**Calvary Fellowship 9.4.2022 Matthew 13:1-23 “The Dirt on Spiritual Growth”**

* **I knew very early on that I was called to be a pastor - In fact, I had only been a Christian for 3 weeks when I told my future wife of my calling**
* We had just come out of church on a Wednesday night & we were standing in the parking lot & I said, “U know that message the pastor gave? I think I can do that. I think God is calling me to be a pastor.”
* Carey, my then girlfriend, future wife said, “Are U sure about that? Don’t U remember High School? U should. U were there for 5 years.”
* Now b/c I felt called to be a pastor, I wanted to teach & get better at communicating - it didn’t happen until 4 years later, but I was excited
* **My 1st teaching assignment was a 4 week class on the book of Jude**
* The class was on a Monday night & typically these classes would start out w/ 30 people & end w/ 20 people over the course of 4 weeks
* My class grew every week, so the church staff was very happy w/ me
* At the end of the class we asked everyone to fill out an evaluation
* I got glowing reviews - all except for 1 person who said I told too many stories
* Guess what I obsessed over - the 50 people who loved the class or the 1 guy who was critical? I couldn’t sleep over the 1 guy
* I even took his evaluation & tried to match it to the attendance sheet
* By the way, that has been the #1 criticism people have had about me - they’ve said, “Pastor Bob tells too many stories.”
* 1st, let me give U the spoiler alert - that isn’t going to change
* 2nd - U know who else told a lot of stories & made storytelling his primary method of teaching? Jesus - check mate, I win - let me tell U a story about that
* Jesus was a storyteller - in fact, 1/3 of Jesus’ words & teaching are parables
* They are stories meant to illustrate the points that Jesus is making
* The stories that Jesus told are called “parables” which is a transliteration from the Greek “paraboles” which means “to cast alongside”
* The idea is that Jesus told a story & essentially laid it alongside the point He was making & the story brought clarity to the teaching itself
* Teaching in parables was a very common teaching style for rabbis in that day
* History records 100’s of parables that famous rabbis taught - some of them are absolutely hilarious - I’ll share some with U sometime
* The parables Jesus taught teach us about the character & nature of God - they explain God’s heart to us, & they give us insight into how God wants us to live
* **So by way of introduction I want to give U 3 truths about the Parables of Jesus, that will help U understand them no matter how different they are:**
* **#1 - Parables are Jewish in Nature**
* The parables are not just Jewish - they are extremely Jewish & to not set them w/in a Jewish context, U will misunderstand the meaning of the parable
* Many times we insert our own cultural ideas into a Jewish teaching & what we get is misunderstanding about what the teaching is really about
* **So here’s a famous parable by Rabbi Eleazer - there was a rabbi who was riding his donkey, feeling elated over his extensive studying the Torah**
* On his journey, he encounters an exceedingly ugly man walking the same road
* The ugly man says, “Peace be upon U rabbi” - the rabbi look at him & says, “If everyone in your town as ugly as U?” - I ugly man said, “I don’t know. Maybe U should ask the 1 who made me, why U made this vessel so ugly.”
* The rabbi immediately got off his donkey, bowed before the man & asked his forgiveness - so what does the parable mean? Don’t be mean to ugly people?
* No - in a Jewish context, the rabbi is famous, educated, knowledgable, riding a donkey, signifying his position in life - the man is walking, signifying he is poor
* He had no education & has no standing in social circles - The story teaches us sometimes those w/ no training have greater wisdom than the educated
* Here’s the point - if we neglect the cultural setting in which these parables were written in, we will miss their meaning completely
* **#2 - Parables are Insights into God’s Kingdom**
* **The message of the parables is for us to understand how things are supposed to work in God’s kingdom & for God’s people**
* That’s why people who are supposed to hate each other forgive & sacrifice
* That’s why 1 soil doesn’t bear any fruit & another bears fruit 100x over
* That’s why a person finds hidden treasure & sells everything he own to buy the field where the treasure is
* The parables give us insight into how things are supposed to work, how God wants things to work, & how things will ultimately work in the kingdom of God
* **#3 - Parables sometimes Overturn the Norms**
* Sometimes to make a point, Jesus illustrates God has an judge who is annoyed by a woman demanding justice
* Sometimes Jesus praises a manager who is cooking the books for his own gain
* It can mess us up if we miss the point of the parable
* It’s like my daughter Livi - I have many nicknames for her - when she was 3, 1 of them was Godzilla - do U know what Godzilla’s goal is in every movie?
* He wants to destroy Tokyo - that’s it - do U know what my daughter’s mission was in life at 3 years old? To find rooms that were clean & destroy them
* Does this mean I believe my daughter is a fire-breathing dragon? No
* It means I believed she was bent on the destruction of anything neat & orderly
* The point is, we can’t take the parable beyond Jesus’ intention or it will mess us our understanding of the parable & Jesus’ original intention
* **So what we’re going look at is 1 of Jesus’ most famous parables - what I love about it is the topic - spiritual growth**
* I believe this is the most important of the 7 parables Jesus gives - that’s not just preference, Jesus says in Mark 4 that tis parable is key
* “And He said to them, ‘Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?’” (Mark 4:13)
* In this parable, Jesus is going show how U can evaluate yourself & see if you’re growing spiritually & if U aren’t, U can see what might be choking the growth

