

Sunday, March 7

Matthew 13:1-23 (Four Soils Part 2)

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Intro

This morning we continue our consideration of the parable of the soils. I want to apologize for the last sermon. Not for the content. But for too much information. There's so much here I should have broken the passage into two sermons. One part interpretation. One part application. I am a learner too!

Let's recap:

Sower = Jesus

Seed = "word of the kingdom" = Jesus' kingdom message, or the good news of the gospel

Soils = hearers = 4 typical responses to Jesus (the variable is the hearer)

1st soil = scribes & Pharisees...**gospel quickly rejected**

2nd/3rd soils = crowds who follow Jesus for a season

2nd soil = **gospel misunderstood = fall away when persecution comes**

3rd soil = **other affections prevent gospel reception**

4th soil = Jesus' disciples...**believing response**

Parable point: to explain varied responses to Jesus' kingdom message and to challenge his hearers to ask, "which soil am I?"

FCF: gospel immediately dismissed...accepting a misunderstood gospel...competing desires prevent gospel reception

Grace given: optimism because the gospel bears fruit with the 4th soil

13:1-9 = mixed audience

13:10-23 = disciples only

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Sermon Focus

10 applications that arise from the parable and the near context

Point 1: Great proclamation doesn't guarantee reception

We'll assume Jesus presented the gospel well. That Jesus said the right things in the right way. That his communication was clear. That his reasoning was sound.

Great gospel proclamation could have no effect because of hard hearers. See the Pharisees. Don't blame yourself when the gospel's rejected. Don't quit evangelizing when the gospel's rejected. Rejection is part of faithful gospel ministry. Jesus was rejected!

We should aim to share the gospel clearly, wisely, skillfully, truthfully, boldly, gently, but perfect articulation doesn't guarantee reception.

▪ my hardness in Daytona in 1996

Point 2: Supplying proofs doesn't guarantee reception

The blind were healed, demons were cast out, the dead were raised. Yet unbelief persisted.

We can make the greatest apologetic arguments.

- 1) Intelligent design = evidence of a Creator
- 2) Predictive prophecy = divine nature of Scripture
- 3) Sense of right and wrong = moral law from a Law Giver
- 4) Resurrection = a divinely authenticated faith

Jesus supplied irrefutable proofs. We can supply sound arguments. But the gospel is still rejected. Because the problem of gospel rejection isn't finally intellectual. Gospel rejection stems from moral failure.

Romans 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

I'm not saying God can't use proofs. I'm not saying proofs are never helpful. God may choose to use them. What I'm saying is proofs aren't sufficient to convert sinners. Jesus did miracles, and the gospel was still rejected. What I'm saying is proofs must be accompanied with something else. The gospel and the Spirit's illumination.

Point 3: Pray for the Spirit to illumine sinners

2 Corinthians 4:1-6 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. ² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

I take Satan's past action of blinding to have occurred at the fall, when Satan led Adam into sin by deceiving Eve. Satan blinds today through deceptive lies. This past blinding has ongoing effects. We're born sinners with a bent against God. We don't see in part because we don't want to.

The point is the gospel is rejected because of human blindness. We have eyes that can't see. Many who witnessed numerous miracles in Jesus' day were unable to see. But God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, shined light in the Corinthian believer's hearts and they saw.

So when we sow the gospel we pray for the Spirit to shine “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” in the hearts of our hearers. We pray for the Spirit to make the gospel compelling. For our hearers to comprehend the beauty of Christ.

Point 4: Aim for understanding (1st soil)

The first soil is a group that “does not understand” the word of the kingdom (13:19). I’ve just said we need to pray for the Spirit to illumine the hearts of our hearers. But that doesn’t excuse our responsibility to present the gospel in an understandable way. Jesus, with parables, used real life examples to illustrate how truth was and wasn’t heeded. He skillfully used stories to drive truth home. He aimed for understanding.

Make sure people grasp the gospel before calling for a response. I’ve seen tracts that an unbelieving family member would heartily affirm and still fall short of salvation. Do they understand God’s stance against sin? Do they understand they’ve personally sinned against God? Is there enough in my presentation for conviction of sin to occur? Do they understand substitutionary atonement?

A biblically illiterate generation requires that we provide a basic knowledge of God, sin, the cross, and faith before calling for a response.

A mistaken gospel accepted ≠ Jesus messed up. Blindness exists even with the best presentation. But we should do everything in our power to make sure people understand what they’re supposed to respond to.

Point 5: Don’t hide the costs (2nd soil)

In the second soil we find people who immediately joyfully received the kingdom message, but when persecution arrived they were gone just as quick.

Our job isn’t to secure a decision at all costs. Our job is to faithfully lay out the gospel and leave the results up to God (see 1 Cor 3:5-7).

- 1) Faith ≠ adding Jesus to other gods (e.g., Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism)
- 2) Faith ≠ fire insurance
- 3) Faith ≠ freedom from trials

If a person’s lifestyle is characterized by sin they can’t be led to believe that they can trust Jesus and keep on living just the same, and all will be well. Jesus died to purify us in this life (see Titus 2:11-14). Part of evangelism may be helping a person see how God will help them overcome their sinful situation, if only they will embrace Jesus. The gospel isn’t a sales pitch so don’t hide the costs. Like opposition they’ll encounter or cherished sins they’ll have to give up or false religions they’ll have to abandon.

▪ Illustration: medication with side effects = a good doctor warns the patient of side effects before giving them the medication... commercials with numerous side effects

Don’t be afraid of turning someone away by presenting the hard truths of the gospel. Better that truth turns them away than they’re deceived into thinking they’re right with God when they’re not (see Matt 7:21-23).

Point 6: Aim at the affections (3rd soil)

In the 3rd soil we see that competing affections were the problem. Cares of the world and desire for riches drowned out the gospel message. A heart was ruled by other things rejects the gospel. When we proclaim the gospel we are dealing with a person’s loves. So present the gospel in a compelling way.

Don't be afraid to make the gospel compelling. Speak to their circumstances. You're longing for security in riches. Wouldn't it be better to place your hope in something that's truly secure? You're weighed down by the cares of life. Wouldn't it be better to have God's help in the midst of life's cares? We can present the gospel in a compelling way. Show them why the gospel is good news. Show them how the gospel is superior to their current loves. It doesn't have to be bad news only. The gospel is richer than forgiveness of sins and an eternal inheritance. It speaks to life today.

Point 7: Beware of superficial responses (2nd and 3rd soils)

Jesus has previously warned against delusion:

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Some think they're right with God when they're not. Like the curious crowds who fell short of faith and repentance. They saw, they listened, they liked some of what they experienced, but they rejected Jesus in the end.

Just because a person has professed faith doesn't mean they're right with God. The critical question is, "what happened after their profession?" Good soil shows itself in what follows the profession.

Point 8: Look for fruit (3rd and 4th soils)

The 3rd soil is unfruitful. The good soil is fruitful. Fruit distinguishes the 4th soil from the other three. The 4th soil hears the word = they have ears to hear. The 4th soil understands the word = they have eyes to see. Mark says the 4th soil accepts the word (Mark 4:20). In Matthew, fruit is the mark of true prophets/teachers (7:15-20) and fruit reveals the state of a person's heart (12:33-37).

Fruit will differ based on a number of factors:

- 1) Will be more evident in a hardened sinner, but likely much sin to overcome in life so fruit ≠ the absence of sin
 - 2) Will be less evident in a young child
 - 3) Fruit hindered by lack of spiritual disciplines
 - 4) Fruit hindered by lack of connection with the local church
 - 5) Fruit hindered by unfit teachers (Kibbe example of pastors who don't know the gospel...how do you think that affects those who do believe and sit under their teaching?)
 - 6) Fruit hindered by deficient examples
 - 7) Fruit helped or hindered by the health of the local church (do they understand biblical spirituality?)
- Dad example = opportunity to take me in as a teenager...believe he was hindered by immature leadership and lack of discipleship

Less fruit in some ≠ fruit isn't always present!

Fruit varies (100, 60, 30), but fruit is present in the 4th soil. The question we need to ask ourselves is: "Has God changed my life? Has God changed my loved one's life?" When a person truly believes, God changes that person.

Point 9: Look for ongoing faith (2nd soil)

The 2nd soil abandons Jesus immediately after trials or persecutions come. This is failure to understand the gospel and count the cost. If this is a mark of false faith, the mark of true faith is endurance. An ongoing trust in Christ. An ongoing repentance, ongoing turning from sin.

Treat professors like disciples. When ministering to those who've departed or previously professed repentance, call them to faith and repentance today. Response or lack of response will reveal where they stand with God. Challenge. Don't comfort with you're okay because of a past decision. Many have had decisions here. I'm not saying decisions are bad

- my experience: distinct event and know the exact day...the culmination of 6 months of counting the cost and choosing between competing affections

I'm saying it's bad to trust a past event when faith and repentance isn't present today. Assurance comes through present trust and seeing God change our hearts. Don't settle for I got them to say the prayer. Look for signs of life today:

- 1) How do they respond to God?
- 2) How do they respond to others?
- 3) How do they respond to their circumstances?
- 4) How do they respond to their own sin?

A person's present response to God shows where they stand. Yes true believers fight indwelling sin. Yes true believers can fall into gross sin for a season. But sin will be accompanied with misery because God's Spirit indwells his people. There will be conviction of sin. Since God will complete the good work he begins in all his children (Phil 1:6), their faith will not fail. And since the believer's sin incurs God's discipline, discipline that leads to "the fruit of righteousness" (Heb 12:5-11), their rebellion will be temporary.

We can be confident we're right with God because we're trusting him today.

Point 10: Engage expectantly because some will respond (4th soil)

Did you catch this point? When the gospel is sown, sometimes it will land on good soil. There have been hints of optimism in Matthew's gospel:

- 1) Our good works in the world cause unbelievers to believe (Matt 5:14-16)
- 2) There is a harvest to be had (Matt 9:36-38)
- 3) There are "worthy" people out there (Matt 10:11-13)
- 4) Some people who hear the gospel bear fruit (Matt 13:23)

Optimistic realism: the gospel will be rejected, but some will come

Expectant engagement: when we proclaim the gospel, some will come

2 Corinthians 2:14-17 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. ¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶ to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

→ these truths should lead us to engage our acquaintances in gospel conversations

→ speaking to myself as I'm speaking to you...these are truths I'm meditating on to drive out pervasive pessimism

→ confidence in the gospel's power to convert sinners drives gospel proclamation

Conclusion

The parable of the soils is the story of gospel response. Sometimes hardness prevents reception. Sometimes misunderstanding leads to false professions. Sometimes the gospel can't be received because of competing affections. But sometimes the gospel lands on good soil. This encourages us to press on with optimistic realism. With expectant engagement. Proclaim and some will come. We have not because we proclaim not.