

How Is Your Crop?

Matthew 13:3-9

Preface

I spent much of yesterday tilling up a garden. You may be thinking it is a little late to be planting a garden. However, this is not an ordinary garden. I was tilling a part of the backyard for a flower garden of all things. Pam loves day lilies and wants a place to plant what seems like hundreds of plants she keeps bringing home. We are running out of places to stick them in the regular flower beds so I just went all out and tilled up a large area for her to plant all she wants.

Many of you are farmers and have probably forgotten more than I will ever know about farming. However, I think you would be pleased with my efforts. I tilled up the ground, removed the grass and roots, added peat moss and cow manure and tilled even more. I have the ground to the point that it is as fluffy as a feather bed. I wanted to make sure that anything we plant has the best possible chance of thriving in Pam's new flower garden.

Jesus uses a parable to speak directly to us about our Christian life. He speaks of planting seeds and different types of soil in which the seeds are planted. Following this parable, He explains each type of soil. Let's look at this parable and ask God to speak to our hearts about our own soil and crops of our spiritual lives.

Scripture – Read

³Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹He who has ears, let him hear." Matthew 13:3-9 NIV

Introduction

In this parable, Jesus covers the gambit of Christians today. This parable is as applicable today as it was the day he spoke the words. In this audience this parable is equally applicable. This parable is about us, you and me. It is about our hearts and how we receive the Word of God. This parable goes right to the very core of our relationship with God and forces us to confront our relationship with God.

In this parable, the seed is the God's Word.

In this parable, the soil is the different kinds of hearts of mankind.

God's Word is like seed in that it is living and powerful. Unlike the words of men, the Word of God has life in it for those who receive it.

⁴²For the word of God is full of living power. It is sharper than the sharpest knife, cutting deep into our innermost thoughts and desires. It exposes us for what we really are."
Hebrews 4:12

The Word of God must take root in the heart, be cultivated and permitted to bear fruit. Fruit is the real test of salvation (Matthew 7:16). Our ultimate response to God's Word should involve fruit.

Illus: There is a story about an old Indian chief who is sharing his wisdom with some young braves. He is talking about the good and evil that often does battle in a man's heart. He describes it as two wolves one being the white / good wolf and the other being the dark / bad wolf. He speaks of the struggle where the good wolf wants to do the responsible things, being truthful and full of integrity. At the same time, the dark wolf desires the darker side of things with deceit and lies. Soon, one young man asks, "Which one wins?" The chief's answers, "The one you feed."

As we review the four types of hearts, please reflect upon your own heart and ask the difficult questions. Which soil reflects the condition of my heart? How well am I feeding my heart with the Word of God?

Content

1. The Hard Heart

Jesus describes the first soil as being a hard path in which the seed does not even germinate. Because the path is hard, the birds are able to easily eat it.

In verse 19, Jesus explains the meaning, *“¹⁹When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.”*

This describes two types of people with a hard heart. First, there are those in our society who simply reject the gospel all together. They hear but refuse to believe the truth of God’s Word. These are the people who say, “I am not interested in hearing anything about God.” This is a dangerous group because they become the instruments of Satan.

Secondly, there are many people in our society today who profess to believe in God but show absolutely no sign of following Him. They never attend church or read His Word. They claim to believe in God but do not know Him. God’s word never gets past the mind and never penetrates their heart.

Please understand, it is possible to believe but not be saved. It is possible to believe in Him but not know Him.

2. The Shallow Heart

Some of the seed falls on rocky places and though it does begin to germinate and grow, it quickly withers away.

Jesus explains the meaning in verses 20 and 21, *“²⁰The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.”*

Gail and I have been organizing the church membership in a computer database. In fact, you will be receiving something soon in the mail asking you to provide updated information about your family members. You might be surprised to know that we have a total of 164 families in that database. I realize some of them have left and become a part of other churches.

Upon confirmation of that they will be removed from our records. However, many of these families and individuals are precisely what Christ is referring to when He describes the shallow heart.

These are people who receive God’s Word but never give it an opportunity to establish roots. These are often the people who are initially so excited about receiving Christ. They often become hard workers in the church for a brief period of time.

However, when difficulties come especially as a result of their faith, they quickly fall away. When things don’t go their way, the shallow heart lays aside their faith and abandons its faith.

Across the country there are church roles filled with people like this. These people bring pastors great disappointment because we know if they would just be faithful and trust God’s Word allowing it to take root, their lives would be filled with joy. Instead, they lose heart and fall by the wayside.

Illus: In our garden, we must till and take precautions to insure plants can establish strong roots. The same is true of our spiritual lives.

3. The Distracted Heart

Other seed falls on good ground and begins to grow but is soon choked out by weeds and thorns.