**———(v. 1-9; 18-19)———**

**#1 - The Wayside Soil: The Uninterested Unbeliever**

* **I want U to notice that multitudes are gathered - tons of people listening to Jesus & not everyone is at the same level or there for the same reason**
* So Jesus is going to tell a story - it’s about seed that’s being scattered & a sower who is faithful to scatter it - but the ground is different - why?
* B/c not everyone who is receiving the seed is accepting it in the same way
* So Jesus says the seed hits the path & gets trampled on under people’s feet & then the birds of the air come & take the seed away
* **There’s 2 things happening here - 1st, there’s evil working against this person b/c the birds come & take the seed away**
* But that doesn’t happen until they trample on the seed 1st - that means they treated the seed in an insulting way
* Ever give someone a gift that U believe is precious & they think it’s no big deal?
* **Years ago, before I had kids - when I still had a lot of hair - I gave my nephew my original 1977 Luke Skywalker action figure**
* I sat down w/ him & I said, “When I was your age, I went to the movies w/ my dad & my older brother to see a movie called, “Star Wars”
* I grew up in a broken home w/o both my parents & this guy Luke didn’t grow up w/ his parents either & he saved the galaxy - by this time I’m crying
* "So today I give this to U b/c I believe you’re going to change world.”
* He says, “Cool. Thanks!” And throws Luke down the hall
* That’s when I told his parents that this kid might be demon possessed
* I was about to play out that scene when Darth Vader chokes that guy b/c he finds his lack of faith disturbing - but the grown ups broke things up
* I’m like, “U don’t throw Luke around. That’s a precious gift bro!”
* But this is what happens when someone doesn’t see the value of spiritual things - they discard it & then Satan comes & takes away whatever is left
* Listen - if Jesus is saying tot he crowd listening to Him, “There’s people here today that couldn’t care less about what I’m saying.” - That’s Jesus people!
* That means, some people in our lives aren’t going to care either
* Let me tell U what we have to become really good at as Christians - really good at answering questions w/ kindness & ignoring opportunities to argue
* We should always be willing to answer honest questions that people have about our faith, but arguing is a complete waste of time
* Here’s why: b/c no 1 has ever been argued into the Kingdom of God
* Do U remember what win U over? It was God’s kindness
* “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4)
* U got the answers U needed & it opened your eyes to love & grace of God
* So don’t give up on the wayside unbelievers in your life - love them & give them time - b/c listen, I was once like that - I heard the Gospel many times before I responded but someone loved me enough to not give up on me…

