

Text: Luke 8:4-15 (see also Matthew 13:3-9, Mark 4:2-9)

Title: The Parable of the Soils

Truth: Cultivate a noble and good heart that hears and keeps God's word.

Date/Location: Sunday February 11, 2024 at FBC (previously 11/13/2016)

Illustration

“The Svalbard Global Seed Vault (Norwegian: Svalbard globale frøhvelv) is a secure backup facility for the world's crop diversity on the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen in the remote Arctic Svalbard archipelago.[5] The Seed Vault provides long-term storage of duplicates of seeds conserved in genebanks around the world. This provides security of the world's food supply against the loss of seeds in genebanks due to mismanagement, accident, equipment failures, funding cuts, war, sabotage, disease and natural disasters. The Seed Vault is managed under terms spelled out in a tripartite agreement among the Norwegian government, the Crop Trust, and the Nordic Genetic Resource Center (NordGen).

“The Norwegian government entirely funded the Seed Vault's approximately 45 million kr (US\$8.8 million in 2008) construction cost. Norway and the Crop Trust pay for operational costs. Storing seeds in the vault is free to depositors. The vault has been depicted in several films and other art forms...

“A feasibility study prior to construction determined that the Seed Vault could preserve most major food crops' seeds for hundreds of years. Some, including those of important grains, could potentially remain viable for thousands of years.”

As of three years ago, there were 87 depositors, many of which contributed tens of thousands of seeds into the storage vault.¹

Regardless of the beliefs of those who developed this seed bank, it is an impressive feat of human cooperation and could be very useful in a future calamity.

Freezing seeds in a vault is one thing you can do with seeds. But on the short-term time scale, it is much more useful to use most seeds

¹ Taken from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Svalbard_Global_Seed_Vault

by planting them and tending them as they grow and eating their fruit. It is also wise to save seeds for next season, especially of varieties that turned to be very fruitful. Seeds are meant to be grown. Seeds do little good if they sit in an aluminum air-tight bag or a sealed glass test-tube at -18 degrees Celsius, unable to germinate, in stasis for hundreds of years, and perhaps never used if a calamity does not come in a way that makes them necessary.

Seeds can be scavenged, trampled upon, or eaten by birds, or spring up quickly but perish just as quickly due to lack of moisture. Seeds can grow but be choked out by thorns and other weeds. Seeds can be eaten but then are dissolved by your stomach acid and only provide an infinitesimal fraction of the food value that they would have provided if grown to bring forth many fruits. Seeds can be put on a shelf in the basement, or on a shelf in the garage. They will not last very long that way. Seeds can become the objects of examination, study, and writing. As such they might be dissected, put under a microscope, and become the subject of a botany article in an academic journal.

I thought this would serve as a fitting illustration of a Biblical truth, because Jesus likens the word of God to a seed.

Introduction to the Parable

- A. After reading this parable a few times, we are confronted with the problem of how to title the parable. Is this really the parable of the sower, or is it the parable of the soils? What do you think? Which is the parable more concerned with—the sower or the various soils? The title above shows what I think the right answer is.
- B. If you were to outline the parable and its explanation, you would notice that there are four soils, but only one of the three produces fruit. There is also the seed, Satan, and the fruit. We need to look at all these aspects to understand the parable.
- C. Before going further, notice in verses 9-10 that the disciples did not initially understand the meaning of the parable. They inquired and the Lord replied that God had granted them the ability to understand the truths being revealed about the kingdom of God. Not everyone had (or has) that gracious gift from God. They do not

have a spiritual sight or hearing that is tuned to resonate with God's truth, and thus they do not see or understand. This last statement is a quote from Isaiah 6:9, and it is a judgment from God. In His wisdom, He allows hearts to remain hardened and thus not perceive the significance of the parable. If you grasp this with not only mental understanding but fruitfulness, give thanks God.

