

The Parable of the Soils

Scripture: Matthew 13:2–9, 18–23

Code: 80-181

This morning as we come to the Word of God, I want to invite you to open your Bible to Matthew chapter 13, Matthew chapter 13. Jesus was the master teacher and He taught in parables. And I want to draw your attention to one of His most well-known and important parables this morning. Matthew 13 begins with these words:

“On that day, Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea,” – that’s the Sea of Galilee – “and great multitudes gathered to Him so that He got into a boat and sat down and the whole multitude was standing on the beach. And he spoke many things to them in parables, saying, ‘Behold, the sower went out to sow and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road and the birds came and ate them up.

“And others fell upon the rocky places where they did not have much soil and immediately they sprang up because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched. And because they had no root, they withered away. And others fell among the thorns, or weeds, and the thorns came up and choked them out. And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundred-fold, some sixty and some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.”

Maybe at the very moment that Jesus was teaching that story He could see a sower sowing. Maybe His whole crowd could because the Sea of Galilee is ringed with fields, even today. And were you to go there today, you would see sowers sowing seed in the furrows of their fields if it was that time of year. Jesus is speaking to them in very common language which they understand because it’s their daily activity.

This is the first of a series of parables Jesus gives to His disciples and He always starts with something they can understand and moves to something they don’t understand. He begins with something they see and moves to something they can’t see. He starts with something that’s natural and then moves to something supernatural. He starts with what is material and moves to what is spiritual. He starts with what is common and moves to what is uncommon. Starts with what is simple and moves to what is profound.

And that’s exactly what He did here. They understood sowing, they did it all the time. They were part of an agriculture or agrarian society. They very familiar with the experiences and the activities and the principles and laws of sowing and reaping. What they didn’t understand was spiritual truth. And so Jesus began where they were and took them where they’d never been. And the language in this story is filled, right down to every necessary word, with profound spiritual meaning.

Let’s go over the story. It starts out in verse 3, “Behold the sower went out to sow.” Pretty simple. A farmer whose responsibility was to sow seed in his plowed field went out to do just that. The rows would already been furrowed, plowed and prepared to receive the seed. And he would have hanging

over his shoulder a leather pouch loaded with seed and he would literally reach in the leather pouch and take the seed and – this is where the word came from – broadcast it.

He measured out his steps very carefully and by experience he knew exactly how long each step should be. And he measured out each amount in his hand very carefully so he didn't waste seed and didn't crowd seed and so he distributed it very evenly. Uniformly reaching into the bag and taking the appropriate steps, he broadcast the seed into the furrows. He would go all the way to the end of one furrow, then he would turn and come back down the next and continue that until he had sown all the seed in the prepared field.

Now that sets up the parable. And they were very used to seeing it. As I said, they may have been watching someone doing it even at the moment Jesus spoke. He may have even pointed to such a person. But we notice that the seed could fall in four different places. First of all, in verse 4 He says, "And as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road," – or literally on the road – "And the birds came and ate them up."

Now one of the interesting things in Palestine in ancient times was that people traversed the countryside, walking everywhere they went or riding on an animal, and they had to go through the fields. And so fields were basically bordered by beaten paths. You remember in Matthew chapter 12 verse 1 how Jesus and His disciples were walking through the fields. There would be usually long furrows in rather narrow segments and there would be beaten paths around them so that the farmer could have access to all of his fields. And so the people traversing the countryside wouldn't walk through his fields but stay on the paths.

Historians tell us they were normally only about three-feet wide so that not an undue amount of land was wasted on pathways. As a result they were uncultivated. And Israel is very dry so they were unwatered. And they became hard, beaten paths, beaten down by the sun and the wind and the feet of those animals and people who walked on them. Seed falling on that kind of ground couldn't penetrate it. And even though seed had a little point on it that allowed it to burrow its way into the ground, gradually it couldn't penetrate that hard, hard beaten path which would have been like concrete almost. It would just lie there, verse 4 says, until the birds came and ate it.

