The Seed And The Soil (Thought borrowed from Ken Gurley)

Luke 8:5-15
5 A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.
6 And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung 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 And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Intro

• The setting for this story is packed with drama.
  o Jesus has just stopped a funeral procession
    ▪ and raised to life the only son of a widow.
  o He has taught with penetrating clarity and authority.
    ▪ He has confronted the religious authorities of His day.
• His words are bringing hope and life to common people.
  o The crowds are compelled to Him,
    ▪ to come and hear him teach.
• They drawn to where he is,
  o to watch and see what he will do next.
• There’s a certain sense of awe
  o that has gripped the whole countryside.
    ▪ Never has there been a man like this.
      • Never has anyone spoken words like these.

• The three gospels that record this parable
  o inform us that Jesus preached it to great crowds.
    ▪ Crowds so great, that Mark and Matthew tell us,
      • He was forced to teach this parable
        o from a boat on the lake.
• He would never be more popular
  o than He was at the moment.
    ▪ Never would it more important
      • to deliver the single most salient point
        o of His mission on earth.

• Jesus Christ came to seek and save the lost.
  o It was his mission.
    ▪ It was the very purpose for which he came.
• It is no surprise then,
  o that in this most well known and important
    ▪ of all of His parables
• he focused on preaching the gospel.

• More specifically, He focused on the response
  o of those who heard the word of God
    ▪ preached to them.

• The parable of the sower
  o is not so much about the sower,
    ▪ or the seed
    • as it is about the soil.

• One sower sows the same seed, indiscriminately.
  o That seed has, within it, the kernel of life.
    ▪ It has the ability to spring forth into life.
  o But the effectiveness of that seed is determined,
    ▪ not by the sower,
    ▪ nor by the seed itself,
    • but by the kind of soil that receives the seed.

• Jesus explained the parable to his disciples.
  o He told them that the seed is the word of God.

• The preached word of God
  o is that all-important kernel of life
    ▪ that each and every one of us
      • will receive today.

• The sower would be the preacher
  o and the sower does not discriminate.
    ▪ He sows the seed liberally.
  o He does not limit, in any way,
    ▪ the potential effectiveness of the seed.

• However, the harvest that springs forth
  o from the preached word of God
    ▪ varies from life to life.

• This is not the fault of the seed,
  o nor is it the fault of the sower.
    ▪ The harvest depends greatly
      • upon the kind of soil that receives the seed.

• In the parable, Jesus tells us
  o that there are four kinds of soil.

• All four kinds of soil
  o look the same to the casual observer.
    ▪ Dirt is dirt.

• The differences are internal.
  o There are inconsistencies within the soil
    ▪ that determine the productiveness of the seed.

The Hardened Place
The story starts like this:

5 A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.

- There is a sower,
  - there is the seed,
    - and there is a patch of ground
      - upon which it is to be sown.
- This is not a large commercial operation.
  - This is a small patch of ground
    - that belongs to a simple unassuming farmer.
- Beside this patch of soil
  - there is a footpath that people use
    - to bypass the field as they go
      - to and from town.
- Countless feet have walked
  - on the soil in the footpath, year after year.
- They have beat it down and packed it
  - until the soil is dense.
- The hardness of the soil in the footpath runs deep.
  - It has been compacted many inches below the surface.
    - Deep enough that nothing will grow there.
- Perhaps you’ve seen such a place.
  - Some corner of grass where two sidewalks meet,
    - but countless people have decided
      - to cut the corner and walk across the grass.
    - There is trail there,
      - where no grass can grow,
        - because the earth is compacted together
          - from the foot traffic.
- My dad used to have a spot, at his old house,
  - where he set up the archery targets.
- Every day he stood in virtually the same place
  - and shot arrows at the targets.
    - Every day he walked back and forth
      - between that spot and the targets
        - to retrieve his arrows.
  - Over time, through years of this kind of traffic,
    - a footpath emerged in the middle of that sea of grass,
      - where nothing grew.
- I would venture to guess
  - that the trail remained there
    - for quite some time after he moved away
      - and quit walking that path every day.
• That’s the kind of path that Jesus is talking about
  o when he talks about the wayside of the field.
• The problem is that the soil there is hard
  o and compacted deep below the surface
    • and the seed that falls upon it
      • will never be able to take root and thrive.

