

Theme: Seeds in the Dirt

Text: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23; Isaiah 55:10-13; Romans 8:1-11; I John 3:9; Mark 4:1-9

This week, we are starting a new series under the general theme: “The Path of the Disciple: Imagining a New Reality.” The theme for our discussion today is “Seeds in the Dirt.” LET US PRAY.

Introduction

Dear sisters and brothers, while pondering on the passage, one question dawned on me. So, I asked why Jesus began this speech or parable by asking His audience to listen. He literally asked them to pay rapt attention to His message. In other words, the message He was about to deliver was and is still extremely important. Jesus had noticed that as He went about preaching the gospel of the kingdom of heaven (*cf. Matthew 4:17, 23*), the audience He usually found was not receptive despite witnessing the performance of several mighty works; some did not repent (*cf. Matthew 11:9-14*). I believe this was part of the considerations that prompted Jesus to begin teaching publicly in “*parables*” (*cf. Matthew 13:10-13*). The challenge Jesus encountered was that many people, though they had ears to hear, their ears had become “**hard of hearing**” (*cf. Matthew 13:14-15*).

To demonstrate this problem, Jesus told a parable popularly referred to as “**The Parable of the Sower**,” “**The Parable of the Four Soils**,” or even “**The Parable of the Seed**.” The parable highlighted the different reactions to the gospel message. Because of the significance of this parable, it is recorded in almost all the gospels, namely, *Matthew* (**Matthew 13:3-9**), *Mark* (**Mark 4:3-9**), & *Luke* (**Luke 8:4-8**). Each account gives slightly different details about the parable. Again, I believe that because Jesus prioritized this parable that is why it is one of the few parables that He personally interpreted to the people. The account by

Mark tells us that Jesus explained to just the disciples and a few other people upon request. As Apostle Paul puts it, these individuals were ripe and eager, “*the special elite of people*” who could take in solid food (chew bones). The others who went right home after hearing the message and did not receive any interpretation are regarded as “*weak*” and fed on milk (*cf. I Corinthians 3:2*).

Admittedly, it is one thing to hear the word of God, but it is another thing to comprehend it, imbibe it, and live it. You heard right - live it! Yes, that’s right, we must live it! Because God’s word challenges us! Sometimes, God’s word demands our lives to worship regularly, study the Bible, pray, serve others, even love one another, even our enemies, and treat them as you want to be treated. And some people just aren’t ready for that. They would instead attend a lovely service and retire home. In fact, our first reading reminds us about God’s intention upon hearing His Word. “¹⁰*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the Sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*” - **Isaiah 55:10-11**. Therefore, we are assured of God’s purpose for sending forth His word. Unfortunately, not all soils are receptive, as the second reading reveals. Hence, we need good or fertile soil to fulfil God’s plan.

You have listened to several sermons on this parable already. How have those previous sermons impacted your life? Did you really listen to those? I believe many of us have tended to our fields once or seen a farmer cultivating his/her farm. Can you imagine the seeds falling on four different kinds of soil while the farmer casually throws the seeds onto their field? In doing so, some seeds fell on the ground where the soil was so hard that the seed couldn’t penetrate the ground, and birds came and ate the seed. Other seeds fell on rocky ground that didn’t have

much soil, and although the seed sprang up quickly, the soil was shallow, and there was no moisture in it, so when the sun rose, the little plants were scorched and withered away. Still, more seed fell among weeds and thorns, and these choked the seed, preventing them from growing and bearing fruit. Finally, there was the seed that fell on fertile soil, and with sun and rain and nourishment, these seeds grew and flourished and brought forth a bountiful harvest, oh yes, a bountiful harvest well beyond the ordinary. And then Jesus ends His story with these words, “Let anyone with ears to hear, listen!”

The interpretation reveals that the **Sower** was **God**, and the **seed** was the **Word of God**, *i.e.*, God’s message of love. And the **soil** represents **us - you and I**, in fact, **all people in the world**, everyone. Let us briefly examine the four conditions of our soil (our hearts and minds) to receive and accept and grow the word of God within us. First, some hearts refuse to believe in or have anything to do with God. That’s the hardened soil that the word can’t penetrate. Second, there is the seed that falls on rocky ground, where the word takes root but withers up quickly. I believe we have all gone through this stage at one time or another. You can cast your mind back to the past when your faith was shaken, when life brought you some hard times or misfortune, and you began to doubt or lose trust in God’s promises. His word assures us, “*Do not fear - God takes care of the sparrows, and you are worth much more than sparrows.*” Further, He says, “*Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid, for my peace I give you.*” And, “*I am with you always, even until the end of the age.*” Third, some willingly receive the seed, but then the desires of the world - those thorns, those earthly things that compete for our attention, choke out the words. Remember God’s word, “*Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be given you.*” And, finally, some hearts and minds welcome and relish the word as the scripture tells us: “*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*” Yes, the parable of the Sower is meant to make us reflect

on where we stand before God. And it challenges us to ask the question, “*Are we good/fertile soil that will bear good fruit and a bountiful harvest?*” All those soils or grounds that did/do not aid the growth of the planted seed is *lousy soil* or ground and can therefore be equated to “*dirt.*” All the many souls that follow Him everywhere and have seen Him preach, perform miracles, etc., but have not really repented or meditated, pondering over His message is not listening. Those are only hearing the message or are not paying attention to the message being preached. Excuse me for bluntly saying, “*They are just adding up to the numbers there.*”