Now birds are the unwelcome accompaniment to farmers, as we all know, don't we? That's why farmers put in their fields what is called a scarecrow, right? To scare the crows away because they consume the seed and the crop. And so, it was very typical as the sower was sowing that the birds would be waiting for him to turn his back and they would descend and take advantage of the easiest seed to pick up and that was on the beaten path.

So they were hovering around the area just waiting for their opportunity. Luke records Jesus telling this same parable and adds that the path also having been trodden down by feet, it was not uncommon for the remaining seed the birds didn't get to be crushed under the feet of the people who were walking there. In any case, it never penetrated the soil, it never produced anything.

The second kind of soil is in verses 5 and 6 and He calls it rocky. And it says, "Others fell upon the rocky places where they did not have much soil." What that means is not that there were stones in the soil. When – when a farmer wanted to plow a field, he plowed the stones out and however deep the plow went, he got all the stones out of there and the soil was clean from the stones. But in

Palestine there are large plates of limestone rock that lie beneath the surface and beneath the plow. And so, a farmer doing his best to plow the field never getting down to that hard soil wasn't even aware it was there. Those are the stony places. And when seed fell upon those kinds of places, it would burrow down into the ground but it didn't have much soil and immediately they sprang up because they had no depth of soil.

You see, what happens is the seed goes down into the soil, it decomposes and that releases its life and in the warmth of the soil and – and with the moisture that is there, it begins to generate. It sends its roots down, it sends its stump up or its – or its branches up and all of a sudden, the roots hit rock bed and can't go anywhere so that the force and the energy moves upward and the plant springs up at a more rapid rate than normal, making the farmer assume maybe this is the greatest crop we've ever had, when the fact of the matter is, it isn't because the roots desperately need the water that is down beneath, but they can't penetrate the rock to get it.

And so, verse 6 says, "When the sun had risen, they were burned and because they had no root they withered away. The moisture that was initially in the plant evaporated in the heat of the sun and when the roots tried to get more moisture, there wasn't any way to go down to get it and the plant burned and died and was unproductive. Farmers in Palestine knew that kind of soil as well as the hard path.

There's a third kind of soil here. You'll see it in verse 7. "Others fell among the weeds or the thorns, and the weeds or thorns came up and choked them out." You know, the farmer would do the best he could to plow that field, and one of the things you do when you plow is try to get all the weeds out. You know just in the operation of your little garden that you have or working in your own yard that if you pull the top off a weed and don't get the bottom, it comes back stronger than ever. And everybody knows that the weeds grow better than anything, at least mine do.

And this is the kind of soil that – that just isn't clean. It's deceptive. It's been cultivated, it looks clean, looks ready but down in that soil are the fibrous roots of weeds ready to spring to life again. And when the moisture hits there and the – and the warm sun comes, the weeds grow and they grow fast and they suck out all the moisture and they suck out all the nourishment that's in the soil and they leave nothing for the fragile young plant and it dies.

And if does manage to maybe peek out of the ground, the big broad leaves of the weeds shade it so it can't get the sun it needs for the photosynthesis that makes it grow. Unless – unless that seed is alone in that soil, unless it's growing alone it can't be fruitful. Those weeds restrict the good seed roots, drink its moisture, veil its sunlight and the good seed dies. Every farmer knew this.

But that's not the end of the story or it would be a pretty stupid thing to be a farmer, wouldn't it? Verse 8 tells us there was also good soil. "And others fell in the good soil and yielded a crop and the crop in varying degrees, a hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold." This is good ground. This is deep, soft, rich, clean soil. Oh, it varies from thirtyfold, sixtyfold to a hundredfold because the nutrients in the soil vary from place to place.

Because some soil may be more acidic than others, it – it may mitigate against the greatest possible amount of growth but seed finds entry, finds nourishment, grows to an abundant harvest. And notice the key thing, "It produces a crop," a crop. Now if you were a farmer in Palestine, a – a tenfold crop

would have been very, very good. A seven-point-five crop would be average. But thirtyfold, sixtyfold, a hundredfold would have been abnormal, unheard of, astonishing. But the Lord, nonetheless, uses hyperbole here to make a spiritual point that there is the possibility that this seed can find good soil, go in and produce an unimaginable crop.