• Jesus explained that kind of soil this way:

12 Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

• It breaks my heart to say it
  o but there are some people here today
    • that will categorically reject
      • the preached word of God.
• Part of your heart has grown hard and calloused.
  o Perhaps you’ve become a bit cynical
    • and jaded by religion
      • and by all of the charlatans and fakes
        o that you’ve encountered.
  o Or perhaps you’ve tried and failed before
    • and your heart has become hardened
      • by sin and failure.
  o Or, maybe, you’ve had some great
    • disappointment in your life
      • and you’ve allowed bitterness
        o to creep into your soul
          • and harden your heart.
• Whatever it is, there is a part of you
  o that simply will not embrace
    • the promise of hope and new life
      • that the preached word of God brings.
  o So, when the word is preached,
    • you relegate it to that hard part of your heart.

• That’s the first message of the parable:
  o the human heart can be so battered
    • and beaten down
      • by sin,
      • disobedience,
      • or bitterness
    • that it becomes completely insensitive
      • to the word of God.
The post analysis of a hard heart
  o will reveal many causes.
• For some it is secret, hidden sin
  o that, though it brings shame and guilt,
    ▪ never really yields true repentance.
  o And every time that it rears its ugly head
    ▪ and takes control of your life,
      • it hardens your heart a little more.
• For others it is some deep emotional wound
  o that you've never really allowed to heal.
    ▪ That wounded place gets harder and harder
      • with the passing of time.
• There are some who have simply
  o heard the gospel so many times
    ▪ without ever really putting it into practice
      • that they have become hardened to the word.
• Whatever the cause,
  o these hardhearted people
    ▪ are all along the edges of the field.
      • They come to church.
• We aren’t talking about people
  o who are not here today.
• We are talking about people
  o to whom the word is preached.
    ▪ The seed falls on their lives
      • but it never takes root.
• As the truth sits
  o on the hardened soil of their hearts,
    ▪ the devil comes along with some distraction,
      • and in a moment their mind is captivated
        o by something else in this world
      • and the life-giving seed is stolen from them
        o before it ever has a chance to take root.

The Shallow Place

• Jesus continues the parable this way:

6 And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.

• For a farmer in the Ozarks,
  o farming is a lot like it is in Israel.
• Every winter, the frosts push rocks to the surface
  o and every spring the rocks
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- must be removed from the field.
- The land up in the hills
  - that is now widely used as hunting land
    - was once farm land
  - and you don’t have to walk very far
    - through those woods
      - until you will find a rock wall
        - that marks the edge of where a field once was.
- Every season the farmer stacked those rocks there,
  - he would remove every stone from his field
    - but every new season brought new rocks.
- The problem, however, was not the rocks you could see.
  - Those were easily removed.
    - The problem was the rocks you could not see.
- There were places in those fields
  - where the underlying rock comes close to the surface
    - and has only a thin covering of soil.
- And I’m not talking about the kind of rock
  - you can carry away.
- Sometimes just a few inches under the skin of the soil,
  - there would be a massive slab of solid limestone.
- It would appear to be good soil,
  - on the surface,
    - but the rock below was detrimental to the soil.
- The sun would warm that kind of soil fastest,
  - since it was so shallow.
    - The seed that was planted there
      - would quickly germinate,
    - but since there was so little depth,
      - moisture also quickly evaporated
        - from shallow soil.
  - There was no place to put down roots
    - and the plant had to
      - put all of its energy into growth.
- It grew fast.
  - It would seem to be doing better
    - than the rest of the crops in the field.
  - But when the summer sun
    - began to beat down on that plant,
      - it withered and died,
        - because it had no place
          - to send its roots for moisture.

**Jesus said:**
13 They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.

- These are people who come to the altar
  - and respond in quick,
    - emotional,
    - euphoric,
    - instant excitement.
  - They are swift to respond,
    - but all too often their quick growth
      - withers and dies
        - with the first true test.

- Why is it that some folks
  - are so quick to receive the word
    - but so easily lose their grasp on it?
- It is because of the rock
  - that lies just below the surface of their heart.
- That great huge slab of defiance
  - represents the portion of their life
    - that has never been submitted to God.
- Their repentance was only a surface thing,
  - They never truly broke up the fallow ground.
    - They never really dealt with the issues in their heart.
- They've chosen to engage
  - the word of God on a surface level.
    - They've chosen to try to serve God
      - from the shallow soil of their heart.

- The problem here is not that they grow quick.
  - The problem is not that they have
    - too much enthusiasm for the things of God.
- The problem is that these people
  - are living on the shifting sands of emotions.
    - Their whole experience with God
      - is as shallow as their emotions.
  - They have enthusiasm
    - but they don't have any endurance.
  - They grow fast,
    - but all of the growth is exterior,
      - it is only focused
        - on what can be seen from the outside.
- They never put down any roots
  - because the deeper parts of their heart
    - have been reserved,
• they have been held back.
  o That is the rock of rebellion in their lives
    ▪ that has never truly been broken.
  o The word can’t put down roots
    ▪ because the depths of their heart
      • are not fully surrendered to God.