- D. At this point, let us ask the question: what is the mystery part of this parable? It has to do with how the kingdom is introduced in the world, and how it is *not* received by many.
1. Normally a king comes, conquers, and takes over without input from the citizens of the country. No offers, no niceties, just victory.
 2. The kingdom of God is different, at least initially. It propagates itself by messengers spreading a message, which some recipients reject and some outside forces snatch away so that people will not respond. This is how Jesus' kingdom is spread, not by military force!
 3. His kingdom is quite different in that way from the kingdoms of the world. Yet it also possesses similarities to world kingdoms, for when Jesus comes back to reign, He will establish a rule of righteousness over the globe.

I. Sower

- A. I think we would agree that Christ is the main and best planter. The prophets before Him spread the message of the kingdom as well and their message was not oft well received, as perfectly illustrated by the prophet John the Baptist (Luke 7:26, Matt. 11:9).
- B. After Christ, all who spread the Bible's message—NT prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, and *everyday Christians*—are sowers. Keep that in mind. Jesus used a farming illustration, which shows that anyone can be a sower. It does not take a bachelor's degree or seminary education to plant grass seed. A few basic steps, common sense, water, and diligence will get grass growing in a couple of weeks. This means you too can spread the message. And you must, for the sake of Christ's name, for the sake of the

lost, for the sake of growing and strengthening this church and all churches, and for eternal reward.

- C. What does the parable tell us about how the sower does his work? The sower plants the seed liberally, even on soils that might not look promising.
1. In real farming, the farmer does not go out of his way to plant seed on bad soil, but some does inevitably fall in places where it will not produce anything.
 2. In spiritual farming, we cannot see the condition of the soil by mere external appearance. If you try to do that, you are expressing partiality and favoritism, which God does not approve. The condition of the soil is seen only *after* some seed is placed on it.

II. Seed

- A. The seed represents the word of the kingdom of God. It is generic enough that it is not one specific piece of the Bible's message (like John 3:16 alone). Contextually it refers to the kinds of things Jesus has been teaching in His early ministry. Consider 8:1 an example.
1. Included is the fact that Christ is the Davidic king (Matt. 1-2); that the kingdom of heaven is near and that it is necessary to repent of sin in order to be a citizen of it (Matt. 3-4); the character and conduct of such repentant kingdom citizens (Matt. 5-7); the authentication of the king through miracles of healing, natural phenomena, and removal of demons, which supports the message; the spread of the same message through the disciples.
 2. Many people did not accept this message.
- B. So we could boil down the idea of seed as the word of God to mean the message that proclaims the King, His kingdom, participation in the kingdom through repentance and the resulting conduct of kingdom citizens. The other things in the text, like miracles, are supportive of those main themes.
- C. How we in this age fit into this is good to think about carefully. It is not that we are entering the kingdom immediately upon believing

in Jesus as most people think. We do become kingdom citizens immediately, but we are displaced because we live "in this world" instead of in the kingdom *per se*. We are foreign nationals, that is, we are not firstly citizens of the country/world in which we are living. So, God arranged that we expatriates (those who live outside their native country) should gather in small groups called churches to worship, fellowship, be taught, and propagate the message of the King as modified by the events of his crucifixion and resurrection and the church teaching of the apostles.

III. Soil and Fruit: The Core Message of the Parable

- A. The soil represents the heart of a recipient of the preaching. The fruit represents the life, conduct, character, and what comes out of the inside of a person.
- B. In order to properly understand the parable, we MUST understand this key idea: a tree is known by its fruit (Matthew 7:16, 20). If there is no fruit, that means there is nothing useful; no effective change; no difference. The springing up of a scrawny plant among rocks or thorns is not what Jesus intends to portray as "OK." That does not represent spiritual life. What He intends to convey is that when the plant produces fruit, it is that fruit which shows a person who is really alive and where God is at work.
- C. There are four kinds of soil upon which seed was scattered. List them in your mind: walking path, rock, thorns, and good soil. Many want to say that only the road represents an unsaved person. But if there is no fruit in three cases, I ask, how can you know there is salvation? By their fruit you know them; so if there is no fruit, how do you know them?
- D. In Matthew's version of the parable, there are six distinguishable results of the planting operation: trampled/devoured; scorched; choked; 30x fruit; 60x fruit; 100x fruit. In Luke's edition, only the 100x fruit level is given. Does it sound right if someone's spiritual life is "trampled, devoured, scorched, and choked"?
- E. Viewing the fruit from another angle, we see two levels of fruit: none (the first three cases), and much (30x, 60x, and 100x). Those seed choked by thorns had the same result as if they had not

germinated at all. Those scorched by the sun had the same zero result as if they had not grown at all.

