

THE SOIL OF THE HUMAN HEART
Sermon Series: "The Parable of the Sower" -- August 2, 2015 -- Luke 8: 4-15
The Church of the Covenant

Perhaps this parable of Jesus should be called "The Parable of the Soils" rather than "The Parable of the Sower"? *"The secrets of the Kingdom of God",* says Jesus, are given in parables, so that the disciples will see and hear and understand, but that the world will not –As Jesus says: *"Seeing they will not see and hearing they will not understand."* (Luke 8: 10) A sermon is a lot like a parable. It is seeking to sow the seed of the Word of God into people's hearts. Some will see and others will not. Some will hear and others will not. Some will understand and others will not. I think sometimes people think, "Oh, Stu pointed that sermon directly at me." Nope. In point of fact if I discover myself placing a particular person in my "sermon chair" and I am trying to speak with them from the pulpit through my sermon, then I will stop, erase everything I have written and start over again. I speak a sermon into the presence of God; He is the One person in my "audience". You, my congregation whom I love, are not my audience. You are overhearing the gospel. And if I am preaching my message today to anyone, I am preaching it to me. I am the one sitting in my "sermon chair". My life and the struggles in my own walk of faith are what I am preaching about. God plants the seed of a Bible text in my heart, I attempt to deal with it in my own soul first, long before preaching it to anyone, and then I proclaim it out here in the open, casting seeds every which way, into everyone. Someone may say, "Boy, Stu, you preached that sermon just to me today." Nope. *GOD* preached that sermon and sowed that seed into your heart today...not me. A preacher went out to preach and a sower went out to sow seeds...Same thing, really...

So let them who have spiritual ears to hear, let them hear what Jesus is preaching into our hearts. Have the Word of God be sown into the soil of our human heart today. Do you see? Do you hear? Do you understand? God is here. Jesus is here. Will they speak into all of our hearts today? In a way it is determined by THE SOIL OF THE HUMAN HEART. This is why I say perhaps this should be called "The Parable of the Soils", not "The Parable of the Sower". Jesus notes that a *"sower went out to sow his seed..."* (Luke 8: 5) And the seeds fall in four places.

The first place the seed falls is *"along the path"* (v. 5) and it was trodden under foot, and the birds came and devoured it. Jesus explains later to His disciples that the hard path to which He refers is that seed sown in a place where the evil one comes and takes away the seed that they may not believe and be saved. Evil enters into someone's life in some way and it stops the seed even from entering the soil. The heart is hard; the path is harder. The stony, rock-strewn path in the human heart cannot grow the Word of God into faith that wells up into eternal life. Some choose a hard path in life; some choose to harden their heart. A seed of faith sown in the Word of God cannot enter into that kind of heart. THE SOIL DETERMINES THE OUTCOME.

The second place the seed falls is *"on the rock"* (v. 6) and as it grew up it withered away because it had no moisture. Jesus explains later to His disciples that the rocky soil is the person who receives the Word of God with joy initially but they have no root, NO DEPTH, no equipping, and after a time they fall away. A rocky heart cannot hold the Living Water of the Holy Spirit. So the seed may sprout up initially and the person comes to church for a while and for a time they are enthusiastic. But because the rock will not allow the roots to grow, when a dry time comes in their life, the plant will die, because the rocks have stolen the depth of their faith, and their faith cannot be watered by the Spirit, and they fall away. It is always sad to see people who begin well but who end poorly. A stony heart in the end cannot produce a plant that produces fruit for the Kingdom of God. And in the end it withers away and dies. THE SOIL DETERMINES THE OUTCOME.

The third place the seed falls is *"among thorns"* (v. 7) and the thorns grew and choked it. Thorns are always a biblical symbol of sin. Unresolved sin has the power, unfortunately, to grow up and to choke out a good plant. Good gardeners all know this; it is why we don't just plant the seeds and water; it is why we also spend so much time on our knees weeding and pulling out thorns and thistles from our garden. A weed unpulled can ruin the garden of our heart. THE SOIL DETERMINES THE OUTCOME.

The fourth place the seed falls is in *"good soil"* (v. 8) and it grew and yielded a hundredfold. Our job is to be the good gardener of our soul. Our lives and our faiths are to be well-tended gardens. Take out a shovel and dig up the hard clay of the hard path and go to Home Depot and buy some gardening soil and work it into the clay-like ground of Western Pennsylvania. Take out a hoe and break up the ground and the soil and when you find a rock, dig it out, no matter how much time and effort it takes. Otherwise, it robs the seed of the Living Water. Take the time on our knees in prayer to pull out weeds and thorns and thistles. They are ornery and stubborn; they grow back constantly. The same weed we pulled two weeks ago springs up again and we have to pull it out again. Spray with Weed-B-Gone. Pour out the Preen to discourage weeds. Allow no root of bitterness to take hold of our heart. Let nothing planted there take control of our heart. Because it can choke out our faith. It can rob us of the Word. It can take away the seeds of blessing the Lord wants to sow so abundantly into our heart. Great Christians are Great Gardeners. For Great Gardeners know that THE SOIL DETERMINES THE OUTCOME.

And now for my "Parable of the Soils". A man was standing outside in his back yard. And he was complaining to himself about everything. Everything that used to give him joy no longer did. His family felt like a burden to him. He only found criticism for his wife. He was frustrated with his work. He found himself prone to anger and deep murmurings in his heart. He had fewer and fewer friends and according to him, "they weren't true friends anyway." His hobbies no longer made him happy. Gardening and working in the yard, that he used to love, now was just a chore and drudgery. He didn't like going to church anymore. The music failed to inspire. He never liked the hymns anymore. The sermon felt like a dry lecture and he never "took anything home with him". He would find himself even angry at God. His kindly next door neighbor, who was a great gardener, came over and they were talking over the backyard fence. The one man complained that nothing ever grew in his garden anymore- Its just weeds and rocks; that's all it is. The wise gardener said: "Maybe it is the soil. Maybe the soil of your heart is determining how you feel. Maybe that's how your garden grows?" Maybe so.

When the soil of our heart is "good soil" the Word of God grows in our heart. And Jesus promises us that it will produce spiritual fruit for the Kingdom of God *"a hundredfold"* (v. 8) When we look at our lives and the well-tended gardens of our soul we should be able to see at least 100 people whose lives have been touched, whose hearts have been filled with God's seeds, whose faiths have been influenced by us. When the soil is good, it will produce at least *"a hundredfold"*. So there were 277 people in church last Sunday. So wouldn't it be a good idea to invite just one person to accompany you to church next Sunday? If just 40 of us did that, if just 40 seeds were sown through us this week, then there would be ten more people in church next Sunday, and the next week there would be ten more, and so on and so forth, until by Rally Day, September 13th, there would be more than 300 people in church. Our life of faith is to produce at least 100-fold increase in the way it influences others for the Kingdom. When the soil is good Jesus promises that will happen. The secrets of the Kingdom –let those who have eyes to see, see...and those who have ears to hear, hear...and may we fully understand how important the SOIL OF THE HUMAN HEART really is. And Amen.

By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!