

The Soil Of Our Soul

As Jesus went about the countryside preaching and teaching, we know that He often used parables, "word pictures" to illustrate the truths that He was conveying in His messages.

But strangely, and we don't know all His reasons why, Jesus would sometimes also use those same parables to veil the true understanding of His words.

Here, in this parable that Jesus gave, He did both. To some, He chose, at least for the time being to conceal the true meaning of His words, but then, He took His chosen disciples aside and explained the true meaning of the parable. Listen carefully to all that Jesus tells us in this passage! This is Luke chapter 8, beginning in verse 4.

4 And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: 5 "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. 6 Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. 7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. 8 But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold." When He had said these things He cried, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

9 Then His disciples asked Him, saying, "What does this parable mean?"

10 And He said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest *it is given* in parables, that '*Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.*'

11 "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12 Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. 13 But the ones on the rock *are those* who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. 14 Now the ones *that* fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. 15 But the ones *that* fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep *it* and bear fruit with patience. (Luke 8:11-15)

May I begin today with a story about an interview that television host, Larry King, conducted some years ago with Billy Graham? In that interview, Larry King asked Billy Graham what his thoughts were as he watched all those many people coming forward at each of his "altar calls".

Billy Graham responded, "I think about the "Parable of the Soils". And with that, he began to explain this bible account that we have before us today of the Sower and the four kinds of soil.

Billy Graham said that he realized that not all of those people who were coming forward, though perhaps well-intending, would actually be saved that day. Among those people were a varied mixture of souls, some truly wanting to be saved, others who were simply so unhappy with their circumstances of life they knew that they really needed some kind of change to take place. They weren't necessarily seeking to know Christ, but they were willing to try anything to find some relief from their troubles.

And so, as with the four different kinds of soil spoken about in this parable, there was usually a varied mixture of souls that would come forward at the altar calls. And because that was so, only some of those coming forward would truly be saved, but others, unfortunately, would not be.

Why would that be so? Why will that perhaps always be so? Why would God just not save them all? The answer to that question is truly a mystery. But what we do know is that God is sovereign, and that He makes choices about all the things that take place on the earth, especially as He draws men and women to Himself.

And always intermingled within His making of choices is the mystery of what we like to call our "free will". And somehow, both of those essential elements are part of the equation, God sovereignly making choices and men and women exercising their own will. And we are told clearly in Romans chapter 1 that within that mixture of God's choosing and man's responding to His call, each person is left without excuse for what takes place.

And the problems and concerns can be many and be varied. When faced with the difficulties and obstacles of daily life, this thing that we like to call our "free will", can sometimes, even often, cause us to make willful choices that we should not make.

Our “will” can quickly take us down paths of self-reliance, self-preservation and self-gain, paths we should not travel. Just as with this first “soil” we can make choices that will carelessly allow the devil to slip in and steal away the seeds of the gospel that we have heard.

With all of its self-centered tendencies, our will can become our greatest hindrance, preventing us from moving on forward with the loving and gracious gift of salvation.

In Christ, God has already done His part completely. As we read in 2 Peter 1, “God has given us everything that we need for life and godliness.” Christ has died on the cross to pay our penalty for our sins. Then, by His Spirit, God “draws” us to Christ, and that sometimes taking place during an “altar call”, drawing us forward to accept and to receive Christ’s provision.

But still, even with much provocation and drawing and wooing from Him, too often, our “will” interferes and takes control, and we turn and walk away, incomplete in our salvation.

Sometimes our rejection of Christ is intentional. At other times, it is a subconscious, unknowable response, but all the same, a decision is made by us to keep our life the way it was, without Christ.

And again, why would that be so? Why would we so foolishly reject eternal life with Christ, a life that is filled with blessings and joy, and to instead desire to keep our miserably wretched life of self-seeking and dissatisfaction? What could possibly be the cause for such foolish behavior?

Some of the reasons are spoken about here in this parable. Listen again!

¹¹“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹²Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. ¹³But the ones on the rock are *those* who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. ¹⁴Now the ones *that* fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. (Luke 8:11-14)

In this first word-picture, as the seed, the word of God, falls on the soil of our soul, and our soil is of the kind described here as being "by the wayside", the devil and his demons quickly descend on the word to keep it from piercing on down deeply into our soul to begin its work of salvation.

At first consideration, that would not seem possible to us, that the demons could have power over God's word. And that would most often be true. Because God's word is far more powerful than satan and his demons.

But God also makes certain allowances to satan. He has given satan a certain kind of kingship and authority over this world and over the world's activities. And in such cases, it is only as man, you and I, step forward to reject sin that satan loses his power and ability to control us.

In this seed that falls on the soil by the wayside, these people may truly be seeking a change in their lives, but their souls are still too wayward, too unyielded, too hard to receive the seed, and so the devil and his demons quickly come and take away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

Folks, yes, you and I are always ultimately accountable for the choices we make, but we must also know that another element is also always at work. Satan and his demons are ever and always present and busily working to steal God's blessing away from us.

Look again at our passage . . . the next cause for our turning away and not receiving God's salvation is described for us here in the second kind of soil, the rocky soil. Listen!

13 . . . the ones on the rock *are those* who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. (Luke 8:13)

Again, by these words making reference to, "times of temptation" we can recognize that demons will always be at work to defeat us. But on beyond their efforts, this kind of soil reminds us that our "flesh" and our "free will" will be making most all of the choices, and we will be accountable for those choices. Here, the soil is still too hard, too rocky to receive God's word.

This brings to mind the kind of work and mission that John the Baptist was sent to carry out. John was sent to “prepare ye the way of the Lord”, to preach the need for the recognition of sin and for repentance from it. Repentance removes the rocks and softens the soil, to receive the word from God.