Let us dwell a bit more on “*the seed*” and its *potential*. Again, the seed is “*the word of God*” - **Matthew 13:19a**. Thus, the gospel of the kingdom, which was the theme of Jesus’ preaching (*cf.* **Matthew 4:23**) and was also an essential element of the apostolic preaching (*cf.* **Acts 8:12; 28:30-31**). **I John 3:9** says, “*No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.*” In essence, the seed we receive following becoming new creatures in Christ has the prospect of assisting us in stemming the root cause of sin in our lives. And that same seed ensures that we are not condemned as having been born of God, as the scripture says, “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*” (*cf.* **Romans 8:1**). Those in Christ are those who have the seed and therefore the potential to grow. In this regard, they cannot be condemned since they possess great potential - **Romans 8:1-11**.

“**The good ground**” (The Fourth Soil)

This soil represents the one who “*hears the word with a noble and good heart and understands it*” (*cf.* **Matthew 13:23a; Luke 8:15**). He/she “*keeps it and bears and produces fruit in patience*” (*cf.* **Matthew 13:23b; Luke 8:15**). Those with “*a noble and good heart,*” then, are the ones who will understand the Word,

keep it, and with patience produce fruit in their lives! These people can be likened to the Bereans, who were commended for being “*fair-minded,*” as manifested in the way they: “*received the Word with all readiness*” and “*searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so*” (cf. **Acts 17:11**). Again, note the importance of using the word “*understanding*” in relation to “*bearing fruit.*” Jesus made the connection between the two words in this parable (cf. **Matthew 13:23**). Paul connects the two when he acknowledges that the gospel is producing fruit among the Colossians - “*since the day they heard or understood the grace of God in truth*” (cf. **Colossians 1:5-6**). In principle, when one “*understands,*” they will eventually “*bear fruit,*” but the key to understanding hinges on a “*good and noble heart*” that is willing to ***listen*** and ***learn!***

The question is, what kind of “*fruit*” will one bear? There are different kinds. The fruit of winning souls to Christ - **Romans 1:13**. The fruit of practical holiness - **Romans 6:22**. The fruit of sharing material things - **Romans 15:27**. The fruit of the Spirit (*i.e.*, a Christ-like character) - **Galatians 5:22-23**. The fruit of good works - **Colossians 1:10**. The fruit of praise & thanksgiving - **Hebrews 13:15**, and so on.

An important observation is that not all will bear the same amount of fruit. The scripture tells us, “*Some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty*” (cf. **Matthew 13:23**). This is also illustrated in *the Parable of the Talents*; some may be given more according to their ability to use what God has given them - **Matthew 25: 14-15**. Whatever our ability, we should exercise it accordingly (cf. **I Peter 4:10-11**).

When Jesus finished telling His parable of the Sower, He cried out: “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*” - **Matthew 13:9**. Obviously, ***hearing*** and ***listening*** were significant to Christ. Clearly, from the explanation of Jesus Himself, we

learn that not all those who have ears to hear really listen! It is vital that we listen well when God's Word is being proclaimed, for that is how faith is obtained (*cf. Romans 10:17*). How well have you listened to this parable of Jesus and His explanation? If you are anything other than that, like "*the good/fertile soil,*" you need to strive toward achieving that today! Dear friends and brethren, I urge you to indeed have a good and noble heart to hear, examine, understand, and accept the gospel of Christ and the gospel of His kingdom!

Conclusion

The message today addresses **The Parable of the Sower, The Parable of the Four Different Soils,** or "**The Parable of the Seed.** In essence, when the seed, which is the Word of God in you, is nurtured, germinates, and grows well in your body, it eventually yields excellent fruit. In other words, the seed, though small, has enormous potential embedded in it. Therefore, the individual carrying the seed will not be the same again and can't deviate from that path. On the contrary, if the seed is bad, not of the Word or Spirit of God, not of God, then that seed will produce bad behavior.

With the explanation provided by Jesus Himself, we should better appreciate **The Parable of the Sower** and the spiritual truths Jesus was teaching. However, it is one thing to understand it and quite another to practice it. Seeking to make the application in a thought-provoking way would be to ask yourself, "*The kind of soil you are?*" as that determines how we receive the Word into our lives. Amen!