

## THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

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SCRIPTURE: Luke 8:5-8, and 11-15.

A sower went forth to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell by the wayside, and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold ... Now the parable is this: 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. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for awhile believe, and in time of temptation fall away. 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. 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.

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I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

Today we begin a consideration of some of the parables of Jesus in which he pointed out various truths having to do with the kingdom. Several of them begin with the phrase "the kingdom of heaven is like unto:" others, like the parable of the sower, apply to the kingdom indirectly.

Although this parable is almost always called the parable of the sower, it is noteworthy that almost nothing is said about the sower, or about the seed. We take it for granted that the sower knew what he was about, and that the seed which was the word of God, was good seed. In Jesus' day in Palestine it was customary to sow the seed before the soil was plowed; then the shallow plowing served not only to loosen the soil but also to cover the seed. This fact will help to explain why the sower seemed to be so careless as to where he put some of the seed. The quality of the soil would not always be apparent until after it had been plowed. The sower sowed in faith knowing that some of his seed would probably be eaten up by the birds, that some would fall on poor soil or be choked by briars and thorns so that the yield would be curtailed; but knowing also that if he was faithful in sowing, some would fall on good soil, and God would give the increase. It is always the task of all who have the responsibility of teaching or preaching, to SOW THE SEED in faith, trusting God to give the increase even though some seed may fall by the wayside and be lost.

Rather than calling this parable the parable of the sower then, it would be much more appropriate to call it the parable of the four soils; for the lesson of this parable is that those who listen are responsible for the kind of reception they give to the seed, or God's word. Some men respond to the preaching or teaching of the word of God: others do not, or fail in some degree to make full use of what they hear. The parable divides these hearers into groups, and likens them to four kinds of soil.

The seed, which is the word of God, fell first on or beside the path through the field -- a path trodden down and hardened by the passing feet of man and beast until no seed could penetrate its solidity. The hard soil of this well-trodden pathway is typical of the human heart which is hardened, indifferent, calloused -- so deadened and dulled by the ceaseless round of sinful habit that it does not even hear the word, and if it does, greets it either with apathy and disinterest or with scorn and prejudice. The word dropped down into that kind of life results in no action. It brings about no growth, no change, no fruitage. The birds of the air come and eat it up before it has time to sprout and take root.

The second class of people are represented in the parable as rocky soil -- a thin layer of soil lying over a ledge of rock hidden just underground. In such a shallow soil, the rock ledge would hold and reflect the warm rays of the sun, and in this warmth the seed would sprout quickly and early. But the same sun which would warm and nourish the seed which fell on good soil, would wither and destroy the tender sprouts which had no depth of root. Some people receive the word with their emotions, but without conviction. They hear with joy, but their lives are shallow. They have no patience, no perseverance, no root; and the hot suns of misfortune which make some people grow and produce fruit, only discourage and wither the shallow souls who have no depth of root. Seed which falls on this soil over a rocky ledge may spring up with a quick, premature growth, but it withers as quickly as it begins. So does the word of God fare in the life that is shallow and superficial, which does not care to know the deep things of God.

The third class of people who receive the seed of the word are represented in the parable by the ground which tries to grow both grain and thorns at the same time. Notice again that there is no question about the worth of the seed, and that in this case, there is no doubt about the quality and the fertility of the soil. The soil was good; it had depth; it was just as capable of producing all grain as part grain and part weeds. The seed which fell in this soil had good root of proper depth; it also had a healthy stalk above ground. The only thing wrong was that the soil was trying to do two things at once -- to raise both good grain and weeds -- and even the best soil cannot grow both side by side.

Many a life is like that good soil which tried unsuccessfully to do two things at once -- to produce both good and evil. Many a life has failed to bring forth good fruit because it recognized no compelling priority of good over evil, of best over that which is less than the best. Many of us are content to give the good seed of God's word and God's gospel a little room, providing that it doesn't prevent us from also raising a crop of thorns and briars and weeds at the same time and in the same place. A divided life produces only a little more than nothing at all. A house divided against itself cannot stand. Ye cannot serve both God and Mammon. A life crowded by cares and worries, by an obsession for money or preferment or power, by a great busy-ness which produces nothing permanent or worth-while and gets nowhere -- this is the kind of life in which the good seed is choked by thorns, and produces no fruit.

The fourth class of people is of course represented by the good deep soil in which no stones or thorns or weeds. When the seed of God's word falls into an open, curious, inquiring, child-like mind of faith, it results in action. The seed sprouts and begins to grow. It has ample root in sufficient dept of soil, plus adequate stalk to leaf, to support the fruitage of grain and bring it the nourishment necessary for full development. This kind of life has patience and perseverance; it is not discouraged when the fruit doesn't appear on the second or third day, but waits patiently and diligently for the harvest. The seed is good; the soil is good, the sun and rain are good, and by making wise and proper use of each, there ensues a goodly harvest.

The point or lesson of this parable is that we may do what we will with the word of God -- the good seed. Inert soil is helpless to change its condition. But we, who are the soil into which the good seed of the word falls, can will to soften our hardened hearts so that the seed may not be snatched away before it has had time to sprout. We can make the soil deep, so that the seed may find root in our firm convictions, and grow under the rays of the sun which destroys the seed in shallow soil. We can root out the cares and pleasures and riches which crowd and choke out the good seed, and give it a change to grow.

What kind of soil are you? If you would be fruitful in the kingdom of God, prepare your heart to receive the good seed of the word, that it may take root and grow and bring forth an hundred fold.