

# **The Parable of the Soils**

## **Part 2**

*Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23*

### **Shallow Soil**

- **The Bedrock of Wrong Belief**
- *Luke 24:11*

### **Stony Soil**

- **Boulders of Disobedience**
- *James 1:22-24*

### **Gravel Ground**

- **Gravel of Ingratitude**
- *Hebrews 3:7-19; Ezekiel 36:26-27*

love.learn.live.

[westvalleychurch.com](http://westvalleychurch.com)



**West Valley Church**  
**October 29, 2023**  
**Michael O'Neill**

## **The Parable of the Soils<sup>1</sup>**

### **Part Two**

***Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23***

This is the Word of God for the people of God! Thank you, Scott, for reading God's Word to us. May God bless his Word to our hearts.

Today we are continuing in our series on the parable of the soils. The story is found in Mark's, Luke's, and Matthew's Gospels, and Scott read it to us from Matthew 13. I'd encourage you to open your Bibles to that passage as we continue to explore it in more depth today.

First, let's review from last week: remember, we aren't really told who the farmer is; it could be God, or Jesus, or anyone who is sharing the Good News of Jesus or God's Word with others. What is the seed? The Word of God, which is the Logos, which is the purposes of God, which all comes to fulfillment in and through Jesus. If you don't understand the Logos, I encourage you to go to our website or our YouTube channel to download the manuscript or watch the message from last week so that you will have a better understanding, because it's very important to know.

What is the soil? It is our hearts. That's the point of this parable that Jesus taught; that we always want to be ready to receive more and more of Jesus in the soil of our souls, but we must examine our hearts. Jesus is teaching that the soil of our hearts will be able to receive more and more of Jesus into our lives all the time, so that we will enjoy abundant and fruitful life as God intended and so that our lives will produce more fruit for God, just like a crop. Because remember the seed is not planted just to produce a single plant, is it? A seed is planted to produce a crop and to reproduce multiple times. The seed is given to us with the intention that it would produce an entire crop of Christians as it grows in us and through us to the lives of unbelievers as we introduce them to Jesus. Right? Good.

So last week we looked at the first type of soil which Jesus described as the path. We talked about how we don't want to be pathway people, having hard hearts. Remember, we said the things that can pound a path through the soil of our souls are the wrong people, ponderings, and priorities.

Today we are going to look at the rocky soil, or the shallow soil.

I've been the pastor here coming up on fourteen years in January, but before we were here, I was the pastor of the Nazarene Church in Mountain Home, Idaho for eleven years. Mountain Home is in Southeastern Idaho, which is high desert country, and the ground is riddled with rocks. In some places, to build a building or a house, builders had to blast the ground with dynamite just to break

---

<sup>1</sup> Resources:

Phillip Keller, *A Gardener Looks at the Fruit of the Spirit*, Inspirational Press, 1993

Robert S. Snow, Arseny Ermakov, *Matthew: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, Beacon Hill Press, KC, 2019

Ralph Earle, "The Gospel according to St. Matthew," in *Matthew-Acts*, vol. 4, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966)

John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016)

William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Third Ed., *The New Daily Study Bible* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001)

up the layer of rock that sits below the surface. Some houses had to be built higher because they just couldn't get past the rock beneath the soil.

There are areas around Mountain Home that are great for farming – especially potatoes! But even then, the farmers have to work the rocks out of the soil, and the land they farm is the result of hard work done over a hundred years ago. Otherwise, it's not good for farming – for the very reasons Jesus talked about in this parable. And a shallow-soiled soul isn't good for a Christian, either. Which brings up an important point: this type of soil is talking about people who have become Christians already. They've received the Word of God and the purposes of God into their lives quickly and enthusiastically. But even though it appears that the person is a strong and excited Christian, the believer falls away – their faith withers up and dies. We don't want to be that kind of Christian, so let's learn from this soil today about some things that we can prevent from causing us to wither up in our faith and die.

One of the things about this kind of soil is that it is...

## **Shallow Soil.**

This soil is actually rich and fertile, but it is only a few inches deep. Under that fertile soil is a solid shelf of rock. Now, that rock helps retain heat and moisture, so seed that lands in it will germinate and grow very quickly. But soon the roots run out of room because they have nowhere to grow. So when challenges come, the plant dies out. Make a mental note of that: when the challenges come, the plant dies out.