**———(v. 5-6; 20-21)———**

**#2 - The Rocky Soil: The Flaky Believer**

* **This person hears God’s Word & gets excited - they’re the 1st person down to the front when we give an invitation for people to receive Jesus**
* They’re the ones who join 5 Growth Groups - they want to serve at Calvary
* They listen to all the Worship music - they listen to all the podcasts - they buy the biggest Bible & they buy a matching T-shirt to go w/ it
* Then something happens - something or someone gets in the way of their spiritual growth & they disappear b/c they they had no root
* There’s a challenge here - the person falls away b/c of 2 things - tribulation & persecution - these are 2 different things
* Tribulation is something that happens to everyone - it’s trouble & trouble seems to find everyone at some point in their lives
* Persecution doesn’t happen to everyone - persecution is something that is brought about b/c of someone’s faith
* In this season, U need have a root system b/c this is when a person has to live out their faith - but they didn’t b/c they didn’t didn’t develop roots
* **Here’s how it works in nature & in every area of your life - roots don’t grow in the summer - summer is when we’re bearing fruit**
* We develop deep roots in the winter - when on the outside, things look dead there’s a deep work that’s happening underground where no 1 sees
* This is why living in Florida is so challenging b/c we don’t have seasons to remind us that things change & some things don’t last forever
* The early season of relationships is fun & everything is new, but U don’t want that season to last forever - there will never be any depth to your relationship
* **When I 1st started dating my wife, I was nervous just to hold her hand**
* The 1st time we went to a restaurant I has butterflies in my stomach & I couldn’t eat - can U guess if that feeling has passed or not?
* Could U imagine if those feelings never went away? It would be horrible
* I’d come home from the office & sit down to dinner w/ my family & I’d say, “I’m sorry, I can’t eat. I’ve got butterflies over this meal we’re having.”
* Listen, when a relationship matures, it’s not the person’s presence that makes things odd, it’s their absence - that’s why U can’t sleep when your spouse is out of town - their presence has almost become par of your DNA
* **But do U know what happens as U grow deep roots? It make everything better - Being married for 25 years is the most fun I’ve ever had in my life**
* If I knew it was going to be this good, I would have started here & skipped all the parts where we didn’t understand each other & had all the expectations
* The problem is, U can’t - to enjoy this season, U have to go through some winters & learn to dig roots & hold on when things are difficult
* But now - now, we speak w/ a short-hand & there’s no drama - it’s all joy
* **I had jury duty on Monday & when I got home, I still had bunch of stuff to take care of, so by the time dinner came around, I was wiped out**
* So I said to Carey, “U know what I could really go for? Remember, those kids cigarettes they used to sell when we are kids?”
* Well, Carey starts laughing & says, “Yes I remember, Those were awesome.”
* My kids were mortified - they said, “Dad, U told us you’ve never smoked anything in your life & now we’re finding out U smoked as a child!”
* Then Carey & I laughed even harder when we explained that the cigarettes they sold to kids are bubble gum in the shape of a cigarette
* Which, by the way, what kind of a maniac markets cigarettes to kids?
* My kids hear that & said, “The 80’s are different than they present it on Stranger Things.” - Yes, there were candy cigarettes, but no Demogorgon
* **Having babies is great - but U don’t want them to stay babies forever**
* Listen - especially U parents w/ newborns - it is a glorious day when your kids learn to eat & use the bathroom by themselves - hopefully not at the same time
* Do I miss the seasons when the kids were really little? Of course
* Sometimes I see old pictures of the kids & I cry b/c they aren’t little anymore
* But I don’t cry b/c I missed the opportunity - it’s b/c the season was so good
* That’s why the goal is not to miss the seasons b/c they doesn’t last forever
* But I am loving the season that I’m in w/ my kids b/c we’re having meaningful conversations about life & the future
* I saw a video this week of when I taught Mia to ride a bike & now she’s getting ready to get her learner’s permit & I’m going to be reaching her to drive
* “And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.” (Daniel 2:21)
* And God is reminding us that seasons don’t last forever - even the challenging season U might be going through right now - it won’t last forever
* This is the moment to prove that your faith is real b/c the surviving the winters of life are what make your faith unbreakable

