

The Parable of the Soils, Luke 8:4 - 15

4And when a great multitude were coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable: 5“The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road; and it was trampled under foot, and the birds of the air ate it up. 6“And other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. 7“And other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it, and choked it out. 8“And other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great.” As He said these things, He would call out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

9And His disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable might be. 10And He said, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, in order 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“And those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13“And those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. 14“And the seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. 15“And the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.

Has anyone here heard of Josh Harris before or read any of his books?

Josh Harris is about 6 years older than my oldest daughter, so a generation younger than me. He wrote a book called *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* in 1997 that was a call to purity for a generation of christian

young people. It sold 1.2 million copies. Plus there were about 4 more books after that.

He was rocketed to christian super-star status overnight. He traveled to Gaithersburg Md. and soon was lead pastor of a mega church. Sovereign Grace Ministries. C. J. Mahaney was pastor of Covenant Life Church and groomed Harris to take over as lead pastor.

He's been in the christian news since July of this year. He separated from his wife and divorced her, left Covenant life church, denounced his previous writings and severed himself from Christ and His church. He claims to no longer be a christian. There are rumors he's now gay.

I'm not done.

One of the thickest books in my library is a volume of 680 pages that I'm struggling to read. I'm a poor reader. Not illiterate, but I have attention span problems. I read for 15 minutes or so and I'm asleep. Not easy.

The book is called 2000 years of Christ's Power, and those 680 pages are Volume 4. The full volume is 2251 pages. Let me read you some of the chapter headings so you'll get an idea. The sub-title of vol. 4 is "The Age of Religious Conflict 16th - 18th century. Volume 5 isn't published yet.

Chapter 1. Germany and the Lutheran Faith

1. A House Divided the post Lutheran controversies
2. Lutheran Orthodoxy
3. The Thirty Years war. The holy text of pike and gun
4. Pietism religion of the heart
5. Dawn of the protestant missionary movement

Chapter 2. The Reformed Faith

1. Reformed Orthodoxy

2. The Arminian controversy and the Synod of Dort
3. Amyraldianism: the debate that never died

Chapter 3. England: The Puritan Era

1. Puritanism: The problem of definition
2. The origins of puritanism and separation
3. Struggles and schisms

Chapter 4. Chapter 5. Chapter 6. Chapter 7.

1. Gallicanism: Who rules the French Church

Can't wait to read that chapter. Maybe I'm famous??

Are you beginning to see a pattern this morning? The church has never stopped fighting for survival for 2000 years. The church has been fractured and struggling within and without for 2000 years. There has never been a time of peace and unity and harmony. Ever. For 2000 years. Controversy after controversy, defection after defection, apostasy after apostasy.

In John 17, Jesus prayed these words to the Father;

16 *“They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 “Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth. 18 “As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 “And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. 20 “I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 **that they may all be one**; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me.*

In Ephesians 4, Paul echo's Jesus prayer when he says; *1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and*

*gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, 3 **being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit** in the bond of peace.*

*11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 **until we all attain to the unity of the faith**, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

To the Philippians, Paul writes; 2:1 *If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the **same mind**, maintaining the **same love**, **united in spirit, intent on one purpose.***

OK, how're you doing. The authors and foundations of our faith prayed for unity and there hasn't been a day of it since they departed. What happened?

Did Jesus underestimate Satan's power? How do we salvage our faith when we look down through history at non-stop Josh Harris's and fights and divisions and squabbles and dis-harmony, and out and out hate.

Was Jesus delusional when He prayed for our unity? How do we account for the disparity of what Jesus asked for, and what we see as we look back on 2251 pages of non-stop battle and trouble, within and

without?

Welcome back to the parable of the soils. If you missed last week it's already been updated at our web pages.

To the masses who came to see Jesus do tricks, the parable has no meaning. It's almost nonsense. A guy throws out seed and some of it grows and yeilds a return. But some is lost and bears no fruit. So what?

It doesn't mean anything if that's all you get. And for most, that was all they got. It was a turning point, a judgement on the nation that was rejecting their own promised Messiah. The parables are incomprehensible unless the source of the parables gives the meanings.

We looked at that last week. The disciples go to the source and ask Him to explain. And we are included. We get to know.

The seed is the living word of God. Revealed truth that has life giving powers. The sower is anyone who is bringing God's words to others. And the soils represent all of the different kinds of receptacles of the word, and what results.

