

Seed, Soils, and Reality

When you hear the parable of the seed and the different soils, are you able to see yourself in the parable? You should, but the big question is **HOW** do you see yourself in this parable? What “soil” are you? I guess the better question is: **How can you not see yourself in all four soils?** When viewed in light of God’s Word, through the lens of the cross of Christ, **it’s difficult to miss, isn’t it?** Be honest: How often has the good seed of God’s Word fallen on your deaf ears and hard heart? How often have you refused to believe what God has to say about the sins that you commit? Why? Because you know better, based on ALL your experience and wisdom? Because it’s different in your case? How often have you wilted away when a little trial and tribulation arises in your life? And I don’t mean like cowering in fear (which is certainly a problem, as empty pews and unused communion supplies these past many months will bear witness to). How often have you **simply stayed silent** when presented the opportunity to speak the Truth? How often have you turned a blind eye and deaf ear because you didn’t want to rock the boat; you didn’t want to hurt someone’s feelings or make things “weird”? **How often have you wilted away rather than standing tall/firm in Christ?** The slightest breeze blows us over and uproots us. The heat bumps up ever so slightly, and we wilt. The fruits we bear are proof. And as for the seed that falls upon the thorns and weeds, but rises up only to be choked out by the pleasures and recreations of life? Really? Do we really need to dig into that one? **Deep-down, you know your ugly weed and thorn-choked Truth.** God certainly knows the truth, and He isn’t mocked or deceived.

This is why Jesus teaches this parable. God desires the death of no man. He desires that all would repent and turn and live. This is why God sows the seed of His Word... to everyone. And like He tells us through Isaiah, His Word does not return to Him void or empty. God’s Word accomplishes **exactly** what He purposes. He never swings and misses. Yes, there are times that the seed of His Word falls on our hard heads and even harder hearts. Our words and our deeds reveal the ugly truth of the hard-packed soil that good seed has landed upon. There are times that the good seed of God’s Word lands on the **rocky, rootless recesses** of our weak minds and weak hearts. Again, our words and our deeds reveal this ugly truth. And of course there are also plenty of times in our lives when our words and deeds make abundantly clear that the good seed of God’s Word is being choked out by the weeds and thorns of this life; the cares and riches and pleasures that so often and so easily become our gods; that usurp the Lord God.

Okay... but what about the good soil; the soil in which the good seed takes root and grows up to yield one hundred fold? **Can you see yourself here?** Before you answer it is important to remember that the self-righteous Pharisees were convinced that they were not only “good soil,” but the **very best** soil. They looked to their wealth, their social standing, their titles and degrees, and all their good

works and good intentions, and they couldn't help but think that they were the best soil this side of heaven. (Many other people thought the same thing about them too.) Sadly, though, their words and deeds in response to Christ and His Word only served to reveal the fact that their hearts and minds were hard as a rock and full of devilish birds.

And that is an important point to bring out. Those proud men looked in the mirror and didn't see any "bad soil" problems staring back at them. They only saw "prime real estate." Others, too, looked at these "fine upstanding pillars of society" and saw only "prime real estate." ***And yet... that's not how God saw them;*** God, whose Word pierces down the heart and marrow, able to pierce through to the division between soul and spirit; whose Word is able to cut through all the fakeness, all the boasting, all the excuses and façade; whose Word fleshes out and exposes things for how they ***really*** are in His sight; that's not how He saw them at all, and the fruits they were bearing in response to that Word bore witness to this.

What about the prostitutes and tax collectors and lepers and condemned thieves? What about all the "riff-raff"? ***They were looked down upon by everyone as lower than dirt, not fit for the things of God.*** And yet... Jesus sows the good seed of His Word amongst them too, and they are the ones who hear the Word and repent and believe. They are the ones, like Jesus explains in the parable, who heard the Word, and held it fast in honest and good hearts. That good seed of the Word changed them. They were brought to repentance and bore good fruits with patience. Or as John the Baptist would say, they bore fruits that were in keeping with repentance.

And how is it that all this happened? Well... we can say how it didn't happen! They didn't have to first do all these things in order to be deemed worthy enough to then receive the Word of God. Nope. The Master Gardener, through the proclamation of His Word, was scoring open the sinful and lifeless clay of their hearts. Through the proclamation of His Word, He was sowing the seed and planting the seed. He was nourishing that seed with His life-giving water of baptism and His light of the Gospel. Their repentance wasn't the ***reason*** the seed was sown. Their repentance was the ***response*** to the sown seed of the Word. ***Their repentance—in word, thought, and deed—was the good fruit that sprang up in response.*** This is so important to understand! The abundant and God-pleasing fruits of repentance are not a ***prescription***, but rather a ***description***. They are good fruits borne out in response to hearing the Word and holding it fast in honest and good hearts. "Good soil" is not a matter of ***potential*** (as in, here's what you need to do in order to make this happen), but rather ***reality*** (as in, here's how God sees things right now).

Faith comes through hearing; hearing the Word of Christ. I'm reminded of the command our heavenly Father issued forth on the Transfiguration mount (as

well as at the baptism of Jesus three years earlier): *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased. Listen to Him!”* I direct you to Him and His cross. Almighty God loves you so much that He sent His only-begotten Son to die for each and every one of your sins. And—yes—all those many and various ways we reject God and His Word; all those many and various ways we second-guess Him and over-rule Him; all those ways in which we wilt away from Him or just plain ignore Him or blow Him off in favor of our own passions and desires... they’re all sins. They’re all sins that God Himself suffered and died for. *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!”* Sometimes, sadly, we know exactly what we do, don’t we? Forgive us! For Christ’s sake, have mercy on us!

Look at this cross! This is how big of deal your sin is to God! You may not see your sins as such a big deal (at least some of them), but this is how God sees each and every one of them! This is how much God loves you, in spite of your wretched sinfulness. This is God’s mercy for you. He’s not giving you what you deserve (present and eternal wrath and punishment). Instead, He’s taking your place so that you will never have to experience a single second of it for yourself. This is God’s grace for you. He’s giving to you what you absolutely do not deserve. He’s giving to you what you could *never earn*—eternal life and complete forgiveness of all your sin. In grace, He baptizes you into this cruciform victory. Through baptism He takes the *wretched and undeserving riff-raff corpse* and breathes His goodness and life into your *breathless clay*. He gives you His Holy Spirit and puts His name upon your head and your heart, adopting you into His heavenly household, making you His precious child and royal heir. Folks: This isn’t a prescription for what you need to do to make this happen. This is description of what God has done for you! This is a description of how God sees you, right now!

Look to this altar and behold this same almighty and merciful Lord in your midst, sowing His good seed of life and forgiveness and grace. Listen to Him. Take these words to heart. *“It is finished! I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Now take and eat. Take and drink. As often as you do this, remember what I have said: This is My body and My blood, given and shed for you for the complete forgiveness of all your sin.”*

You know what? That’s all that needs to be said. I’ve done my job. I’ve sown the seed the Master Gardener has given me to sow. May this good seed of His Law and Gospel take root in your heart and spring up to bear abundant, God-pleasing fruits of repentance that hold fast in patience to this Divine miracle of mercy, grace, and everlasting life. I pray that you take this Word of the cross—the Word of your reality before God in Christ and because of Christ—to heart, and I pray that it takes root and bears in overflowing abundance the good fruit He intends for you and for all men: *His peace, which surpasses all understanding*. And may this same peace guard and keep your hearts and minds in Him, from now and into all eternity. **AMEN.**