

The Parable Of The Fourfold Soil.

Text: Luke 8:4-15

Suggested Hymns:

498, 392, 264, 267, 515

1) Wayside Soil

2) Stony Soil

3) Thorny Soil

4) Good Soil

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 8:4-15, *⁴ And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: ⁵ “A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. ⁶ Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture.*

⁷ And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. ⁸ But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.” When He had said these things He cried, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

⁹ Then His disciples asked Him, saying, “What does this parable mean?” ¹⁰ And He said, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that ‘Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.’

¹¹ “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹² Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. ¹³ But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.

¹⁴ Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. ¹⁵ But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“Today, the sermon seemed all too short. I could have listened to it much longer.” There are times when we feel like that; we become so interested in the sermon. At other times we are apt to complain that we could not get interested in the sermon. Where does the fault lie?

It is true, not all sermons exert the same influence upon us. Nor are the gifts of God given to all preachers in equal measure. Some are more forceful than others. But this cannot be the only reason, nor even the first and foremost reason, because even Jesus, the greatest Preacher of all times, complained that, *“hearing they do not hear.”*¹

The people of Athens said of Paul, *“What does this babbler want to say?”*² Nor does the fault lie with the Word of God. It is always quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword,³ like a hammer,⁴ a light,⁵ a devouring flame,⁶ and a life-giving force.⁷

It is of equal power whether preached by the most noted pulpit orator or by an illiterate humble Christian.⁸ Why, then, the difference?

In the parable of the Sower the Saviour compares a Christian congregation to a field with four kinds of soil; therefore it is also called *“the parable of the Four Kinds of Soil.”*

Just as in a field there may be patches which are less productive than others, yes, even entirely barren, even though the farmer has worked the ground with the same care and sown seed of the same quality, so also in the visible Church there are hearers who do not come to faith or who do not remain in faith.

Our soul’s eternal weal or woe depends on the manner in which we hear and receive God’s Word. Therefore let us today study *The Parable of the Fourfold Soil*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Wayside Soil.

Firstly, we consider the condition of the soil. Our text says, *some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it*. It was hard, crusted soil, trampled solid. A path across the ploughed field. The field

had been made ready to receive the seed, but men had made a path across the field. Any seed falling on this path cannot penetrate. The birds pick it up. There is no fruit on wayside soil.

Some people hear the Word, but the good seed of the Word of God cannot penetrate their hearts. The devil snatches away what has fallen upon the ear.

Secondly, let us examine the cause. It is a hardness of heart owing to routine and mechanical and thoughtless hearing. Remember that this parable is spoken to those who regularly hear the Word. But churchgoing has become a mere habit with them. When they go home, they remember very little of what they have heard. They can hardly repeat a sentence or thought of the sermon.

It is not a lack of intelligence. If they have been to a lecture, they can repeat ever so many things they heard. But with the hearing of the Word it is different. While their bodies are in church, their minds are elsewhere — at their business, over the records, figuring assets and liabilities, in the factory, the store, the field, the kitchen, at their pleasures, the afternoon outing, the coming vacation, or the fishing trip.

It is also careless sinning. When the warning voice of God's Word is disregarded, the heart becomes callous. "*The little foxes spoil the vines.*"⁹ The many little sins are like little foxes, which make the ground hard and spoil the tender grapes. The very word of admonition which they should hear, they miss.

Or one may be quick to apply the Word to some one else but never to ourselves. In either case the Word strikes only the ear but not the heart. Then the Word is snatched away before it does its work. There is no fruit. Let us examine ourselves.

Thirdly, let us look at the remedy. The very nature of the trouble, is a careless disregard of God's Word, but it points to the remedy.

Firstly, we must become aware that, when we are in church, we stand in the presence of God. "*The Lord is in His holy Temple.*"¹⁰ The place of worship is a sacred place. God Himself is present. Recall Jacob at Bethel,¹¹ Moses at the burning bush,¹² and Solomon in His prayer of dedication of the temple.¹³

Secondly, you must come to church for a purpose. Scripture says in Ecclesiastes 5:1, *¹ Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw*

near to hear. And in Isaiah 66:2, ***“But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word.***

The hymnist wrote, *“Lord, open Thou my heart to hear.”*¹⁴ God has something to say to you. For the receiving of the Law, Israel had to prepare itself three days.¹⁵ Heb. 2:1-3 points out the greater importance of hearing the Gospel.

For this purpose, here are a few practical suggestions: Come to church early enough to compose yourself. Speak a prayer in which you ask God to bless both the preaching and the hearing. Glance over the hymns in quiet meditation. Join in the singing and the praying from the heart.

Thirdly, consider who is at the bottom of such careless hearing. Watch how you hear. Satan endeavours to divert your attention and to snatch away the seed of the Word, ***lest you should believe and be saved.*** This requires a constant struggle. No one is safe.

2. Stony Soil.

Firstly, we consider the condition of the soil. ⁶ ***Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture.*** Good soil on top, but a hard-pan beneath. Quick germination, promising growth; but owing to the lack of depth the plants soon wilt and die.

Our text says, ¹³ ***But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.*** The Word of God has struck home in a person. He becomes deeply moved. He realises his sins and the need of the Saviour. He is eager to join the Church, and be very active at once. He becomes a zealous worker. But after a while he loses interest, the first enthusiasm wanes, he is seldom seen in church, and drifts away completely.

The trouble is that ***these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.***

Christians are put to the test. The winds of adversity blow; the heat of tribulation comes. Our Christianity should not be a fair-weather Christianity. Trials and tribulations are intended to send the roots of our faith deep into the ground.

Others lack a thorough understanding. They are not rooted and grounded in faith.

