

Dirt

How many of us remember playing in the back yard and making mud pies? I can remember as a kid when the girls wanted to make them and wondering what they might taste like since I was one who seemed always to be hungry. But of course they were only for the purpose of “playing house” and obviously weren’t edible. Our small yard had plenty of dirt to make them since there was hardly ever any grass. Seemed the only thing we had was dirt and were often covered in it by evening when it was time to go in. So I can’t say we were “dirt” poor. And concerning dirt, what about such phrases as “getting the dirt on someone”? I’m sure whoever came up with that one wasn’t talking about rolling around in our yard. Or “here’s mud in your eye” (*not sure what that one means*)? And for those who get involved in some sordid activity the phrase to “get their hands dirty” meant to be equally responsible as the rest in case they got caught. And I’m sure there are many, many other sayings that involve “dirt”. But today’s lesson is from a parable that has produced a multitude of sermons concerning differing stages or levels of conversion when it comes to a person’s growth and sustainability as a new babe in Christ. They are based on original lessons taught by the greatest Teacher of all time but should all come to the same conclusion when it concerns church growth based on the backgrounds of each individual disciple that hails “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (*Rev 5:9*). We are not to judge people from what we might see on the surface as being stained with the dirt of sin, but are to treat each person with respect as a potentially washed, new convert regardless of past circumstances or present appearances.

Joh 7:24 Do not judge (*Gk.2919- condemn*) by appearances, but judge (*Gk.2910- determine*) with right judgment (*Gk.2920- justice*).

This same Greek word has different glosses that can be substituted depending on the context of the passage. Those who say we aren’t to judge anyone based on these passages don’t really know what Jesus was talking about.

Mat 7:1 "Judge (*Gk.2919- condemn*) not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment (*Gk.2917- decision: -condemnation*) you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

The Parable of the Soils

Each of the following soils pertain to each of us individually and we need to be honest and ask “Which one best represents my heart?, How have I received His word? ”

Mar 4:2 And He was teaching them many things in parables, and in His teaching He said to them: 3 "Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." 9 And He said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

A parable (*Gk.3850*) is ‘a similitude, that is (symbolically) fictitious narrative (of common life conveying a moral)’. As the Master Teacher, Jesus was very good at getting the attention of His audiences with statements that peaked their curiosity or their animosity toward Him. And He did so using parables in four ways, according to Albert Barnes.

1. To convey truth in a more interesting manner to the mind, adding to the truth conveyed the beauty of a lovely image or narrative.
2. To teach spiritual truth so as to arrest the attention of ignorant people, making an appeal to them through the “senses.”
3. To convey some offensive truth, some pointed personal rebuke, in such a way as to bring it “home” to the conscience. Of this kind was the parable which Nathan delivered to David 2 Sam 12:1-7 (*This was when David had Uriah killed in battle in order to hide the affair he had with Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba, who was with child as result.*) , and many of our Savior’s parables addressed to the Jews.
4. To “conceal” from one part of His audience truths which He intended others should understand. Thus Christ often, by this means, delivered truths to His disciples in the presence of the Jews, which He well knew the Jews would not understand; truths pertaining to them particularly, and which He was under no obligations to explain to the Jews.

Mar 4:34 He did not speak to them (*the Jews*) without a parable, but privately to His own disciples He explained everything.

At one point the priests and Pharisees knew He was speaking about them after He spoke of the kingdom being taken away from them and “given to a people producing its fruits” (*Mat 21:43*) .

Mat 21:45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking about them. 46 And although they were seeking to arrest Him, they feared the crowds, because they held Him to be a prophet.

Obviously Jesus’ words still have a convicting quality about them even today when they pierce the consciences of those who hear them. But to those who love Him and do His will they shouldn’t have the same effect as they would on those who aren’t interested in personal growth, growth of the church or efforts to encourage others of like faith. Out of their trying to evade any thought of such negativity being aimed at their own conscience they strive to convince themselves they are on the right side of Jesus’ teaching. But, once again, we all need to be honest with ourselves when it comes to our own personal standing with reference to Christ and His teachings.