Folks, as with this second soil, we too might when first hearing the word of God, get very excited about it, and to some extent even believe what we hear. But unless and until the soil of our souls has been soften by the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin and until we begin to respond with repentance, we will not be able to grasp the real need for all the demands that are seeming to be made upon us. And, as with this second kind of soil, in times of temptation, we will surely fall away.

A great warning must be taken about this kind of soil. Note again here that we might believe for a while, and truly believe that we believe, even become regular church goers. But though we believe that we believe, our belief does not reach deep enough to bring about real salvation. And that is why we can fall away.

With this kind of belief, we can fool ourselves and each other, and that is an awful state to live out the days of our lives within, because when the final accounting comes in judgment, God will be compelled to say to us, “depart from me ye worker of iniquity, I never knew you”. And how awful that will be for us!

The next soil . . . this third soil can best be described by the word “quandary”, because those who live within it truly live within a “quandary”.

While some bible scholars do differ about whether or not this soil represents people who are truly saved, most agree that they are saved but are caught up within the problems of their own “free will”. Listen!

¹⁴Now the ones *that* fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. (Luke 8:14)

Here, in the words “bring no fruit to maturity” is, I believe, evidence that salvation has truly taken place. To bring forth fruit, though the growth of the fruit may be stunted, the branch must be “in the vine” and that Vine is Christ.

But unfortunately, even though salvation may have truly taken place, the world, the flesh and the devil are always immediately and powerfully at work, ruining as many of the good things of salvation that they can. Listen again to these words and note the wretched condition of their daily lives.

. . . when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. (Luke 8:14)

God forbid we should allow such things to happen folks, but they do, and seemingly far too often. In these words, these hearers receive the word and are saved, but immediately they go out and are choked with the cares, the riches and the pleasures of daily life.

When we get caught up in this kind of lifestyle, we can find all sorts of excuses for the misguided things we do. The complete tenor of our daily existence can get caught up in busying ourselves with meeting our own needs first.

Yes, we attend church, but not faithfully so. After all, aren't we supposed to enjoy the things of life? We work all week and all we have is our weekends. Can't we have some fun too?

And besides that, my work sometimes prevents me from going to church on Sunday.

And also, after we bought our home, my wife needed to go to work to help pay for it. And with all of us working so hard, we are just plain tired. Sunday is a good day to sleep in.

And oh yes, Sunday is also the only time that some of my friends are available for visits. They don't go to church, and I don't want to leave them alone to come, so I just stay at home with them. And when I go to visit them, we don't go to church there either.

And also, the money thing that gets talked about in church sometimes bothers me. The church seems to always want more and more money. And even when I do feel convicted to tithe and to give to missionary support, with all of the things that I have bought recently, our home, and my new truck, and my new 4X4, I really don't have much money left.

Folks, a question, do some of these words sound familiar to you? These are the circumstances of life that this third soil describe . . . the cares, the riches and the pleasures of life that choke out the word of God and render us unable to bear fruit in our relationship with the Lord.

And sometimes, we get so ashamed of our behavior that we just quietly stop going to church altogether. It is an awful way to live, saved, but not even speaking to our beloved Savior who gave everything that we might have life.

But thanks be to God, we don't have to remain captive within that quandary of life. We can surrender our life, our habits, our behaviors, our families, our friends and our finances to Christ our Savior.

We can abide in the vine and begin to produce fruit, fruit that is sweet, not only to our own taste, but to the taste of all those around us, especially our other family members.

And then finally, listen to the simple, but profound words that tell us about the fourth soil.

¹⁵But the seed *that* fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep *it* and bear fruit with patience. (Luke 8:15)

In this fourth soil, our souls can find pleasant rest. We can flourish and show forth all of the fruit that the Lord Jesus can produce in us.

But folks, listen carefully, before those good things can begin to take place, you and I must get really serious with the Lord. And that seriousness begins with "surrender". Not "commitment", commitment comes later. We must first surrender, surrender everything that we are, everything we have and everything that we want to be. We must surrender all to Jesus. It is only in surrender that the things spoken about in this fourth soil can truly begin to become a reality in our daily lives.

And contrary to all that we believed before we were saved about where we could find enjoyment and fun and entertainment, real joy, real fun and wholesome entertainment is far sweeter when we abide in this fourth soil. Real pleasure comes from abiding in Christ.

Jesus said, "I came that you might have life and have it abundantly". And we can! There is actually more life, abundant life, in our surrender to Christ, than we could ever hope to have in the things of this world. And they are all good and wholesome things, things that will not later bring us regret.

But on beyond the benefit that will come to us, we will be able to produce fruit that will glorify God and will benefit all those around us, especially our families. And that is the purpose of our abiding in the vine. We can carry forward the life and the ministry of Christ by blessing other people, giving them God's word, and giving them our substance, food, shelter, missionary support, and church tithing.

Folks, in Christ, there is a fullness that will never be possible in any of those other three soils.

As we close these thoughts for today, let me ask you, which of these soils are you? Most all of us have confessed that we are truly saved. If you have doubts about that, I would like to have an altar call for you and I would invite you to come forward.

But if you are truly saved already, are you perhaps, as I too often am, living somewhere within the miseries of this third kind of soil, choked with the cares and the riches and the pleasures of life.

Folks, we should not live there one moment longer. Won't you join with me in fully surrendering our lives to Christ, to living within this fourth soil and to bearing the fruit that is in Christ alone? Listen as we close . . .

¹⁵But the seed *that* fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep *it* and bear fruit with patience. (Luke 8:15)

May we pray.