By the way, this is why, in all my almost 40 years of ministry – almost 15 as a full-time youth pastor and now 25 years as a lead pastor, I don't put a lot of stock in big emotions when someone becomes a Christian or has a spiritual breakthrough. That's because I know that success is *not* the initial, enthusiastic, emotional response; success is in the growth that happens *afterward*. Because the true test of the depth and authenticity of someone's faith will come as their life is lived out and as they face the challenges of life. Emotions are great – you can't help but get excited about the great things that Jesus does in your life and about the relationship you can have with him. But Jesus teaches here that it's not the enthusiastic reception of the Word that makes the difference; it's the depth of the soil of your soul. If the soil is shallow, we will be in trouble.

So what is this shallow soil, this layer of rock? It is...

## **The Bedrock of Wrong Belief**

...that lies just below the surface. Notice I did not say, "*unbelief*" or *no belief*". We all have faith in something or someone. Even atheists have faith. There are three main faith systems in this world: polytheism, which is the belief in many gods (like Hinduism), monotheism, which is the belief in one God (there are three: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity), and a-theism, which is the belief in no gods. Even atheists have a belief system – it's a faith that there is no god. We all have faith in something or someone, but what we ultimately need is faith in the *right* thing, and that is Jesus Christ. So the bedrock of wrong belief can be belief in anything *besides* Jesus Christ. Sometimes the difference in your faith in God and faith in other things can be very subtle, but any time your faith is not in God alone, you are in danger of running into rock under the soil of your heart. Sometimes we can find ourselves putting more faith in our friends, or our spouses, or even godly

people and pastors, then we do God. We can begin to rely more on material things or circumstances – our jobs, our bank accounts, or that things seem to be going well for the time being. But whatever those people or things that we put our faith in may be, no matter how good or reliable they are, *there is no substitute for God*. Because things go wrong, circumstances change, people make mistakes and let you down, and soon you find that you become hard and cynical. Without your faith in God alone, through Jesus Christ, you will be in danger because of the bedrock of wrong belief. You see, it doesn't matter how strong your faith is if it's in the wrong things. *Your faith is only as good as the object of it. (repeat).*

When I sat down in this chair, I had faith that it would hold me up. I'd had good experiences with it before, so I had some good reason to believe it would hold me up again. But let's say it wasn't the same chair, it just looked like it; or that someone had messed with it and removed some important support screws. It wouldn't matter how strong my faith in it was, it still wouldn't hold me up – correct? (Nobody get any ideas!) But my faith is only as good as the object of it. I can believe all day long that my chair is going to hold me up, but it's a bad chair, my faith won't make any difference and I will hit the ground.

Your faith needs to be placed in Christ – he's the only One that can be completely counted on at all times, in all circumstances. Faith in anything or anyone else is wrong and misplaced faith.

There was a news report a few years ago about a photographer who was a skydiver. He had jumped from a plane along with several other skydivers and was videoing the group as they free-fell and opened their parachutes. On the video that was shown on the news, as the final skydiver opened his chute, the picture went berserk. The news reporter stated that the video camera man had fallen to his death, having jumped out of the plane without his parachute. He was so excited to get out there with the group that he forgot to put one on. It wasn't until he reached for his ripcord that he realized he was free falling without a parachute.

Until that point, the jump probably seemed exciting and fun. But tragically, he had acted with thoughtless haste and deadly foolishness. Nothing could save him, because the faith he put in a parachute failed him. He never put it on. Faith in anything but the all-sufficient God can be just as tragic, spiritually. Only with buckled-in faith in Jesus Christ do we dare step into the dangerous excitement of life. Faith in anything else is dangerous and wrong belief. It doesn't matter how enthusiastic you are. No matter how great that thing might be, no matter how excited you are, if your faith isn't completely in Christ, then the truth of God's Word won't take deep root in your heart. In fact, God's Word will even seem like foolishness to you.