• The problem with that kind of soil
  o is that the commitment doesn’t last.
    ▪ They start out in a blaze of glory.
      • Their enthusiasm cannot be contained.
    ▪ They want to do it all,
      • to be a part of everything.
  o But all of their growth is on the outside.
    ▪ When the pressure of life comes,
      • when the hot sun finally breaks through the façade
        o and scorches their heart,
          ▪ there is nothing there to sustain them.

• They are the kind of people
  o that drift in and out of church.
    ▪ They are up and down,
      • hot and cold.
        o Here a while, there a while.
  • They have a veneer of Christianity,
    o but the foundation of their life
      ▪ is still that same unbroken rock
        • of sin and rebellion against God.
    o The problem is that they have never really
      ▪ fully surrendered to God.
    o They live their life however they want to live it.
      ▪ They do whatever they feel like doing
        • instead of what they know
          o that they should be doing.

• They give the appearance of being healthy.
  o They give the appearance of growth and productivity.
    ▪ But their heart is separated from God
      • by their own unbroken will.
  o They have never fully surrendered
    ▪ the reigns of their life to God.
  o They will serve him
    ▪ as long as it is convenient for them.
• But they will not allow
  o the bonds of their service to God
    ▪ to become an inconvenience
      • to the pleasures of their life.
• Jesus said of these people that they fall away.
  o They are not saved.
    ▪ They become lost on a church pew.

The Thorny Place

• He went on to describe the third kind of soil:

7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.

• This third kind of soil was the worst of all,
  o because after clearing the land
    ▪ of stones and weeds,
    • there was the persistent problem of thorns.
• The way most farmers prepared
  o their fields for planting
    ▪ was to burn them.
• This cleared the land of all the weeds.
  o The problem was,
    ▪ the roots of the thorn plant
    • could remain through the fire.
  o On the surface,
    ▪ everything looked fine,
    • but the root of the problem
      o was still there,
    ▪ slowly choking
      • the life of the harvest.

• Jesus said:

14 And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

• When the seed is sown on this soil,
  o then watered and germinated,
    ▪ the entrenched thorns
      • also sprout and grow
        o with an aggressive violence,
      • choking out the seed
        o before it can produce fruit.
• This is a divided heart,
  o infected with incompatible loyalties.
    ▪ The thorns demand the time and attention
      • that is necessary for growth in the kingdom of God
    ▪ and, as they devour the resources of life,
• they destroy the good harvest of the word of God.
• Jesus told us exactly what the thorns are.
  o They are the cares of day-to-day living,
    ▪ the riches of this world,
    ▪ and the pleasures of this life.

• We all have cares.
  o We all have the worries
    ▪ that are a requisite part of life.
• The warning here is that
  o it is easy to lose our productivity as Christians
    ▪ because we get too bogged down
    ▪ in the cares and concerns of this life.
  o Our spiritual growth
    ▪ can become stunted by the worries
    ▪ and cares of this life.
• The root problem here
  o is that we haven’t truly learned
    ▪ to trust God.
• The thorny root
  o that is choking the spiritual life from us
    ▪ is simply an absence of faith.
• Somewhere along the way
  o we have to learn that we can trust God,
    ▪ no matter what happens in our life.
• He orders our footsteps,
  o he governs our way
    ▪ and he is always going to take care of us.
  o No matter what the storm brings,
    ▪ no matter how fierce the trial may be,
      ▪ he that promised is faithful!

• Surprisingly enough,
  o the next thorn that Jesus mentioned was wealth.
• Why would financial wellbeing
  o become the kind of thing
    ▪ that would choke out our spiritual life?
• The answer lies in self-reliance
  o instead of dependency on God.
• If we aren’t careful
  o we can be fooled into believing
    ▪ that we are self-sustaining,
      ▪ that we don’t need anyone or anything.
• But, nothing could be further from the truth.
  o We need God.
    ▪ We need his help.
• We cannot grow spiritually
  o on the basis of our own resources.
  ▪ We need what only God can give us.

• No matter how much money
  o you have in the bank today,
  ▪ no matter how affluent
  ▪ or well off you may be,
  ▪ you depend on God for your very next breath.
  o All the money in the world
  ▪ can’t add one minute to your life.
  o All of the riches of the ages
  ▪ cannot buy your way into heaven.

• You need God.
  o And the moment you forget that
  ▪ is the moment that the thorns
  ▪ begin to choke out your walk with God.

