

**Which Soil Are You? Daniel Cote**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Congregational Church 10/27/24**

**Scripture Reading: Luke 8:4-8**

**Sermon Text: Luke 8:9-15**

A husband and wife were at a party chatting with some friends when the subject of marriage counseling came up. "Oh, we will never need that. My wife and I have a great relationship," the husband explained. "She was a communications major in college, and I majored in theatre arts." He continued, "She communicates well, and I act like I'm listening." Why are all the women in here nodding their heads?

Using the literary form of parables, Jesus communicates crucial information about discipleship in an unforgettable way. In the Parable of the Sower, the soils represent different types of people and how they respond to the gospel message. Only one of the four types of individuals described responds in a sustained positive way to the gospel. We need to resist the temptation of doing the math and concluding that only 25% of people are going to heaven. But we do need to remember that our Lord teaches in the Sermon on the Mount, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it" (Matthew 7:13).

The gospel message is the good news that Jesus Christ died for the sins of humanity and rose again, offering salvation to all who believe. Salvation comes by true faith, that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again. In other words, God's eternal heaven can only be accessed by true faith in Jesus and His work of atonement by His death on the cross, through which all who believe are reconciled to God.

Our Scripture reading was the Parable of the Sower. Fortunately for the disciples and all of us, Jesus completely explains the Parable of the Sower in our sermon text. A mystery in the Bible is something that was previously hidden but is now revealed to the people of God. In the Parable of the Sower, the mystery to which Jesus refers is the world's response to God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

As I explained a couple of summers ago, Jesus taught in parables to reveal important information and details about the kingdom of God to His disciples. A second reason that Jesus spoke in parables was to hide the truth from unbelievers whose hearts were hard. The disciples had responded to Jesus in faith and would be given further knowledge of the kingdom because of that faith. The Jewish leaders were unbelieving and sought to kill Jesus. So, Jesus taught in parables, veiling truth from unbelievers who sought to destroy Him. However, Jesus willingly explained the meaning of the Parable of the Sower when the disciples asked Him about it, as we find in our sermon text.

There is a third reason that Jesus taught in parables, and that was to fulfill what is prophesied in Psalm 78 about the nature of Jesus' ministry, which is that He would speak in parables. Jesus spoke in parables to fulfill the prophecy about the Messiah in Psalm 78. As I have said many times before, by fulfilling dozens of prophecies that were written long before He was born, Jesus shows and proves that He is the Messiah sent by God. In the Messianic prophecies, God has given us an objective way to know that Jesus is the Messiah. Furthermore, because the Bible reveals the future in advance, we have an objective way of knowing that the Bible is the Word of God. That is so important because it makes the claims of Christianity verifiable, unlike any other world religion. So, let's turn to our sermon text.

In the ancient world, agricultural fields were often rough by modern standards because they lacked the machines that we have today to make them smooth, rock-free, and uniform. Paths or roads for workers cut through these rough fields, and sometimes, seeds would begin to take root on these paths or roads.

So, let's get to Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Sower. Jesus says in verse 11 of our text that the seed represents the Word of God, which is the gospel message. The four soils that the seed falls upon represent the condition of the human hearts that the seeds fall upon. Let's consider each of these four soils, which represent the four heart conditions of people and their responses to the word of God. First, some of the seeds fall beside the road, where they are trampled underfoot and eaten by birds. This represents people who have heard the Word of God, which is the gospel of the kingdom, but Satan has swooped in to take the word away so that they will not believe or be saved. These people might have heard the gospel repeatedly and made a career rejecting it. Certainly, in the Western world, it is hard not to hear or see the gospel spoken, written, or depicted in artwork throughout our lives, yet even with multiple exposures to the gospel, some reject it throughout their lives.

Satan is a master at deceiving people, and he has spent thousands of years perfecting his skills at snatching the truth of the gospel from them. Among his best tools for getting people to turn from God are the theory of evolution and the problem of evil. After listening to a lecture on evolution by a science professor, a student wrote a poem titled "The Amazing Professor." The poem read:

Once, I was a tadpole when I began to begin.  
Then, I was a frog with my tail tucked in.  
Next, I was a monkey on a coconut tree.  
Now, I am a doctor with a Ph.D.<sup>2</sup>

That is an entertaining little poem, but the reality is that the theory of evolution beguiles millions, giving them a possible means to remove God from the creation of life. However, evolution is contradicted by the fossil record, which doesn't show the gradual transition of species over time, but instead, the sudden appearance of fully formed species with no evidence of evolution from earlier organisms. Furthermore, scientists have failed to create new species when attempting to reproduce evolution by natural selection in the lab. Moreover, scientists have no credible explanation of the origin of the first living cell that would be needed to begin the process of evolution. So, too, evolution by natural selection does not explain the origin of the vast amount of complex information in DNA or the sophisticated micromachines we find in living cells. However, evolution is a false theory that continues to delude many.