Look at the disciples. Of anyone, they should have had "deep soil." Yet for a long time they didn't fully believe in who Jesus was. We know this because we see them questioning him right up until the end, and even after his resurrection. When Jesus rose from the dead, think about what happened: the women had gone to the tomb after Jesus had been crucified and buried. They got to the tomb and found it empty. Angels then appeared to them to confirm Jesus' resurrection. They ran back and told the disciples all about it. But the Bible records the disciples' reaction:

"The disciples did not believe the women, because their words seemed like nonsense."  
(Luke 24:11, niv)

Here was the proof of the truth – Jesus' resurrection – and they didn't believe it. Of course, we know that the disciples eventually did fully believe. But the point is, if you don't have faith in who Jesus is, the truth of his word will not take root in you; it will make no sense and you will dismiss

it. Fortunately, the disciples did come to their senses, and so can we, by putting our faith fully in Christ.

But this type of soil isn't only the kind with buried bedrock; it is also...

## **Stony Soil.**

Unlike previous bedrock soil, this soil has large boulders and rocks in it. It's fertile soil, but it takes enormous work to get anything to grow in it because roots have to grow down and around these rocks. What are these stones? They are the...

## **Boulders of Disobedience.**

Every act of disobedience places a boulder in the soil of our hearts, making it that much more difficult for God's Word to grow. There have been times when I've worked with folks in the church, trying to help them grow in Christ, and we just had to keep going back and dig up boulders. It's spiritual excavation, and it's hard work, just like trying to remove boulders from potential farmland. We'd no sooner make progress in their faith than they'd bury another boulder in the soil of their soul. You end up spending so much time digging up boulders that you begin to wonder if anything is ever going to grow. Every act of disobedience is like that. That's why it's so important that we submit to the Holy Spirit, and we obey God's Word. The Bible tells us:

Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don't act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like. (James 1:22-24, tmt)

Obedience is the key to fertile-soiled souls. Disobedience plants boulders in your heart that, left unearthed, will impede, or even block and kill your growth. The way to dig them up is to confess, repent, and ask God to bring his spiritual excavator, the Holy Spirit and dig it out of your heart. You may have to assist – by seeking reconciliation with someone or making restitution or asking forgiveness. For sure by obeying.

Let's just do a quick check: The seed is what? The purposes of God, revealed in his creation and work in this world and our lives, and culminated in Jesus Christ, his Son. The Bible tells us what we need to know about all that so we can be saved and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

What is the soil? Our hearts. Our lives.

And Jesus says in this parable that the seed on this type of soil won't take deep root because the soil is shallow. When troubles come, it destroys the plant. If we don't obey, the same will be true for our Christian lives. No matter how enthusiastic we are about it.

Notice what Jesus said about these people, "They believe for a while." One pastor writes, "That's an important statement. There are people who believe for a while but in time of temptation fall away. Jesus said in John 8:31 –

"If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine." (John 8:31)

The writer of Hebrews talks about true believers being those who persevere. Paul told the Colossians about the true believer who continues in the faith, contrasted with those who believe for a while.”<sup>2</sup>

It’s kind of like someone who hastily builds a house without paying attention to codes or safety regulations. The house might have gone up fast, and look great, but as soon as a hurricane comes, there won’t be much left of their house. When all is calm and the skies are blue, building our lives on something other than obedience to God’s Word can be tempting. But there’s only one way to be ready for a storm. It benefits us to obey – then God’s Word can go deep, and we can be productive Christians!

I think sometimes in the church we breed this kind of belief in the quick fix and the emotional experience. I saw this so many times during my years as a youth pastor. There would be camps or retreats where students would make an emotional decision for Jesus. I’m not saying that’s bad, but they’d often get stuck there. They’d equate their spiritual life and position with *that* emotion. But then they’d get home and be thrust back into sibling issues or cranky parents or unsaved friends...or in some cases, they’d come back home to abusive situations. Or even if not that, when life started just wearing them out, they’d wonder where that feeling was, and they’d think they were failures or worse, not saved. But if they’d taken the time to invest in God’s Word, prayer, prioritizing disobedience, building those relationships and priorities into their lives, they’d find a different dynamic at work.

But often these students would grow up and start looking for the same things at Promise Keepers or Women of Faith conferences or other types of events. So we become event addicts. We want the quick fix. We want to be Pop Tart Christians, when what we need to be are Crock Pot Christians. Instead of the big emotional event, we need to slow cook our faith over the long haul. Eugene Peterson called Christianity “A long obedience in the same direction.” Otherwise, we end up with shallow soil, stony soil, or third...