Now let me just kind of sum it up. The parable is very simple. Some seed falls on the hard path, it can't germinate at all, it's either picked up by birds or crushed under the feet of people who walk there. Some seed falls on rocky soil that allows it to germinate and spring up for a little while but it doesn't have any depth so its roots can't get the water. The sun comes out and burns it and it's dead before it can ever produce anything. And some seed falls on weedy soil and it starts to germinate but everything around it starts to germinate and it's more noxious and more powerful and so it eventually overcomes that good seed and it never bears any fruit either. And then there's the good soil and it bears fruit.

Well Jesus told that simple little illustration. And then in verse 9 He said, "He who has ears, let him hear." Which is another way of saying, "Do you guys have any idea of what I've just said? Do you know what I'm talking about?" Let me tell you, a parable without an explanation is a riddle. If that's all there was, I don't know what He's illustrating. I don't know what He's talking about. You're going to have to explain that one to me. And we all know that the – the disciples didn't show an immense amount of astuteness in terms of understanding the words of Jesus which were clear, let alone the ones that weren't. So he explains it.

Go down to verse 18. After a little interlude, telling them how privileged they were to have these explanations which He gave to them and not to the crowds, He says, "Hear then the parable of the sower." Let me tell you what I've just said, let me tell you what I'm trying to say in that story. Let me take you from what is obvious. They're saying, I understand that, I understand that, Lord. Yeah, I've done that. Oh my family has been in farming for years, we understand that. You know, we do the fishing side of this agrarian business but our friends to the farming, that's exactly right, Lord, we understand all that. Well let Me tell you what I'm just talking about spiritually, He says.

And that opens up to us then this parable. There are only three components here. There is the sower, there is the seed and there is the soil, that's it. There's the sower, the seed, and the soil. Now the parable doesn't say anything at all about the sower. It just says the sower went out to sow. And it doesn't say anything at all about the seed in this parable here. But we can – we can find elsewhere some insight. Go down to verse 37 of this thirteenth chapter of Matthew.

And in another parable, a parable of sowing wheat and tares you are familiar with, verse 37 says, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man," – talking about Jesus Christ. So we can conclude that while you don't necessarily want to borrow all the elements of one parable and put them in another one because they're only illustrations or analogies, we'd be safe to say that if the Lord is the sower in one place, He certainly could be the sower in another place. After all, the good seed comes from Him, doesn't it? That's not a stretch. So we could conclude then that the one who sows initially is the Lord Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who came into the world and was the first to preach salvation through His name.

But we could go beyond that. Jesus was the first to preach salvation through His name, but not the last, was He? Acts 9:15 says about the apostle Paul, God says he's a chosen vessel unto Me to bear My name. The apostle Paul was a sower, wasn't he? So are you, so am I if you belong to Christ, if

you bear His name. Now the question is, what is the seed? Well, verse 19, when anyone “hears the Word of the kingdom.” The seed is the Word of the kingdom. What is that? What is that? That’s the message about how to get into God’s kingdom, that’s what that is.

The message about the fact that God is a King over a spiritual kingdom and that He’s inviting people to come into that kingdom. And that kingdom involves joy and peace and fulfillment and satisfaction and blessing imaginable, and unimaginable. It involves goodness and grace and mercy and kindness in this life and eternal glory in heaven. That kingdom involves all of that and you enter that kingdom by putting your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. That’s the message of the kingdom.

God has a kingdom and He invites you to leave the kingdom of darkness and enter the kingdom of His dear Son. And you do that by putting your trust in Christ and you become a member of God’s kingdom and then you’re blessed with all spiritual blessing in His kingdom, including not only what He gives you in this life but what He’ll give you in the life to come eternally in the glories of heaven. That’s the message of the kingdom, that’s good news, isn’t it? That’s the seed. Luke 8:11 says this, Luke records this same parable and Luke adds “the seed is the Word of God,”⁸⁷ because the message of the kingdom is contained in the Word of God, isn’t it?

