

Jesus Tells a Story About Different Soils

Matthew 13:1-23

by David Servant

David Servant explores Jesus' parable of the soils to illustrate the different responses to God's Word and the importance of being receptive to spiritual truths.

Scripture: Matthew 13:12, Mark 4:3, Galatians 5:22, Hebrews 3:12

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Fruitful Living"

Description

David Servant emphasizes the importance of understanding spiritual truths through Jesus' parables, which were designed to reveal these truths to His followers while hiding them from those who were not receptive. The parable of the sower illustrates how God's Word impacts different hearts, with only the good soil producing lasting fruit. It is crucial for individuals to maintain a receptive heart to God's Word, as hardened hearts, shallow faith, and distractions can hinder spiritual growth. True Christians will bear fruit, although the amount may vary, and it is essential to guard against becoming unfruitful by staying connected to God.

Transcript

The best way to teach is to take what a person already understands and relate it to what he needs to understand. For example, if a person didn't know what a donut was, you could explain it by saying that donuts are round with holes in the middle, like car tires, but small enough to hold with one hand. They taste something like bread, and often have sweet-tasting icing on top, and so on.

Jesus wanted His followers to understand certain spiritual principles, and He explained those principles using parables, stories that compared natural things with spiritual things. Jesus' parables were not only meant to help His followers understand spiritual concepts, they were also designed to hide those same truths from those who were not His followers. Jesus, of course, wants everyone to be His follower, but only those who decide to become His followers receive certain privileges, such as going to heaven in the future and understanding spiritual truths right now. Jesus said, "To those who are open to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge" (Matthew 13:12). But those people who weren't open to His teaching would be cursed to remain ignorant of wonderful spiritual truths.

This particular parable we just read explains why so many people who hear God's truth are not changed by it. Speaking to people who understood about planting seeds, growing plants and harvesting a crop, Jesus compared God's Word to seeds and people to four different types of soil. Just as a seed planted in

good soil sprouts, grows and bears fruit, so God's Word planted in a receptive heart will produce a changed life. But the same seed planted in poor soil will never produce fruit. It's important to realize that in Jesus' story, the seed and the sower, unlike the soils, didn't change. The reason that some people are never saved has nothing to do with God and everything to do with people's receptivity.

Jesus first spoke of seeds falling on a footpath. The soil there was packed hard from people always walking on it, so the seeds couldn't penetrate. Jesus said that this soil represents people who don't understand the good news. The reason they don't understand it is not because they can't understand it, but because they don't want to understand it. Anyone, even a child, can understand that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross for his sins. And God certainly wouldn't hold someone responsible to understand something that is impossible for him to understand.

God's Word can't penetrate hardened hearts, and like the exposed seed that is quickly eaten by birds, so God's Word is snatched from hardened hearts by the devil. When that happens, a person who could have been born again remains unchanged.

The second type of soil Jesus spoke of was a shallow, thin layer over rocks. If you've ever planted anything in shallow soil, you can understand exactly what Jesus was talking about. The seed sprouts and the plant begins to grow, but when the sun shines, the shallow soil quickly dries, and the young plant withers and dies. This soil represents the person who enthusiastically receives the gospel at first, but when he faces trouble or persecution because of his new belief, his faith quickly dies. Most pastors and evangelists have seen a lot of people like that. Saving faith is a faith that perseveres no matter what. Every Christian will have his faith tested in difficulties and persecution, so hold fast to your faith.

In Jesus' third example, the seed fell on ground where thorn seeds had also been sown. The thorns ultimately dominated, and the little shoots from the good seeds were choked by the thorns and died. This represents a person who receives God's Word but doesn't make it his highest priority. Other things become more important, like making money. The good news about Jesus demands our utmost attention, because through it, Jesus calls us to be His devoted followers. You can't have a casual relationship with the Lord.

Finally, Jesus talked about the good soil where the seed sprouts, grows and produces fruit. Of the four types of soil, only this kind represents a person who is saved in the end. Only this kind produces fruit. Those fruits would include the fruit of the Spirit listed in the book of Galatians: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (see Galatians 5:22). It would also include the fruit of obedience.

If you've become a true follower of Jesus, you can rejoice that you are good soil! Aren't you glad you are?

Q. According to this parable, will every Christian produce the same amount of fruit?

A. No, some produce thirty, some sixty, and some one hundred fold. Additionally, fruit is something that gradually ripens, and every Christian can grow in the fruit of the Spirit. Some of us still have some green apples, but at least they're apples!

It is also important to understand that if a person has no fruit at all, he is not really saved. Every true Christian will bear some fruit.

Q. Even though all true Christians could be classified as good soil, do you think there's any possibility of our soil becoming like any of the other three kinds?

A. Yes, there is that possibility, and we should guard ourselves from allowing it to happen. The writer of the book of Hebrews said, "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12, NASB). This warns us that good soil can become bad soil.

Application: The most wonderful thing is when we meet an unsaved person who is receptive, like the good soil of this parable. Let's pray today for God to direct us to encounter people like that, so we can share the good news with them.

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