

Rooted - Week 12

“Rooted Deep, Living Strong - Part 1”

Matthew 13:1-9 NIV84

In his parable, Jesus talked about four “soils,” which are four kinds of people, or four kinds of heart conditions. If bad seed goes into good soil, we're going to get a bad plant. If bad seed goes into bad soil, we're not going to have anything. But, if we put good seed into good soil, we're going to have an amazing harvest. And we want to talk about what that means and how that connects to the book of Colossians. The issue really isn't the seed, which Jesus identifies in the Matthew passage as the Word of God, the Message, the truth of the Word - it's the *soil*.

If the good seed of the Word is going into bad soil, then it's not going to bring forth a harvest. It's basically the same seed, but it's different results that we *get* out of the seed. So, the seed isn't the problem. Here's the big question we want to start with: what kind of soil are *we*? This parable will explain why we see friends or other people receive the Word of God, get excited about it, and take off like a horse at the Kentucky Derby - they came out of the gate on fire, *blazing* - but then we look up and they're gone. They *were* there, all-in and on the same page together, and then one day they're *not*. What's the problem? The seed wasn't the problem, but the *soil* was the heart of it.

Matthew 13:3-9 NIV

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

Four kinds of soils

1] The hardened heart. This is the first heart that is closed off to receive the message of the Word. In Matthew 13:19, Jesus explains the parable and says, *“When 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.

A sower is throwing down seed. He's casting it out and some lands on the hardened path, and is just laying there. Therefore, anything can come along and take the seed away. Jesus says that birds fly in and eat the seed right up. Some say that these birds represent demonic forces. We need to realize there's a real and evil enemy out there, and he hates our guts. Why? Because we're the ones whom God loves - we are the *object* of his love. The enemy wants to taint and defile that and to destroy it.

John 10:10 says the thief comes only to do three things: to steal, to kill, and to destroy, but Jesus says, "*I came that you might have life.*" The word "life" in the Greek is *Zoe* which means "*the God kind of life.*" Jesus said he came "*that you might have life and have it more abundantly.*" Another translation says, "*Have it to the full.*" We can all have a full life and an abundant life, and when someone asks us, "*How's it going?*" we can say, "*I'm living the dream.*" Don't we all want to be able to say that?

Jesus identifies who it is that steals the seed off of the path. The birds that are swooping in to get it are *demons*. There are demonic forces waiting for us today. As this Word goes out, whether it was sung in worship, whether it was prayed, preached, or said in Communion, whatever goes out from this place is the seed of the Word of God, and right now, it's laying on our heart and there are several things that can happen. Matthew 13:19 identifies these birds as the evil one who comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. Mark 4:15 identifies the evil one as Satan. Jesus says, "*Satan comes and takes away the word.*" The version in Luke of the same parable says, "*The devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts.*"

Are we getting the picture here? There's a very real enemy after the seed, even what's being sown on our heart *right now*. If we've ever gone to a service, a conference, or maybe we just listened to something on YouTube, we were so inspired and motivated by it, but then thirty minutes later we can't even remember what we heard. Thirty minutes later and we're off to the races - we're doing something else. What happened there? The enemy had been very crafty - he came in and took the seed off the soil of our heart. So what kind of soil are we here?

Listen to this keynote: *A distracted heart can't receive a directed word.* When we're so caught up in what's going on, we can easily be distracted. When we don't keep our eyes on the road, we're distracted by every squirrel, gnat, fly, bird, or airplane. Think about all of the noise pollution in our world, even the sounds of a building that we walk into. Sometimes noise crowds out the truth, even driving down the road listening to music. Every once in a while the Holy Spirit nudges us to say, "*Turn off the radio - just turn it off.*" Not that anything's bad that we're listening to, it's just sometimes it can become *noise*. And sometimes we need to be *still*, and quiet enough to hear him - to shift our heart to say, "*Lord, I want to be more receptive to you.*"

What isn't *received* gets removed. It gets taken away. So, if we don't receive the Word that's spoken or shared and then we walk away and nothing sticks, that means the soil was hard - like a trodden path. The enemy steals what we refuse to steward, if we don't take it and receive it as something that's from the Lord. Maybe Abram said something and it resonated with us and we have a moment there where we can take it: *"I take that. I'll receive that. I take it by faith. I receive it into me."* What we're doing is, we're planting a seed into the soil of our life and in the soil of our heart. But when the soil is hard, it just bounces off - we become impermeable from the Word. In other words, the Word can't get in. It can't *break* in.