**———(v. 7; 22)———**

**#3 - The Thorny Soil: The Fair-Weather Believer**

* **Fair-weather fans love their team when it’s going well & forget about them when they’re struggling**
* I don’t know if there’s anyone who frustrate me more than fair weather fans
* **I believe that U should be a fan of your hometown teams - I grew up in Boston, so my teams are the Red Sox, Celtics, Bruins, & the Patriots**
* I understand that Miami fans hate the Patriots - my kids’ lives since birth involved the Patriots going to the Super Bowl every year
* I was walking in the mall w/ my kids & there was a cardboard cut out of Patrick Mahomes - I told Mia, “He’s going to go to the Super Bowl this year.”
* She said, “What about the Patriots?” - I said, “They got knocked out.”
* She said, “What are U saying? Can they even have a Super Bowl if the Patriots aren’t in it?” - I said, “Yes, it’s just won’t be as much fun.”
* But I’ve been a fan since birth - even the really bad years
* In fact, I have a picture of me at 8 years old w/ a Patriots jersey on at a Disney World w/ my grandmother - they went 2-14 that season - they were awful
* But when someone is a fair weather believer in their relationship w/ God, this is the person who is following Jesus until something better comes along
* And we don’t have to wonder what will cause us to become fair-weather fans
* Jesus just lays it our for us - It’s 3 things - the cares (or worries) of this world, desiring riches, & pleasure
* To put it another way - it’s stuff that isn’t going to happen, stuff I don’t have, & stuff that I haven’t experienced
* All of it boils down to 1 thing - thinking that God is holding out on us
* That’s why we worry - b/c we don’t think God is going to come through for us
* Listen, this is at the heart of all the unwise things we do - lacking trust
* It’s why we desire more than I have - b/c we think God hasn’t provided enough
* It’s why we desire pleasure - b/c we think there’s experiences out there that God hasn’t allowed that’s going to make our lives better
* And here’s the reality - going outside of God’s will never made our lives better
* In fact, it only made life harder
* We never experience the blessing of God by violating the principles of God
* “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.” (Galatians 4:4)
* **My wife & I waited 10 yrs to have a baby -** I remember how long those years were - I really wondered if God had forgotten us
* And we went specialists to see if there was anything wrong w/ us
* But I’ll never forget the Monday morning Carey woke me up & was standing over me w/ a positive pregnancy test - it was just God’s time
* For years I had no idea why God made us wait 10 years - & last week Carey & I were talking & I said, “These kids got better parents b/c God waited.”
* And I realized that for years I thought God had forgotten about us, when in reality, God was waiting b/c of the kids He was going to give us
* He just wanted to work on their parents for a little longer

**———(v. 8; 23)———**

**#4 - The Good Soil: The Fruitful Believer**

* **There's this amazing contrast that Jesus gives here - while everyone has the best of intentions, this is the only soil that bears fruit**
* It's a picture that Jesus is giving us, asking us which we want to be
* Jesus says this person who bears fruit, he bears fruit w/ patience
* This means there’s isn’t going to be fruit right away
* My kids are learning instruments & my son was listening to me play a song & he said, “I don’t think I could ever play that.”
* I said, “Xander, I didn’t pick up a guitar until I was 15 years old. If U stick w/ it, you’ll be far better than me when you’re my age”
* When U start playing, U stink - U only get good & start to bear fruit when U patiently work at it & invest in your playing
* “But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.” (Psalm 1:2-3)
* Notice it doesn’t say, “Bring forth fruit all the time or every day”
* Instead, there are seasons to life - a blessed man or woman understands this reality - that there are fruit bearing seasons & there are root deepening seasons
* **That’s why whatever the blessed man does prospers him according to v. 3**
* B/c everything in our lives is working for God to transform us from who we are to who God wants us to be
* Think about this - if you’re unhappy w/ your job, there was a time when U were hoping & praying that God would bless U w/ that job
* So what happened? Something changed - It could be we stopped being grateful
* We started thinking that we could bloom if the next thing came along
* Don’t despise the days of preparation - b/c it’s where God is deepening your roots so U can bear fruit in your season & prosper everything U do
* When U prepare the soil of your heart w/ God’s Word, that’s when God can bear serious fruit in your life
* **Here’s what I know about U - U want to be the soil that produces fruit**
* U want God to work in your life & here’s the good news - God wants to work in our life - God wants this year to be different than last year
* The changes U want to see in your life - God wants to do that & even more
* That’s why when we come to the communion table, it’s our moment to remember what God has done in the past & embrace gratitude
* Listen, it’s impossible to feel entitled & be grateful at the same time
* That’s why the cure for feeling entitled is to be grateful
* And when you’re grateful, you’re in position to grow & bear amazing fruit in your life & communion is always the activity that centers us back in gratitude…