No one can deny the vast amount of evil in the world, and atheists argue that that is a sure sign that there is no God. They overlook the fact that the greatest evils in our world are perpetrated by human beings who reject God and His moral code. As C.S. Lewis astutely observes in his book *The Problem of Pain*:

When souls become wicked they will certainly use this possibility to hurt one another; and this, perhaps, accounts for four-fifths of the sufferings of men. It is men, not God, who have produced racks, whips, prisons, slavery, guns, bayonets, and bombs; it is human avarice or human stupidity...that we have poverty and overwork.<sup>3</sup>

God has given humans free will because He does not want robots to worship Him. Instead, He wants His people to love Him and worship Him freely. The vast majority of the evil we find in our world is caused by sinful humans horridly abusing their privilege of free will. The atheist overlooks the fact that Jesus will return at His Second Coming to remove evil and all who cause it from the world. I have much more to say on these topics in my recent book, and I would refer you to that if you would like to dig deeper.

We come to our second soil. Some seeds fall on rocky soil, representing those who hear and initially receive the gospel with joy. Seeds can sprout in rocky soil, but they will fail to develop a root system. These individuals might believe the gospel for a while, but because they have an underdeveloped root system, they soon wither and die. Jesus says that when

temptation overtakes them, they fall away from their faith. Perhaps these individuals have had superficial encounters and spiritual moments in their lives, but they never developed saving faith in Jesus that would sustain them in temptation and trial.

Some seeds fall among thorns, which choke the development of the seedlings. For these individuals, the gospel sprouts and begins to take root in their lives, but it never comes to maturity because of their devotion to material things. These individuals are consumed with the worries and anxiety of this life and the concern for riches and pleasure, so they never mature in their faith or bear the fruit expected of the disciples of Jesus.

Dr. George Sweeting, the former president of the Moody Bible Institute, described his visit to Niagara Falls as follows.

Several years ago our family visited Niagara Falls. It was spring, and ice was rushing down the river. As I viewed the large blocks of ice flowing toward the falls, I could see that there were carcasses of dead fish embedded in the ice. Gulls, by the score, were riding down the river feeding on the dead fish. As they came to the brink of the falls, their wings would go out, and they would escape from the falls.

Sweeting writes,

I watched one gull, which seemed to delay, and wondered when it would leave. It was engrossed in the carcass of a fish, and when it finally came to the brink of the falls, out went its powerful wings. The bird flapped and flapped and even lifted the ice out of the water [a bit], and I thought it would escape. But it had delayed too long so that its claws had frozen into the ice. The weight of the ice was too great, and the gull plunged into the abyss.

So, too, the material possessions and worries of this world can entrap us if we become too attached to them. Like that gull, they can lead us into the abyss. If they become our focus, they will result in our destruction.

Fortunately, in the Parable of the Sower, some of the seeds fall on good soil, and here again, is what Jesus says about them in Luke 8:15, "But the *seed* in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word with a good and virtuous heart, and hold it firmly, and produce fruit with perseverance." These are the children of the kingdom, the believers of all ages, and the following things are true about them.

First, they have heard the Word, which is the gospel of the kingdom, meaning that they have listened to the message, paid attention to it, internalized it, and allowed it to transform them. Second, these are individuals with a good and virtuous heart, meaning that they are upright and of good character, and when they hear the truth of God, they seek to understand it and obey it. Third, once they have learned the truth, they hold fast to it, take possession of it, and own it. And finally, fourth, they bear fruit, meaning they do God's kingdom work, serving God, serving others, and spreading the gospel, and they do it with perseverance and are not easily defeated or dissuaded when they face trials and the attacks of the devil in doing their work for God. Good soil abounds in our congregation of believers, but in Christ, we all need to grow, and we all need to become more like Jesus in our walk with Him.

If we study the words of Jesus, we find that He repeats important things many times. I counted up one time in the Gospels that Jesus talks about or refers to hell about 35 times. Hell is obviously an important topic. The reason hell is such an important topic in the Gospels is that Jesus came into this world to save sinners who, apart from faith in Him, are on the highway to hell. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 1:15, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Jesus talks about hell a lot in the Gospels because His reason for coming into the world was to save people from going there because God so loves the world (John 3:16). As Jesus says in John 16:8, the Holy Spirit is at work in the world,

convicting people of their sin and unrighteousness. The Holy Spirit is calling us to Christ, but some will not heed the call. As for God, as Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance.” The sad fact of the Parable of the Sower is that many will not receive the word to the displeasure of God.