James 1:22 NIV

"Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

If we want to make the soil soft, then we take the Word, and by faith, we step out on it. By faith, we step *into* it. By faith, we *lean* into it and say, *"The Bible tells me to do this, so I'm actually going to do this."* That's one way to break up the hard soil. Hebrews 3:7 says this, *"So, as the Holy Spirit says today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."* If we want to take a malleable, soft, teachable heart and make it hard, we just refuse to obey what he's bringing to us. We will literally sear and harden our heart, and we can sit in church the rest of our life and be hard as a rock - impermeable - and we don't want to do that.

We want to be *teachable*. We want to be *open*. We want to be good soil. Cynicism becomes a very real filter, and has even become the new pastime. That's entertainment for us here in the West. A lot of it comes as we're trained through social media, and even by Simon Cowell on American Idol. He made being cynical cool again, but maybe his heart's getting a little bit softer now. Cynicism becomes a filter whereby we can't receive anything. In fact, there's been such an effort by the enemy to create distrust of our government, distrust of *all* governments, and distrust of anything that comes over the airwaves through the internet. We're so distrustful of *everything*.

There's a *healthy* cynicism - that's critical thinking where we're actually *thinking* - we're actually thinking for ourselves. There's a difference between that and unhealthy cynicism that has become our autopilot, where we don't believe or trust *anything*. But, there are still good people in this world. There are good people with good motives and good hearts, who want to do good things, who want to make a difference, and who want to live in a better world. When we sometimes swim in these cesspools of cynicism - which could be all kinds of media entertainment, all kinds of sidebar conversations - we can begin to grow cynical and our heart gets hard.

When *everything* is questioned, *nothing* is received. We can get so hard that now we don't believe *anything*. But we trust the Word of God and take what we hear to the Lord and say, "*Lord, is this true?*" We check it and think for ourself. We think well, think critically, but don't so harden our heart that we can't receive anything. That's a *hardened heart* and it's dangerous. We can hear the Word without ever *receiving* the Word if we have become impermeable, where nothing can break through. Here's the key question on this: Where have we become too busy, too distracted, and too cynical to receive the Word? Are we blocking what God wants to get to us?

2] The shallow heart. That means being quick to respond, but also being quick to *retreat*. Jesus said that some seed fell on rocky places where it didn't have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched and they withered because they had no root. In Matthew 13:20, Jesus explains the parable: "*The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. Since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.*"

That's the second soil - the shallow heart - it's rocky soil. That means there are emotions but it's not rooted. People like that come to church, then bounce up after the service and say, "*This is the best church I've ever been in. This is the best thing since the internet was invented. This is the best thing since white bread was invented.*" They're all excited, but enthusiasm will wear off, because one day they'll drive up and somebody's parking in their spot or they'll come in to sit down but somebody's got their chair, or come in one day and they don't like the song that's being sung. They'll come in one day - it's rare - but Abram's pitch is off, and there will be things the pastor says that offends them.

They'll get *offended*. The word "offend" means *something we trip over*. An offense is something we can't get over. It's like a fence that we can't get over. Until people have some stress here in this church, they're just enjoying the ride for now. That's okay. Enjoy it as long as it lasts. Honeymoons are great. Enjoy the honeymoon season. But realize this - we're not trying to build a quick-hit instant-gratification culture here. We're trying to build a *family*. We're trying to build an *army* that wants to "go long" and do life together through the hard stuff. The reality of it is that not everybody will *stick*, because emotion responds fast, but roots grow slow.

So, while their heart might be there, and in their mind they might be, "*Yeah, I'm all in,*" but then the first bubble comes along and they're *not* all in. And guess what they do? They take their Samsonite down the road and go into the *next* church. And they're offended *there*. They were offended before they *got* there. Guess what they're taking with them? They're dragging *offense* with them. The first time the "new people" mess up, they're going to be down the road *again* till one day they'll say, "I'm *done* with church. I don't want anything to do with it because those people are *awful*."