So the sower is anyone who preaches the message. The sower is anyone who sows the seed. First of all it was Jesus, it was the apostles, it was Paul and now it’s us. We are like a – we’re like a sower and we just drop that precious seed, that’s our calling. That’s what we do. Anybody who proclaims, anybody who speaks of entrance into God’s kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ is sowing the seed. There’s no such thing as synthetic seed, there’s just the real stuff. And it was created by God. Did you get that? It was created by God.

You can’t create a synthetic seed. You have to sow the seed of the Word of God, the message of the kingdom. The seed was created by God and given to us. Now if it ever is lost, it’s impossible through human power, human ingenuity, human skill to produce a new synthetic supply because only God can create a living seed that gives life. And that is the Word of God. Christ is the living seed. Listen to this. Christ is the living seed and the Bible is the husk that holds it. The husk that holds the seed is the most precious thing in the world next to the seed that it holds. Christ is the most precious thing, and next to Christ the Bible which brings you Christ is the most precious thing, right? Christ is the sower and yet within the husk He’s also the seed.

So the parable is all about sowing seed. In other words, it’s all about presenting the gospel, the good news of how to get into the kingdom. And that brings us to the main emphasis of the parable which is the soils, the soils. And this is where the thing really begins to make important sense to us. “When anyone” – verse 19 – “hears the good news about salvation and entrance into the kingdom and does not get it” – comprehend it, grasp it, understand it – “the evil one comes, snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road.”

All right, now He’s going to explain what it means when it falls on the road. Oh, that’s the hard-hearted person, that’s the stiff-necked person, that’s the resistant person, that’s the belligerent person. In the – in the words of Proverbs, that’s the fool who says in his heart, “Ah there’s no God.” But would you notice there, it tells us what the soil is because it says in verse 19, “that which was sown in his” – what? – “heart.” The soil is the heart. The sower is anyone who presents the seed. The soil is the heart. The basic truth of this parable that Jesus taught is this, the results – listen carefully – the results of the hearing of the gospel always depend on the condition of the soil, not the

skill of the sower.

It's the character of the hearer that determines the effect of the Word on him. Let me tell you something. If you hear the gospel and the message of Jesus Christ, and you turn your back and walk away, that doesn't say anything about the seed, that just says everything about the soil. That's just a revelation of where your heart is. The soil is the heart. And in this parable, you have an unresponsive heart, you have an impulsive heart, you have a preoccupied heart and you have a well-prepared heart.

Well let's look at that first one, that wayside soil. In verse 19, the soil that never was plowed up, the soil that was down around the field. beaten hard. The seed was thrown onto the road, hard. It – it can't absorb it. The seed can't penetrate. Birds fly down, eat the seed and what's left gets trampled. You know, in one brief little idea there. You have the preaching of the gospel, the self-destructing rejection of the gospel, and an opportunity for Satan to move in, in one simple little picture. The analogy is powerful.

And there are hearts like this, many, many of them which correspond to that smooth, impenetrable hardness of the footpath that crosses that field. And the heart has become a thoroughfare, crossed by the mixed multitude of sins day after day after day. And the fields weren't fenced so those paths lie exposed, they lie unprotected from all the evil stampings of everyone that comes. Never broken up, never softened by conviction, never softened by repentance, never softened by self-searching, the heart grows callous, the terrors of the Lord aren't frightening and the love of the Lord isn't even winsome. The seed is good. The sower's okay. The heart is unplowed.

This reminds me of the people to whom Jesus came. And He threw the seed all over Palestine, didn't He? And He invited them to come into His kingdom and they were so hard that they executed Him and screamed for His blood. And Satan comes, He says, "and snatches" – the evil one is Satan – "snatches away the seed." It doesn't just stay there, it's gone, tchh.

Satan wants to make sure it never has a chance to penetrate. He snatches it away through the influence of false teachers. He snatches it away to the fear of man. He snatches it away through pride. He snatches it away through doubt. He snatches it away through prejudice. He snatches it away through stubbornness. He snatches it away through procrastination. He snatches it away mostly through the love of iniquity. But he snatches it away. That's a sad situation. And you have to look at your own heart this morning.

Are you that hard dry road at the end of the field? Maybe you even come occasionally here and some of us throw the seed. It bounces, disappears. Has your life been hardened by sins that you've constantly tread over your heart so that the powerful, productive seed of God's Word never can penetrate? That's sad. But it's real. I deal with people like that all the time. So do you. You're so exuberant about the gospel, you're so excited about what Christ has done in your life, you're so thrilled about what's going on, what God has granted to you and given you. You think the next guy you meet is going to love the message. You give it to him and you're running into a brick wall. Right? Don't question the seed, don't even question the sower, the issue is the soil.

Now there's a second kind of soil and it's in verses 20 and 21 and it's this rocky soil, this one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, "it's the man who hears the Word and immediately

receives it with joy, yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary. And when affliction or persecution arises because of the Word, immediately falls away.” This picture is so clear. Here’s the person who has shallow faith. On the surface, “Whoa, this is great, I’m in, count me in, where do I sign? I like this, this is wonderful.” A joy burst forth. May I encourage you, joy is not the distinguishing factor of true salvation, people get happy about a lot of stuff.

Joy is reality to a true Christian, but just exuberant, emotional joy, excitement, enthusiasm doesn’t necessarily indicate true faith. Warm affection, newly stirred up, somebody coming off of a problem, somebody coming out of a dilemma, coming out of a disaster, coming out of being wounded or hurt by somebody in their life, somebody coming out of some problems that they’re facing, looking for a new group, looking to belong, wanting answers, wanting help, reaching up to the nearest skyhook. And when they’re told this is the answer, there’s an exuberance. It looks good. And we might even say, “Wow, look at that joy, that person’s real.”

But you can have joy without commitment to the King, the roots are real short. It’s not necessarily the deep thoughtful profound joy of a devoted heart, it’s just a superficial deal, you know. Remember the people in – in the parable of Matthew 22, Jesus talked about having a wedding feast for the king, the king’s son? Into the wedding feast come all these people and some guy crashes the party without a garment. He didn’t wear the wedding garment. And Jesus said, “We pitched him out.” The garment represented righteousness, and there are lots of people who want the party without the righteousness.

For whatever reason, I mean, we all deal with this. I’ve had people that I thought I had led to the understanding of the gospel and I’ve even met with them and met with them and met with them and tried to disciple them personally and pffst, they’re gone. They’re gone. I couldn’t see the rock down below either, but it was there. And eventually what happened was what looked like life was just a brief spurt but the roots couldn’t go anywhere. And when the sun came out, He says, “just scorched them, burned them.” And what is that? He says in verse 21, “Affliction or persecution because of the Word caused them to fall away.”

They never counted the cost. They never realized that, you know, to be a Christian could cost you something. To be a Christian could cost you a relationship. It could cause your own family to turn against you. It could cause some friends to turn against you. It could be a real price to pay. There will be a real price to pay. It’s the most joyous life there is but it is a cross bearing. And when there was some pressure – the word is “pressure” here, when there was some pressure put on the individual, *thlipsis* in the Greek, they couldn’t handle it. There was just no real root there.

You see, if the law of God has never plowed the stony heart, bruised it small, then you may, by receiving the gospel on some temporary superficial sort of soft act, think you’ve obtained your religion very easily, only to find out that when the pressure is on you bail, you’re gone. In the heat of the battle, you’re AWOL, you’re not willing to pay the price. And you can’t always tell those people initially, can you? Cause you see the joy and exuberance, it looks fine but when there’s a cost and a price, even such a small price, they’re gone.