However, the true disciples of Jesus will produce fruit with perseverance, as we also learn in the Parable of the Sower. Bearing fruit is another central topic in the Gospels, as Jesus mentions the fruit-bearing of believers about 40 times. Jesus’ most complete teaching on the necessity of disciples bearing fruit is found in John 15:1–8. Let me read it to you now, and let Jesus speak to your soul as I read it. Jesus says,

1 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself but must remain in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you remain in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who remains in Me, and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown away like a branch and dries up; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you remain in Me, and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

In this powerful passage, we learn the requirements of discipleship at the feet of the Master. Israel was the vine that God had planted and lavished His love, but it failed to produce fruit and was not faithful to God. But Jesus came to accomplish what Israel did not. In this passage, Jesus is the vine, and His followers are the branches. The branches get their nourishment from the vine. Because the branches are nourished by the vine, they produce fruit. Following Jesus’ analogy, we must remain in Jesus to bear fruit. Just as a branch that is disconnected from the vine withers and dies, so too a disciple of Jesus that does not remain in Him will die. The disciples of Jesus are fruitful in this life when they pattern their lives after Jesus and do the things that Jesus did.

Jesus says that to bear fruit, the disciple must remain in Him, meaning that we must persevere in true faith in Him and in obedience out of love for Him. Jesus says that those who remain in Him will bear much fruit. So what is the fruit that Jesus is talking about here and in the Parable of the Sower? By patterning our lives after Jesus, we will share the gospel, and we will spread the love, mercy, compassion, and justice of our God in our day-to-day interactions with others.

The Apostle Paul is of great help in understanding the fruit that the disciples of Jesus will produce. In Romans 1:13, he refers to leading others to and discipling them in Christ as the fruit he hoped to obtain in Rome. In Colossians 1:10, Paul calls the Colossians to “...walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” So our good works done to the glory of God are among the fruits that true disciples of Jesus produce. As John mentioned a couple of weeks ago, Paul calls the Galatians to possess and produce the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We see all of the fruit Paul describes on perfect display in the life of Jesus, and those who abide in Him will emulate Him in all they do.

Jesus says in John 15:8 that in bearing fruit we will prove that we are His disciples. Every true believer will bear fruit of some kind throughout their lives. Fruitfulness might ebb and flow

in our lives, but as Paul writes in Titus 3:14, “Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unproductive.” We need to be careful not to be judgmental or prideful about the fruit that we bear in our Christian walk.

We are all unique individuals, as God has created us. We will bear fruit of different types and in different ways. Furthermore, the fruit that others bear might not be obvious to us because we are not together 24 hours per day. The fact that we do not see the fruit that others bear does not mean that they are unfruitful in their Christian walk. Moreover, we are not God and do not have an exhaustive list of the fruit He desires from His people. One thing is for certain, however: true believers will bear fruit in a manner with which God has gifted them.

Our deeds may seem as small as a grain of rice, but with persistence and God's aid, we can do much to glorify Him and advance His kingdom. There is an ancient Indian legend of a king who loved chess. He challenged visitors to a game and was usually victorious. One day, a traveling sage visited the kingdom and was challenged to play a game. To entice him to play, the king offered to give the sage whatever reward he asked if he won. When the king was defeated, to honor his word, he asked the sage what prize he would like. The sage asked for one grain of rice to be placed on the chessboard's first square and then doubled on each following square. The request seemed modest, and the king ordered a bag of rice to be brought. One grain was placed on the first square, two on the second, four on the third, eight on the fourth, and so on. But it quickly became apparent the terms of the request were impossible to meet. The twenty-first square would require more than one million rice grains. By the thirty-first square, the total would go over one billion—with more than half of the chessboard still left to go.

Similarly, if you take a penny and double it every day for 31 days, you will have 10 million dollars. Small things done for God may have a big impact when they are added together and multiplied by the works of others. By the grace of our God, our deeds done with perseverance and in obedience to Christ will be used by Him to advance His kingdom and prove that we are Jesus' disciples. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., [\*Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary\*](#) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Sweeting, George. *Who Said That?: More than 2,500 Usable Quotes and Illustrations* (pp. 208-209). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Harper One, 2009), 56, Kindle.