• The final thorn is represented by the pleasures of this life.
  o Once again, this seems to be an odd thing
  ▪ to single out as a threat
  ▪ to your spiritual wellbeing
  o but for some folks,
  ▪ it is the simple pursuit of pleasure,
  ▪ the pursuit of the good life,
  ▪ which will cost them eternal life.

• As a child of God
  o you must guard your heart
  ▪ from the very real possibility
  ▪ that the best would be crowded out
  ▪ by that which is only a distant second best.
  o There are some folks
  ▪ that will allow the pleasures of this present life
  ▪ to absolutely kill the spiritual life
  ▪ that the word of God has spawned within them.
  o They will trade the pleasure of eternity
  ▪ for some temporal, fleeting,
  ▪ momentary pursuit in this life.

• As Jesus explained in the Sermon on the Mount,
  o “No one can serve two masters.
  ▪ Either he will hate the one
  ▪ and love the other,
  ▪ or he will be devoted to the one
  ▪ and despise the other.”
  o Many begin well,
  ▪ and it looks like they are believers,
• but love for the world
  o and worries over the things
    ▪ and pleasures of this world
• strangle all traces
  o of spiritual life from their souls.

The Responsive Place

• Jesus spoke of one final kind of soil:

8 And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold...

• Unlike the compacted soil of the path,
  o this soil is soft.
    ▪ It is deep, not shallow,
    ▪ like the rocky soil.
  o This soil is clean,
    ▪ not infested with the roots of thorns.
    ▪ Here the seed bursts into life
      o and brings forth a tremendous harvest,
        ▪ it produces one hundred fold.

• Jesus explained with these words:

15 But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

• Here's the truth:
  o Any of the previous three soils
    ▪ could become the good soil,
      ▪ the soft, clean, deep soil.
• The difference is what you do with the word.
  o The requirement here
    ▪ is that you receive it
      ▪ with an honest and good heart.

• The hard ground doesn’t have to remain hard.
  o It can submit to the plow
    ▪ and be broken up into soft, fertile soil.
• But it has to be honest with itself.
  o It has to be willing to be plowed by the Holy Ghost.
• It has to be willing to allow
  o that hard façade to be melted away.
    ▪ Bitterness,
      ▪ pain,
      ▪ and brokenness
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- can only hold you captive
  - as long as you allow them to.

- There is enough power
  - in the preached word of God today
    - to break through the hardness,
      - to plow deep into the fertile soil of your heart.
  - The word of God alone
    - has the power to produce fruit in your life!
      - But you have to determine
        - to receive it with an honest and good heart.

- The soil with that rock of rebellion
  - lingering just below the surface
    - doesn’t have to stay that way.
- The rock can be broken up by the word of God.
  - But you have to be honest with yourself.
    - You have to surrender your will to his.
      - You have to let genuine repentance
        - do its real work in your life.
  - Let the conviction of the word
    - get deep down,
      - past the surface issues
        - and deep into the things
          - that govern your heart.
  - Let true repentance
    - flow from the depths of a broken heart.
- That, like nothing else,
  - will break the unbroken will
    - and result in true submission to God.
  - The word of God can take root
    - and grow in your life
      - but you have to receive it
        - with an honest and good heart.

- The soil with the roots of divided loyalties in it
  - can become fertile productive soil
    - if a person is honest with himself
      - and willing to let God help him
        - pluck those destructive roots from his heart.
          - Not just today, but everyday.

- The thorns were the daily cares
  - and pleasures of life.
    - They are the daily things
      - that we struggle against
        - in our effort to serve God.
  - And they are not removed from our lives
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in a singular instant
- but they require constant tending
  - and continual effort on our part.
- Just like a garden has to be weeded
  - on a regular basis,
    - the roots of thorns and thistles
      - have to be plucked from our hearts
        - on a regular basis.

CLOSE

- Today, each and every life here
  - represents a heart that can produce good soil.
- We each have the capacity
  - to receive the word of God
    - with an honest and good heart.
- The same sower,
  - has sown the same seed
    - indiscriminately in this house.
- That seed has the power to produce eternal life.
  - The question is simple:
    - How will the seed be received?
    - What kind of soil will it find in your heart?

- Will you let it fall on the hard part of your heart
  - and allow it to be snatched away
    - by the distractions of this life?
- Will you let it fall on the shallow part of your heart,
  - so that its growth is only temporary?
- Will you allow it be chocked out
  - by the cares and concerns of your life?
- Or will you allow presence of God
  - that’s in this house this afternoon
    - to set its plow deep into your heart
      - and produce the fruit of eternal life?
- Will you be honest with yourself today?
  - Will you allow the word to do
    - its perfect work in your life this afternoon?