

THE FOUR SOILS (5)

How do you know if you are good soil?

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 soil the seed lands on, is among the thorns.

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

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.

"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)

The first reason is they allow their hearts to be crowded. They allow thorns and weeds (worldly attachments) to grow alongside their desire to follow Jesus.

The second reason is they allow their faith to be choked. 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.

5. What each of these first three soils have in common is that they are ways of disaster.

The people who respond in these ways when they hear the Word of God either don't believe in Jesus or don't continue with Him even though they might initially seem to respond in faith.

If these were the only responses to God's Word, you might ask, "What's the point of preaching the gospel?"

But there is another soil Jesus tells us about in this parable, and this makes all the difference.

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

"Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times." (Mark 4:8)

"Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." (Luke 8:8)

As well as hard soil, rocky soil, thorny soil, there is good soil.

Soil where the seed can penetrate the surface, where the roots can go deep, and that is free of thorns and weeds.

This soil produces a crop. It gives the farmer a return of 30, 60, 100 times more than what was sown.

The crop this soil yields makes the sowing worthwhile.

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

It describes a person who hears God's Word, believes in Jesus and continues with Him.

"But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." (Matthew 13:23)

"Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop – thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown." (Mark 4:20)

"But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop." (Luke 8:15)

Someone who listens carefully and thoughtfully to the Word.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelation 2:7)

"This is the one I esteem; he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." (Isaiah 66:2)

Someone whose hearts receive the gospel when they hear it like good soil receives seed.

Someone who takes the time to consider what it means to believe in Jesus, understanding that there is cost to following Him and who is willing to count it.

"Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked." (Matthew 13:51)

"Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (Matthew 16:12)

"Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist." (Matthew 17:13)

Someone who doesn't allow worldly attachments to crowd their hearts and choke their faith.

7. How do you know if you have a good heart?

This soil draws our attention to two things that will be present in the lives of those who believe in Jesus and continue with Him.

B. There will be ongoing faith

1. When a person's heart is good, they will hear the Word and believe it, and keep on believing it.

"But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop." (Luke 8:15)

"Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:1-2)

2. When a person's heart is good, they will persevere in the faith under difficult circumstances.

"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." (Matthew 24:12-13)

"Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is

coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved." (Hebrews 10:32-39)

For this reason, it will take time to discover whether a person's heart is good soil.

C. There will be ongoing fruit

1. When a person's heart is good, they will hear the Word and believe it, and this will produce fruit in their lives.

"Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop." (Mark 4:20)

A sign that someone is a Christian is the presence of fruit in their lives.

"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." (Luke 3:8)

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener... Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:1, 4-5, 8)

"By their fruit you will recognise them." (Matthew 7:16)

If there is no fruit, it is because the person does not have a good heart.

2. What is this fruit that will be present in their lives?

It will be the ongoing obedience to God's Word – godliness.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

Examples of this fruit include the following:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Galatians 5:22-23)

"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life." (Romans 6:22)

"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." (Hebrews 13:15-16)

"I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles." (Romans 1:13)

"And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way; bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light." (Colossians 1:10-12)

"Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings." (Romans 15:25-28)

As someone has put it, *"A life in Christ, produces a life like Christ's."*

3. It is true that not everybody produces the same amount of fruit.

This fruit may be present in different quantities – or three grades of glory.

“He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” (Matthew 13:23)

But those who believe in Jesus and continue in Him will live fruitful lives.

The different amounts of fruitfulness Jesus mentions in the parable is designed to make us eager to be more fruitful. To not be satisfied with where we are at – don't you want to be a hundredfold Christian?

Because much fruit glorifies God.

“This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (John 15:8)

4. Finally, remember God has provided what we need to be fruitful and more fruitful.

“But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.” (Psalm 1:2-3)

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no-one to help him up!” (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” (Hebrews 12:11)

D. Conclusion

1. How do we get a good heart out of which comes ongoing faith and fruit?

In the parable, Jesus does not tell us.

It is elsewhere that we learn that it is a gracious gift from God.

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

The emphasis in the parable is that those listening will show they have a good heart by how they respond to hearing God's Word.

“He who has ears, let him hear.” (Matthew 13:9)

Those who believe in Jesus and continue with Him are those who hear the Word and respond with ongoing faith and ongoing fruit.

2. Application:

Take heed how you hear.

Are you hearing?

What kind of hearer are you? Dismissive? Careless? Distracted? Fruitful?