Mar 4:10 And when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parables. 11 And He said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, 12 so that "they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven."

Parables separate the honest from the uninterested. The honest look at each teaching and ask themselves how they stack up to what’s required accordingly. Those who aren’t interested won’t receive the benefits obtained from seeking to please the Lord. It’s that simple.

Mat 13:15 For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' 16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.

When Jesus spoke of receiving “the secret of the kingdom of God” obviously He was speaking of the then yet to appear kingdom in the form of the church. Many, according to Jesus, were hearing what He was talking about but weren’t putting it all together in order to be converted. He then went on to ask His own disciples, which included the twelve yet novice apostles, if even they yet understood what He was teaching.

Mar 4:13 And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word.

If they didn’t understand this parable, Jesus asked, how could they understand anything He was teaching in such form? First, the sower is understood as being the one who scatters seed, which in this case as Jesus said...

Luk 8:11 ... The seed is the word of God.

That would include any way in which we share the Gospel with the lost and how they receive it according to whether their hearts are sincere or otherwise. Jesus went on to explain to His closest followers what the moral of the soils meant with regard to their receiving His word. From here we need to be truthful within, asking ourselves which soil represents my own personal experience with the word of God and how it has changed my life, if the word took root in the first place.

The Worldly Road

Mar 4:15 And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.

Sometimes when the sower went out he dropped some of his seed before entering the field where he planned on scattering it. Those paths were usually hardened from being under foot so much by those who went in and out of the fields. And when collecting the rocks from the soil they were usually strewn on the paths for livestock and wagons to make for a more solid road. Seeds on such hard ground became food for birds since it wasn’t protected by being planted deep in the soil. The soil here wasn’t very good for growing anything but weeds. So the majority of the those who hear the Gospel preached fall into this category. As Jesus stated in Mat 7:14 “the way is hard that leads to life” and these folks have been so influenced by the world that Satan has too much of a grip on them to even consider their eternal fate. These are people who may have come from backgrounds where the only time they even heard of Jesus was when His name was used while cussing. They could also have been from homes where the Bible was ‘crammed down their throats’ or was taught falsely to the point of it being contradictory and not being reliable and now want nothing to do with religion. The truth didn’t have a prayer’s chance of gaining a foothold enough to even begin to take root. They are the group composing of atheists, agnostics or those who believe there **is** a Heaven and Hell but feel **all** good people go to Heaven. The second highest category of soil belongs to people of...

The Rocky Road

Mar 4:16 ... the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. 17 And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.

This is where a thin layer of soil covered a rocky bed which prevented moisture from accumulating. It is so sad when a person is so excited once they understand the truth to the point of being converted and their excitement is epidemic among fellow members only to have it be extinguished, seemingly immediately, because of a lack of being rooted, fed and cultivated. When returning to their lives, whether at home or at work, many are too embarrassed to talk about having turned their lives over to Christ to live “godly and dignified in every way” (1 Tim 2:2). They withdraw when being taunted by their unbelieving coworkers or family members who say “You’re not as fun as you once were!” or how “You don’t go out to nightclubs or drink like you once did!” or how “You aren’t my judge!” when nothing was even said for them to make such a statement. It’s the lifestyle that a Christian lives that judges the actions of our fellow man. As Peter said...

1Pe 4:4 With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; 5 but they will give account to Him Who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Those Jesus likened to this type of soil attend almost every function at first, but once they’ve been so discouraged we never see them again. Sadly though, the group of people that belongs to this rocky soil may have had that original spark that seemed to be genuine but once that spark goes out it can take its toll on the faithful who were involved in the sowing (1 Cor 3:13-15). But we all understand how there **will** be disappointments along the path when sowing the seed and we aren’t to become so frustrated to the point of giving up. Satan would rejoice if the church here became so discouraged. Would a farmer expect to reap if he didn’t sow? Neither should we expect to grow if we become discouraged to the point of not making any effort whatsoever toward sharing the word. This next soil Paul must have had in mind when he wrote to Timothy. He deemed them...

2Ti 3:2 ... lovers of self, lovers of money, **proud**, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, **ungrateful**, unholy, 3 heartless, **unappeasable**, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, **not loving good**, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (*Emp. added*)

Obviously we can’t attribute all these characteristics to this next group, but most of these features do reveal the attitudes of those who fall into this crowd.

The Thorny Road

Mar 4:18 And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

Even though the folks of this soil may attend somewhat more often, they aren’t fruitful because there are so many factors that come into play that keep them from their own spiritual growth. Maybe they have problems at home or with their finances or stresses at work that keep their minds off of worshipping God as He so desires and deserves. Others of this group are the “pew packers” who sit on the fence, who might attend sporadically and maybe even attend fellowship type functions more than they would Sunday morning worship. They seem bored to the point of “daydreaming” or yawning conspicuously out of disrespect for the effort of the speaker or teacher who labored in order to present his lesson. They have an “appearance of godliness, but [deny] its power” and as Paul wrote to Timothy,

we are to “avoid such people” (2 Tim 3:5). We aren’t to cater to such, expend any energy toward or base fellowship activities on trying to appease them. Such efforts can be draining to a congregation and expending the oil to grease such wheels only hinders growth. All we can do is be encouraging and let the chips fall where they may. Those we **are** to support are the ones who fall into the category of good soil. This is the group that is most responsible for growth, whether spiritual or numerical, and in many cases against negativity from within. All the effort spent on the previous soils to cultivate and nourish won’t produce the bountiful return that this next group will.

The High Road

Mar 4:20 But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

The few times that I spent working at Dad’s farm on the Petersburg Road were times spent understanding what hard work really was (*and is*). But a tractor to my dad was like what having an X-box would be to a gamer. He understood from his youth in Illinois on the family farm that a good harvest can only be reaped from long hard days of getting in the dirt to cultivate it and fertilize it in order to reap a good crop. There was no time for what his dad deemed foolishness. Once when Dad went out for track in high school, my grandfather saw him running around the school one day while getting supplies in town. He later admonished him for it. He was no longer permitted to use the car to get to school, which was miles away from the rural farm and was told “If you can run around the school like an idiot, you can walk to school!”. But he still had to have his chores and schoolwork finished before bedtime. He said he spent many evenings up until after midnight by the coal oil lamp doing homework only to be up before dawn to start all over again. Work developed into a sort of entertainment to him, he was so used to it. So that said, soil that’s not invested with sweat, long hours and determination will not reap a good harvest. It takes a lot of dedication. Many times the soil on the farm in Illinois had to be tested to see what it needed to yield a better crop. Likewise with seeking and evangelizing the lost. We can’t just look at a person and simply judge how the Gospel will affect their heart condition. Only the Lord knows their heart and He doesn’t reveal it to us so we have to work **all** the soils when planting the seed.

1Co 3:7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God Who gives the growth. 8 He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

But, once washed, not always to remain clean.

Another area we need to seriously deal with is what to do about those who have fallen away. We can say all we want that maybe they weren’t sincere in the first place, but that’s not ours to judge.