Our Lord explains this soil in verse 22, *“²²The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.”*

The distracted heart describes all of us at some time or another. We believe God’s Word and we desire to trust Him but we are plagued with distractions. Distractions such as worry, family problems, health issues and the pursuit of wealth all compete for our heart’s attention.

If you are going to be a Christian, Satan wants you to be this type of Christian. The distracted heart is often miserable. A part of them wants to commit and make God the number one priority in their life but they just can’t get rid of the distractions and temptations. Consequently, a war wages within causing them constant anguish. These are the people

who are quick to argue and fight in the church. Always ready to run things of business but reluctant to serve in outreach.

The Word of God cannot produce fruit in our lives if we are putting pleasure before our relationship with God. We cannot produce fruit if God is not first in our lives. God doesn't mind us having wealth as long as we are generous and willing to share with others. God Word says, *"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" 1 John 3:17*

The distracted heart always finds other things to do with their money and time rather than committing it to God. They have their priorities backwards. Our Christianity should be the center of our lives around which friendship, ministry, family and work revolve. *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Matthew 6:33*

Illus: We see evidence of this in our churches as well. What other explanation do we have for an average worship service attendance of about 30% each Sunday? This is also why it is such a struggle to get people to commit to serve as Sunday School teachers and other places of leadership. I am sorry but this is just the plain truth.

Note: If there is any doubt in your mind about these first three descriptions of people's hearts, consider the attendance in worship on Easter Sunday or at Christmas. Churches are filled with people who some how feel enough guilt that they decide to show up on those days to give God an hour of their time.

4. The Fertile Heart

Finally, there is the fruitful seed that falls on good soil and takes root.

Again, Jesus explains this clearly in verse 23, *"But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the Word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."*

The fertile heart is the heart that says yes to the will of God. It is the heart that trusts God and says, "Change me. Get rid of the distractions in my life and allow me to worship you in

all things. Take my possessions and my time, use them for your kingdom."

The fertile heart is the heart that establishes a foundation with roots deep in the Word of God. It is the heart that is soft and ready to receive the Word and Spirit of God.

It is the heart that turns to God when troubles come and seeks comfort from our Lord. When we have a fertile heart, God takes our sins and trials and turns them into strengths.

Illus: I read a story about a young boy who was missing his left arm. Bravely, he decided to learn judo despite his handicap. The boy began lessons under an old Japanese judo master. He did very well but after three months of training, the master had only taught him one move. The boy finally asked the master if he would be learning any other moves. "This is the only move you'll ever need to know," replied the master.

Soon, the boy found himself in competitive matches. The first few matches he easily won with the move he had learned. Eventually, he competed with a more experienced student and while it was more difficult, the opponent eventually lunged at the boy and he was able to use the move and win the match.

Finally, the boy was in a match with a very experienced student of judo and found himself exhausted and struggling to compete. The opponent was bigger and stronger. At one point, the referee wanted to call the match out of fear that the boy would be hurt but the master teacher said, "No, let him continue." Soon after the match resumed, his opponent made a critical mistake; he dropped his guard. Instantly, the boy used his move to pin down his opponent and won the match.

On the way home, the boy asked, "How did I win the tournament with only one move?" The master teacher replied, "You won for two reasons. First, you've almost mastered the most difficult throw in judo. Secondly, the only known defense for that move is for the opponent to grab your left arm."

The boy's weakness had become his strength because his roots were deep in the master's technique.

God wants to do exactly that in our spiritual lives. He wants to turn our weaknesses into strengths through trust in His

Word. God will make us fruitful beyond our imagination if we will just “trust and obey.”

➤ **Conclusion**

Do you really want a spiritually productive life?

Illus: One day a student came to his religion teacher and asked him how he could come to have true understanding of God's Word and wisdom. The teacher told him to join him at the river. Once there, he led him into the water and instructed him to stick his head under the water. As soon as his head was under water, the teacher put his hands on the student's head and held him under the water. The student fought desperately but was unable to break free. The teacher held him under until the student began to become weak. Then he released him and the student shot up out of the water and began to gasp for air desperately. The teacher said, “When you desire understanding as desperately as you desired to breathe the air you just breathed - then you shall find it.”

Jesus said, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.” Matthew 5:6*

In the conclusion of the parable, Jesus says, *“He who has ears, let him hear.”*

Jesus is not speaking of the ears on the side of our head. By now, we all know that our ears pick up sounds and our brains process those sounds. But, it is our hearts that actually hear and respond.

What type of heart do you have? Are you responsive and trusting? Do you study God's Word and apply it to your life? When is the last time you sat down and prayerfully read God's Word?

What fruit are you producing as a result of God's Word? Are you serving God in your life and in His church? Do you speak to others about your faith?

God's Word says, “let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.” Colossians 3:16