At some point, we have to wake up and say, *"Wait a minute. I'm the common denominator here. I'm the one who's always offended. I'm the one who's always upset. Is there something in me that's offendable?"* Excitement isn't the same as transformation. Steve Moro, pastor of one of the largest churches in the world right now, used to say, *"How do you make a disciple? How do you make somebody who sticks? How do you create stickability? - by the same old boring strokes."*

He got that from his son who was a national-ranked tennis player in the Philippines. Steve hired a professional coach to train his kid and all the coach did for weeks was sit out there and hit ground strokes, drop a ball, hit it to him, and he would hit it back, and drop another ball. Steve was kind of going, *"I'm paying a lot of money to hit ground strokes. I could do that."* So, Steve pulls the guy aside and he says, *"Look, I appreciate the fact that you're like the winningest coach in the world, and I'm paying you a lot of money, but why are you just hitting ground strokes with my son?"* The coach turned to him and said, *"Same old boring strokes. That's what wins championships. That's what makes champions."*

Another way to say it is *"doing the right thing for a long period of time"*, or *"going long and staying strong."* If we just want a pump or a quick hit, we can go to a conference. We can go and come out charged up and motivated, if not necessarily inspired, for a little bit, but then it dies back down because we have to go back home into the grind - into the *"dailies."* But it's *the same old boring strokes* that will create in us the perseverance and the endurance to go long - the *discipline* to go long. We say we want to be disciples, but the root word of *disciple* is *discipline*. That means doing the same stuff - the *hard stuff* - every day for a long period of time.

If we want more than a quick pump or a quick hit, we have to look in the right place - it's called the Kingdom of God. We have to come in with the mentality of, *"I'm here to stay long. I'm here to grow deep."* We have to be willing to go strong. We have to be willing to *stay* long and stay through the hard stuff - because there *will* be hard stuff. Depth determines durability. We've got to get our roots to go deep into the soil. If we're just a little sapling that's growing on the side of a rocky bluff, where the soil is shallow, it doesn't take much to pull us out. And if someone's sliding down a hill and they grab that tree, they will just keep going because its roots are *shallow*.

Trials reveal what's beneath the surface. Pressure is going to come, and it will reveal whether our roots "took" or not. Let's make a commitment today to grow our roots deep, to not live with a temporary mentality, to not live with the idea of *"When's the next shoe going to drop? When are these people going to reveal themselves for what they really are? When's Pastor Jimmy going to grow a tail and sprout horns?"*

Let's not say, "This seems too good to be true, so it must not be true," but let's come to church, plant our life, and say, "I'm going to grow old with these people. I'm going to watch some of these young people graduate from high school and then watch them go to college. Then I'm going to watch them get married and we're going to cheer them on. Then they're going to come back and serve on staff here and lead our church." We want to stay long enough to see generational transfer. Aren't we tired of going off to the church down the street and just doing it all over again? That gets old - because it's not meant to be.

Depth, not hype, determines durability. *Depth*. And depth isn't fancy. Depth isn't clever. Depth isn't gimmicky. Depth is real. Depth is the person you go to when your life falls apart. Not the *hype-ster*. Not the one that's always "woohoo!" It's the person we go to that's been through it before and stayed for the long haul. So, here's the key question: are we growing deep roots or just living off emotions and moments? Two soils - and we have to ask, "Am I teachable? Am I moldable?"

If we resonate with these, what can we do to receive what God wants to do to change our heart, and *soften* our hard heart? What can we do for God to come and change the shallow heart that's gets caught up in emotion? It's okay to have fun, but we can't live on the mountain top forever. We've got to come back and live where *life* is. Our expectation isn't to go to a worship conference and then come back and be disappointed if *our* church doesn't do that. They're on tour, but *this* is a whole different world. We're talking about doing life together over the long haul. That's our challenge here - that we're here to *stay*. We're not trying to build a *big* church. We're trying to build *great people* who have character and integrity ...and will stay good soil.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, whatever the condition of our heart may be right now, we're asking You to soften it and allow Truth and the seed of Your Word to sink down into something good in our soil. God, help us to be able to receive what You are saying to us. Would You open our hearts and soften the soil on the inside of our spirits? That what You're doing might sink down and grow and remain and produce something in our lives. Lord, for where we've been hardened or shallow, we repent. Forgive us for where we've cultivated bad soil. God, help us to trust again. Help us to receive again. Forgive us for where we've been cynical and negative and fatalistic, rather than having hope and faith and believing, God, You can bring good things out of anything - would You restore our hope and our faith as we turn to You, and do a work in our hearts? We want to be found as good soil. Lord, we pray and thank You, and we receive it all by faith. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen