise the thorns – How do I spend my time? How do I spend my money? What are my interests? What am I worried about and why? What do I daydream about?

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24)

Root out the thorns.

"If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." (Matthew 5:29)

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33)

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward." (Hebrews 11:24-26)

Do this regularly!