- F. There are also characteristics of the soil and plant that indicate problems in the non-fruitful cases. There are descriptions like no depth of earth; no root; no moisture; temporary; stumbling; cares; deceitfulness; and unfruitfulness.
- G. The good ground produces a crop. That is where the action is. Fruit! Again, let us emphasize that sprouting is not salvation. Fruit represents salvation. No farmer in his right mind would try to say that the road, stones, or thorns could produce anything of value. You can tell just by looking at them that they are not right for fruit production. Those are not good outcomes. Those are bad outcomes. The structure of the passage shows three bad results and one (100x) good result, not one bad/three good.

IV. Satan

- A. Satan plays an important role in the parable and explanation. Exactly how he does his snatching-away work is not specified here. He is outside the realm of nature so this is a supernatural thing in ultimate origin, although he uses natural means to accomplish the effect. This is a troubling reality. The preacher is working hard and Satan is working hard against that work. The listener is hearing and Satan is trying to snatch away. The Bible is going out, and the Devil is trying to delete it, and its effect. The Devil is blinding the minds of those that believe not (2 Cor. 3:14, 4:4), taking advantage of depravity and using the sinful influences in the world to his advantage.
- B. Satan's goal is to make it so that people will not believe and be saved (Luke 8:12). He wishes for them to follow him, not God. If that is the devil's goal, what should be your goal? Do you want his goal or God's goal?
- C. We should take note that the devil is not the only reason that salvation doesn't happen. He is only blamed in ONE of the three bad cases. In the case of the second and third soils, you have the effects of the world and the flesh ruining the growing process.

Conclusion

The good soil represents the noble and good heart. We discern that the good heart is marked by (1) hearing and understanding; (2) enduring in obedience to it; (3) continuing to patiently bear fruit by means of good works.

Corresponding to this, we see that a bad response to the message is marked by the various deficiencies in the three soils. These include: (1) the influence of the devil to prevent them from believing and being saved; (2) receiving the word with emotionalism but falling away during testing; (3) being consumed by the things of life like anxieties, money and pleasures.

The agriculture extension soil testing service is a helpful tool to test your garden's soil to see what ingredients it needs. Pre-testing of a person's heart soil is more difficult, but the sure test is what happens when the word of God is planted. With *that* test in mind, what kind of heart soil do you have? Do you believe that your life presents the best growing environment that it can to the seed of God's word?

To hear God's word means to listen and understand and believe it. To keep the word means to obey it. And to bear fruit means to do the good works that the word of God exhorts us to do.

Has the devil has succeeded so far in stealing the Bible from your heart? Has it become trampled down in the mad rush of life so that it cannot grow? Did you initially receive the word with enthusiasm, but it was only an emotional response that failed to hold up under the smallest of pressure? Did you start out well, but because your life is surrounded by weedy individuals then the Word fell on hard times? Has your focus on work, and home and social pursuits and investments and money and entertainment cut out all the nutrients and energy for the growth of your faith and expression of it in the local church? Do you shelve the Bible on Sunday afternoon or put it in the freezer, so to speak, and not pick it up for the next 6 days? Do you leave the Word of God unchewed and undigested so that it passes through the alimentary canal of your mind and is eliminated, thus getting extremely little spiritual nutrition from it? Do you hear Scripture with a critical ear toward the speaker, or

read it with an eye toward technical issues or thinking of cross-references or similar words from other passages of Scripture, or how it will fit in your seminary paper--but not considering how it impacts your life, or teaches you about God, or calls you to obedience, or informs your faith, or shapes your following of Jesus?

Is your life like a spiritual version of the Svalbard seed vault when it comes to the Word--just storing it up on cryo-freeze? Or is it like a well-tended garden growing fruits from the seeds planted in it?

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