1Co 2:11 For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

If we’ve never mourned the loss of even one brother or sister in Christ who’ve gone astray, when we could have had some input, no matter how small, than we certainly **will** be held responsible for losing them in the end. Nobody can ever say they are concerned about a

fellow saint losing their eternal soul and not do something about it! Jesus' blood was shed for all other Christian's souls just as much as it was for mine and if I'm not willing to at least try to make a conscious effort, when I have the power to do so, toward preventing a brother or sister from going astray than I'm just as lost as they are! **Every** effort **must** be made in ultimately restoring a failing saint! If God has blessed us with the strength to get out of bed each day then we should be grateful enough to show it by doing something, anything in our power, toward encouraging and ultimately restoring a lost soul that we know of and have at least some influence on. Just as a farmer works tirelessly to make sure he reaps a good harvest, we, much more so, need to be at work in the Lord's vineyard if we really believe in the eternal nature of the soul. If we spent as much time on at least trying to restore a fallen brother or sister as we do on Facebook, television, the internet, sports or any other worldly driven activity, could we not grasp the magnitude of defeat Satan would have to deal with and the number of precious souls saved for Jesus? Not that there's anything wrong with those activities and we all understand that's not the point of their mention here. We all, every single one of us who have the ability to do so, need to be, as Jesus once said, "about My Father's business" (*Lk 2:49*). And no excuse will be honored at the judgment if we aren't at least somewhat involved in using the abilities we've been blessed with toward growing and sustaining the local church. But even **if** we've expended all efforts to restore a fallen brother or sister, what happens to them, out of their own choice, who were once washed but chose to leave the safety of the (*O.T.*) "city of refuge" known as the (*N.T.*) church?

2Pe 2:20 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. 22 What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."

Many of us know the gut-wrenching pain of losing a family member to the world. However deep the seed penetrates the heart of a Christian determines the level of their faith. Soil must be cultivated through encouragement, prayer, study and reading, along with fellowship, for the roots to grow deeper into the soil making it harder to return to a former way of life. Obviously not everyone has the desire or even the ability to be farmers. But, don't we support them by purchasing their goods through the local market? The same goes when it comes to teaching or preaching. Not everyone has either the desire or ability to do such work but those who do need support just the same. Support through respect and encouragement for their labor since teaching and preaching are akin to cultivating.

1Th 5:11 Therefore **encourage** one another and **build** one another up, just as you are doing. 12 We ask you, brothers, to **respect** those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love **because of their work**. Be at peace among yourselves. 14 And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. (*Emp. added*)

Lessons like these are for the purpose of having "respect [for] those who labor among [us]" and to "admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted and help the weak". We are all in this work together. There's a job for every talent and ability that God has given each one of us to use to His glory. If we aren't using such to the greatest of our ability then we aren't returning to God what rightfully belongs to Him, and that's our gratitude for all He's done for us.

Mat 25:29 For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

"It means that a man who improves what light, grace, and opportunities he has, shall have them increased. From him that improves them not, it is proper that they should be taken away."
Albert Barnes

Spreading the seed through evangelism involves removing the rocks from the soil to make it more fertile for planting. Once planted the soil needs cultivated and weeded because we know how weeds always have a tendency to reappear, weeds being the temptations of life that continue to crop up no matter how deep the roots go.

1Co 10:12 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

So, which soil best represents your heart? Have you cultivated your soil in order to keep the weeds out? How deep are your roots? Are you fertilizing your soil enough to make anything grow? And, what will you reap at the harvest?

Mar 4:9 And He said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear (*Gk.191- understand*)."

Has the Gospel been planted in your heart? Do you understand it and are you willing to accept it? Is your soil such that you will receive it with gladness and obey what Jesus asks of all who love Him? Will you be cleansed from the dirt of sin by being immersed for forgiveness that your conscience will be right before God at the judgment? Your eternal destiny depends on your response.

1Pe 3:21 **Baptism**, which corresponds to this (*how the flood saved Noah and his family from the sinful world they lived in*), **now saves you**, not as a removal of dirt from the body but **as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through** the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 Who has gone into Heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to Him. (*Emp. added*)

If Jesus never rose from the dead none of us would be able to stand before God with a clear conscience "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (*Rom 3:23*). If you are subject to this invitation, please be washed from the dirt of sin and be clothed in Christ, putting Him on in baptism.

Charli Yana
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