You remember in John chapter 6, Jesus feeding five thousand men plus women and if there’s five thousand men, five thousand women, there’s got to be twenty thousand kids, so it was a big crowd, big crowd, maybe thirty thousand people. And He’s – and there’s no food and the disciples come and say, “There’s no food.” And He said, “Yes there is. A little boy over there brought his lunch, go get

that little boy and bring him to Me.” And he brings the little boy and he’s got a little basket and in his basket, he’s got some fish and bread, pickled fish is what they used to do so they would preserve them, and some little – some little biscuits. He’s got thirty thousand people and He’s looking at this, and He says, “This is enough, this is fine, this will do.”

And then it says, “He fed them all,” like this, just made food, just kept passing the food out. Fish that had never swam, never lived, never died, just came into the world pickled. That’s how the Lord makes lunch. Lunch, there it is. And He feeds all these, maybe thirty-thousand people. Oh, man, they were so exuberant, they were so thrilled, they were so excited. You know what happened, don’t you? He crossed the sea that night, they showed up on the other side at breakfast. Because in those days, in ancient times, there weren’t any fast food places. There was only slow food, really slow food. You know, you had to beat all the stuff and do all the stuff that...nothing was pre-done.

And they all showed up for free breakfast. They thought they were about to launch the greatest welfare state in the history of humanity. Showed up in the morning and they were just pawing all over Him, they’re so thrilled at all of this. And He started talking about Himself and He’s trying to talk about His kingdom and by the time you come to the end of the sixth chapter of John, those who once called themselves disciples turned their back and deserted Him, gone. They flourished for a little time, didn’t they? But when He started to talk about the cost and the price, and the suffering, they were gone.

But you see, trouble and persecution are very helpful. They do two things. One, they strengthen believers and they manifest non-believers. Trouble and persecution will show you who’s real and it will strengthen God’s own. After you’ve suffered a while, Peter said, the Lord will make you perfect. So you’re going to have those kinds of people. I mean, I’ve experienced it, you’ve experienced it. It’s just going to happen, Jesus told us it’s going to happen and it’s encouraging to know that so – so we don’t get surprised by it.

Third, there’s that weedy ground. And in verse 22 He says, “The one on whom seed was sown among the thorns or weeds.” Who’s that? Well that’s the man who hears the Word, you know, with – with a – with a receptive attitude, but the worry of the world, yeah, he’s just into the spirit of the age. Man, he’s just into the stuff, you know. He’s into it. He’s into his career, he’s into his environment. He’s into his world. He’s into whatever he’s into and that’s the dominating deal in his life. And along with that, and probably the compelling reason he’s in it is because of riches that are availed – available to him. So the combination of the system itself, the world in which he’s found himself, and the deceitful allurements of riches choke the Word and it becomes unfruitful.

I remember onetime years ago, a man came to our church, was one of the leading producers of pornographic films in this area. And he confessed Christ; it was really an exciting time for us at that moment to hear this testimony and I brought him – after he had given his testimony of faith in Christ and come to the church for a few weeks, he wanted to be baptized. I had the privilege of baptizing him.

Now if you’ve made a fortune as a producer of pornographic films, it’s a little hard to send out your resume to get your next job. He couldn’t make any money. It wasn’t long before he was back doing what he did. It was the deceitfulness of riches. It was the system he was in. He never really had let it go, had he? Maybe out of panic or fear of what he was doing, he wanted to grab on to God because he knew what the consequences of that kind of thing could be.

I don't know. We've all seen that happen. The soil appears good, even maybe a certain sense of desperation. But there's other stuff in there that's never really been cleaned. It – it isn't that you have to clean it, it's just that God has to pull it out and bring you to a place of repentance for it. This is the double-minded man who's – who's not going to receive anything from God, James said. He's trying to serve God and money, the deceitfulness of riches.

Well fortunately there's much to be learned by this. This is a very profound story. I don't know who you are this morning, but maybe you're that hard sell. On the one hand, maybe you're that short-spurt guy, or lady, and you've made a profession of faith in Christ outwardly but the pressure's on and you're – you're bailing out, you're going to walk away. I hope that's not the case.

Or maybe you're that person who's gone to Christ, you're gone to hearing the gospel, but you're really into the system. You've got your life style and you've got it just the way you want it and you've got the path in which you can make the things you want to make, the world is important to you, you want to gain the things the world has to offer. You have to remember what James said, that if you're the friend of the world, you're the enemy of God. And if you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you.

It doesn't mean that we are totally isolated from the society around us, it's the question of what we are – what we long for. It's a question of what our passion is, what our priority is. I mean, I want to drive a car that runs. I don't need to have a hole in my suit or my shoe. I like to sit in a comfortable chair if I have an option. And I think God has given us all things richly to enjoy. But it's one thing to understand those as gifts to God – from God and embrace them as evidences of His blessing, it's something else to pursue them as the god of your life.

Now, you see, let's talk a little more about these weeds. Salvation occurs in a heart where the things of the world have been plowed up. You see, your heart can only hold so much, you know. The – the ground is limited as to its capability and the weeds drain the soil of its nourishment, its nutrition, its water and – and the good seed can't survive. And by the way, the good seed is not native to your soul, weeds are. They used to be in there. They live there. But the good seed is alien to you and it has to be protected and cared for and cherished. But the weeds, they're at home. And as long as weeds live, listen to this, they grow. You keep pulling off the top, they'll get stronger on the bottom. And eventually these weeds or thorns will tear and lacerate and the good seed can't flourish.

The last category of soil is the hopeful part of all of this, verse 23, "And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the Word," – man or woman – "who hears the Word and understands it, gets it, and bears what" –what? Produces a crop – "bears fruit, thirtyfold, sixtyfold, a hundredfold" or in reverse it's written there. This is the fruitful hearer, understands the Word. Mark 4 commenting on the same parable says, "accepts the Word." Luke 8:16 commenting on the same parable says, "holds the Word."

That's it. He hears it, he accepts it, he holds it, he takes the gospel in. There's genuine repentance, there's a genuine plowing of the Spirit of God in his heart, plowing out those noxious weeds of his former life. And there's some deep soil that can reach down, not a rock bed of selfish resistance and he produces fruit.

Now not every Christian produces the same amount of fruit. There – there – there were different conditions in the soil that cause different levels of fruitfulness in the crop. And the same thing is true of our spiritual lives. We all bear some fruit. Some bear just some fruit, some bear more fruit, some bear much fruit, but we all bear fruit, we all bear fruit. That's the distinguishing mark of believers.

What is fruit? Well Hebrews says the fruit of your lips is praise to God. You were bearing fruit this morning when you were singing, not from your mouth but from your heart through your mouth, right? Were you praising God this morning? Were you giving Him the fruit of your lips? Was your heart lifted up and were you thrilled to sing the words you sang? That's fruit. And Paul said the first fruits of Achaia, the first people I led to Christ in Achaia are fruit.

And Paul wrote to the Philippians and the Colossians about the fruit – the fruit of righteousness. And Paul wrote to the Galatians about the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. So we have action fruit and attitude fruit. And that all is produced in your life. And it differs from person to person by the fact that there's a different level of devotion and some cases perhaps different capacity by God's design. But there's fruit.

Now let me draw this to its conclusion. Here's what I wanted to say, all of that to say this. Friend, there's no discussion here of the sower, anybody will do. There's no discussion here of the seed, the seed is the Word of God, the gospel, okay? The only issue here is the soil. Now can I encourage you? The issue is not the skill of the sower, it's the state of the soil. Let's assume that this farmer, who was farming that day and maybe doing his sowing while Jesus was teaching this, had a little five-year-old son. And his little five-year-old son wanted to be like his daddy so his daddy made him a little leather pouch, put it around his shoulder and put some seed in it.

So his little son is going along a furrow somewhere behind him. And he's sticking his little fat hand, which is mostly hand and not much finger, as you know, and it's hard to get a handful of anything. Every time I give my grandkids a handful of M&M's, there's about two in the middle and about 15 spilling out all over everywhere else. So this guy's got a little fat hand and he's dipping it into his little pouch and he's learning how to do it like his daddy does. The problem is, he throws it in his own hair, down his shirt, down his father's back, everywhere. He's not good at it, he's just learning.

You want to know something? When the seed hits the good soil, it didn't matter if it was thrown by his father or him. Did you get that? It's not the skill of the sower, it's the state of the soil. Can I make a suggestion to you? The more seed you throw the more likely you are to hit good soil. Don't go through your life with one seed saying, "I'm waiting to see where this baby goes." Start throwing seed in every direction and you're more likely to hit good soil.

That's what we're here to do, do you understand that? You say, "I thought we were here to praise God." No, we can go to heaven and we can do it right up there, perfect. "I thought we were here to live righteous lives." Well we're having a tough time with that one, we better get up there and real righteousness is going to occur there. He says there's only one reason to leave us here. The only thing we can do here that we can't do there, the only thing we can do here better than we can do there, the only thing we can do here and can't do there is throw seed, just throw seed.

A friend of mine was walking across the street in Los Angeles one day and the signal changed and there was a big policeman in the middle of this intersection and he had a, you know, a stick on one

hand and a hip – and a gun on the other hip. And he had these sunglasses that are mirrors, you can't see. You always think those people are looking at you, don't you? Always.

He walks up to this big guy standing there in the middle of the intersection, he says – just as he got off the curb, my friend said, "I thought to myself, you know, I ought to – I ought to tell that guy about Christ." And then he talked to himself, "That's ridiculous, that must be me talking, that's ridiculous." I only have 45 seconds.

Then he said, "No that can't be me, I'd never think of that. It must be the Lord prompting my heart." So he walked up to this guy in the 45 seconds he had to go across the street. And he said, "Sir, I – I just want to ask you if you – if you know that Jesus Christ died for your sins?" The guy looked down at him and said – silence, and then said, "That's exactly what I've been thinking about. How did you know that?"

Look I don't know where that good soil is but it's there. And there's nothing more wonderful than – than being the sower when it hits the good soil. That's what we do, folks, that's what we do. And the dear disciples needed to know this because they were going to get rejected big time, right? They were going to get martyred in the process of sowing the seed.

What kind of courage do you have? It's unlikely you'll get crucified. It's unlikely you'll get burned at the stake. It's unlikely you'll get thrown in a prison or exiled to an island in the Mediterranean, although that doesn't sound too bad. It's unlikely that any of those kinds of things would happen to you, isn't it?

How much courage do you have to throw seed? You throw seed, ask God to plow soil. You can't plow soil either, God plows soil. Pray that God will bring you across prepared soil. And if you're that hard soil or you're that rocky soul or you're that weedy soil, listen, you ask God to plow your heart so you can receive the transforming saving message of the gospel that Christ died for your sins and rose again that you might have eternal life, and in believing in Him you can enter in to His kingdom. Let's pray together.

We thank You, our Father, for this wonderful time of worship. We thank You for Your Word which is so powerful and so penetrating. We thank You for the dear friends who have come to gather with us. We thank You for bringing all these guests from all over the world, these wonderful young men from back in West Virginia.

We thank You, Father, for just bringing us all together. We know this is – it's like it was said of Esther, who knows but Thou art come to the kingdom for just such a time as this. Things don't happen as accidents, You have a wonderful unfolding plan and we're just so blessed to see it work.

Most of all, we thank You for Jesus Christ, we thank You for the fact that He died on a cross bearing our sins in His own body on the cross. We thank You that He became sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. We thank You that there is eternal life in Him, forgiveness of all our sins, the riches and fullness of life now and forever.

This is the seed. May we be faithful in sowing it and oh, God, may You graciously, mercifully plow the hearts of many so that they may receive the good seed and bear much fruit to Your glory and Your

honor, Amen.

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