## **Gravel Ground.**

This is soil with layers of gravel or streaks of sand running through it that seeds can’t push through. This is the...

## **Gravel of Ingratitude.**

An ungrateful heart leaves streaks of gravel in your soul that the root of God’s Word won’t be able to maneuver through, and so it will wither and die. Ingratitude. Some people will gripe no matter what. No matter how good they have it, it’s not good enough.

There’s a story of a young pastor who was making farewell visits to the people of his congregation before he moved to another church. Visiting one very elderly lady – a lady he visited regularly – he explained why he was leaving. He was a bit concerned about her response, because she always seemed to lean toward the negative. After he told her, the woman sighed deeply and said, “Well, we’ll never have another minister as good as you’ve been.” The young pastor was caught off guard and blushed, scuffing his feet on the floor, and said, “Oh, I’m sure the next pastor will be excellent.”

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/sermons/2005/august/2434.html>

The elderly woman shook her head with determination and said, “You don’t understand. I’ve been here through five pastors and each one has been worse than the last.” If we have a complaining spirit of ingratitude, we can find what’s wrong with anything.

Like layers of gravel, ingratitude, grumbling, and complaining lies just below the surface of what looks like fertile soil. But you don’t have to scratch below the surface too much before you find it. The seed has a tendency to pop up here and there, until the difficulties of life come and wash away what little topsoil there is. Then everyone sees you for what you are.

Don’t be ungrateful. Don’t gripe and snipe. Because you are only hardening your *own* heart’s ability to receive God’s Word. Please take this very seriously; God does. Look at what happened to complainers in the Bible (Remember the Israelites had been set free from four centuries of slavery in Egypt, but now they were in the desert on the journey, and they were grumbling and complaining and being ungrateful). The New Testament writer to the Hebrews wants us to learn the lesson from them and not repeat their ingratitude. Listen:

So, as the Holy Spirit says:

“Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts  
as you did in the rebellion,  
during the time of testing in the wilderness,  
where your ancestors tested and tried me,  
though for forty years they saw what I did.  
That is why I was angry with that generation;  
I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray,  
and they have not known my ways.’ (*Logos!*)  
So I declared on oath in my anger,  
“They shall never enter my rest.”

See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. As has just been said:

“Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts  
as you did in the rebellion.”

Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief. (Hebrews 3:7-19, niv)

These people were living a miracle, but instead of being grateful for all they had, they complained about what they did not have. They compared everything to what they used to have, and of course they remembered it far better than it really was. So they became hard hearted and griped. Fault finding and criticism becomes chronic, and soon it’s our mindset; it’s all we see and all we are.

Turn grumbling into gratitude and pouting into praise to God. If not, your heart is becoming too hard for even God's Word to grow in it.

No matter how fast your start in your Christian life, no matter how excited you are, if there's unbelief, disobedience, or ingratitude, there's just not enough heart for God's Word to grow in.

It reminds me of a scene I saw recently on the Discovery Channel. One documentary was pointing out that the cheetah survives on the African plains by running down its prey. The big cat can spring into a sprint of seventy miles an hour! But the cheetah can't sustain that pace for long. Within its long, sleek body is a disproportionately small heart, which causes the cheetah to get tired quickly. Unless the cheetah catches its prey in the first flurry, it has to abandon the chase.

With unbelief, disobedience, and ingratitude, we're like that cheetah: we start out great – we can beat anything. But there's not enough heart for a sustained effort. We fizzle before we finish. And if we keep trying, we die of a heart attack – not enough heart to make it. We need deep, rich-soiled souls to sustain growth in Christ. Is your heart full of stone by wrong belief, disobedience to God, and ingratitude? Listen to the promise that God gives you:

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 36:26-27, niv)

*Prayer*

*Benediction (Pastor Div)*

(Ephesians 3:17-19, tlb)

I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts, living within you as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love; and may you be able to feel and understand, as all God's children should, how long, how wide, how deep, and how high his love really is; and to experience this love for yourselves, though it is so great that you will never see the end of it or fully know or understand it. And so at last you will be filled up with God himself.