Others, again, are offended.¹⁶ They are quick to say, *“Lord, I will follow You wherever You go”*¹⁷ but are quick to deny Him in the face of danger. All of these lack depth. There is a rocky subsoil. The Word of God cannot penetrate. The good beginning has a sad ending.

Let us look at the remedy. The rocky subsoil must be broken up. The plough shear of the Law must be set deeper. In an orchard where young trees were to be planted men were at work with shovels and pickaxes. The ground was deep enough for small crops, but not for the trees; there was a hard-pan underneath. Therefore the pickaxes.

Thus our hearts need special attention at times. Perhaps we have not been sufficiently humbled. Perhaps there is a lack of deep sense of sin. Perhaps we have not learned fully to appreciate the Gospel. Go deeper with the Law, but also learn to draw strength in the time of trial from the sweet Gospel.

3. Thorny Soil.

Firstly, we consider the condition of the soil. ⁷ *And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it.* All the land had been carefully cleared, worked, ploughed, and harrowed; but a few roots of thorns and weeds remained. Nothing unusual in a large field to have a weedy patch. But the weeds hinder the growth and cuts down the yield.

By nature our hearts were like a jungle of thorns. But by God’s grace the thorns have been cut down and our hearts have been made into good ground. However, the roots of thorns still remain! The old man is hard to kill. The old sins are apt to gain strength again and choke the good seed.

The cause of the trouble is given in our text, ¹⁴ *Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.*

The thorns are also described as *“the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches”*¹⁸ and in Mark 4:19 as *the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things.* Luke summarises them as *“with cares, riches, and pleasures of life.”*¹⁹

Let us examine “*cares.*” Martha’s worries kept her from sitting at Jesus’ feet. The three great causes of worry are food, clothing, and shelter. Where there are no worries about the necessities of life, other worries crowd in on us: trying to get a better job, acquiring a better education, and seeking to get the luxuries of life. All these may crowd out the care for the soul. We need to remember what Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, ³³ *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

Let us examine “*riches.*” Note that Matthew and Mark speak of the “*deceitfulness of riches.*” There are many warnings in Scripture on this point. For example 1 Timothy 6:9, ⁹ *But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.*²⁰

Where the desire for riches gains the upper hand, it soon chokes the enthusiasm of the church-member: less willingness to serve on committees, no time to accept an office in the church, more irregular in church attendance, too busy to read the Word of God at home and to have family devotion. Everything is sacrificed on the altar of Mammon.

Many a person was a good Christian as long as he was poor, but with the increase of wealth came a corresponding decrease in his Christianity. Get after those thorns. Don’t let them get the upper hand. Either you are master over your business, or your business will master you.

Let us examine the “*pleasures of this life.*” This has always been a thorn. St. John warns us in 1 John 2:15–16, ¹⁵ *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* ¹⁶ *For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.*

Then there is also the example of Demas who loved the world recorded in 2 Tim. 4:10. It is an even greater danger in our day because of the greater amount of leisure time and the greater freedom with which sin lures us. Where these thorns are permitted to grow, there can be no fruit to perfection.

Let us look at the remedy. Thorns must be gotten after with all seriousness and with drastic measures. This may be a long-drawn-out task. The farmer may

be after a patch of thorns or thistles for several years. By daily contrition and repentance the old man must be drowned.²¹

Because Cain did not watch over sin which lurked in his heart, he became the first murderer. Because the Israelites did not utterly destroy the Canaanites, as God had instructed them, the heathen nations around them proved a constant thorn in their side.

4. Good Soil.

Our text says, ⁸ *But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold. ...* ¹⁵ *... the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.*

In every Christian congregation there is good ground (individual Christians), which brings forth good fruit. Noble and good hearts are made so by God Himself. A noble heart means a honest and sound heart. A good heart means excelling in all respects, good in its very nature. They keep the Word. The seed penetrates and brings forth fruit. The full purpose of the sowing is achieved.²²

Luke mentions only yielding fruit a hundredfold. Mark and Matthew specify a gradation, ranging from thirty to hundred. All Christians keep the Word. But the seed does not always produce the same amount of fruit nor fruit of the same quality.

To some people God has given a greater measure of His gifts.²³ We are not all Pauls and Peters and Stephens, but we are all Christians and therefore good ground and should become rich in good works.

Nor should we get discouraged if we do not reach this goal at once. The phrase *“bear fruit with patience”* points to the slow growth; but growth there must be. If there is no advancement, there is decline. If there is no growth the result will be death.

In conclusion we have seen how easily the good ground may be spoiled. Therefore let us be on our guard.²⁴ Since we are apt to become careless and indifferent toward God’s Word ask the Him to especially be with us and to bless His Word upon our hearts

May He make our hearts like the fruitful ground that we may always hear His Word with open ears and believing hearts and bring forth God-pleasing fruit. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matt. 13:13

² Acts 17:18

³ Heb. 4:12

⁴ Jer. 23:29

⁵ Psa. 119:105

⁶ Jer. 5:14

⁷ Ezek. 37:7

⁸ Isa. 55:10-11

⁹ Song of Sol. 2:15

¹⁰ Habakkuk 2:20

¹¹ Gen. 28:17

¹² Exo. 3:5

¹³ 1 Kings 8:27-29

¹⁴ Hymn 498

¹⁵ Exo. 19

¹⁶ Matt. 13:21

¹⁷ Luke 9:57

¹⁸ Matthew 13:22

¹⁹ Luke 8:14

²⁰ See also Deut. 8:13-14; Matt. 19:23

²¹ 1 Cor. 9:27; Rom. 13:14; Col. 3:5; 1 Pet. 2:11

²² Eph. 2:10; 2 Cor. 5:15; Rom. 12:1

²³ Matt. 25:15

²⁴ Luke 8:18