Of the 4 possible different products, only one of the four takes root and grows up to a mature plant that reproduces itself. We looked at the first of four last week before our time was used up.

And what we're doing as we go through these is we're taking the original parable and then the corresponding explanation by Jesus to the disciples together.

The first group is hard pan soil. The seed never germinates at all. Birds eat it up and it just gets either crushed under foot or eaten.

But the next two possibilities are of interest because they both germinate

and begin to grow, but don't finish. No mature plant. No fruit. No reproducing of like kind.

What that means is that at any given time in the life of the church, for 2000 years, there are real believers, and there are others present who for a lot of different reasons, aren't going to stay. The church is always this weird mixture of saved and unsaved together.

The best picture of this phenomenon that we want to understand this morning is actually a second parable that Jesus gave on the same day if we go to Matthew for a few useful moments.

Matt. 13: 24 *He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 "But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. 26 "But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 "And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' And the slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 "But he said, 'No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. 30 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"*

The parable of the wheat and the tares illustrates the same truth that we're going to find in the 2nd and the 3rd soils. And that is that at any given time, in the life of the church in this age where we dwell as aliens in Satan's world, there will be those in the church who appear to us to be christians, but they aren't.

The tares look so much like the wheat that the Master tells His workers

to let them grow together until the final harvest and then they will be separated.

The church for 2000 years has always had this mixture of those who are the real thing dwelling together with those who are not. In the parable of the virgins, we couldn't distinguish the 5 that had the oil in their lamps from the 5 that didn't.

And so we aren't surprised when the Josh Harris's who looked so promising and so fruitful break away and leave. Although he is more high profile than usual. And we aren't surprised that for 2000 years there has not been the unity that we will some day have when Jesus calls the real fruit homeward.

The truth is that for 2000 years there have been false believers dwelling together with true believers and Satan has had that inroad into the body of Christ, the church.

We look at the 7 letters Jesus wrote to the 7 churches of Asia minor and we see already, in the first century, this conglomerate of false dwelling with true in different forms and depths.

So then, with that understanding, let's look quickly at the rest of the parable of the soils. And again, I'm going to combine the original parable to the masses with the corresponding explanation by Jesus.

The 2nd soil. 6 *“And other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture.*
13 *“And those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.*

Rocky soil is very deceptive. We can't see by looking at it that the available soil for growth is razor thin. And then there is rock. So the

seed lands and germinates, and a plant begins, but it can't thrive because there's no place for a root system.

Typically then, the energy, since it can't go down, it goes up, and at the start, the plant may look even better than the plants in good soil. It springs up and it looks so promising. But since there is not depth of root, no moisture to sustain it comes, and it withers and vanishes.

Someone has said, the church in America is 3000 miles wide and an inch deep. *And those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy;*

Our total big box mega church movement is designed on purpose for this phenomenon. The message is tailored on purpose to not be offensive, but instead it's a message that requires nothing, no change, no commitment, no anything, but you are told you'll get everything.

Green grass, SUV's in the driveway, happy kids, better marriages, great sex, a boat in the 3 car garage, life will be good with Jesus. He wants to bless you with all that stuff if you'll only let Him. That's our message.

And the whole idea is to keep tweaking the message so that the hearers will receive it with joy. Remove anything negative. Embellish the positive. Sweep them in. Welcome to the First Church of the Tares.

And it's a revolving door because the minute they are dis-illusioned, the first little trial or little cost, or God forbid, any little expectation . . . and they're gone.

And we're so retarded we go to these funerals 40 years later and say they're happy with Jesus, even though they never thought about Jesus again after the first week, or month, or whatever. Like clockwork someone will say, I remember when so and so went forward 33 years ago and there was weeping and joy. Then they left and never came

back, but they were saved!

Were they? In this parable, the redeemed are differentiated by what? Fruit. 49 years later they're still with God's people, and there's something. At least a few shriveled up grapes. Fruit.

The folks that come and look so promising and disappear, are not christians. But we have to be careful too, right? We don't separate the tares. We might accidentally uproot a wheat. Paul says love *believes all things*. We don't have the christian gestapo running around deciding who is and isn't a christian. Love hopes all things, believes all things.

Shallow christianity produces christians in name only that sooner or later, vanish. Sometimes it's months. Sometimes it's years. Next is a different type of soil with the same end result.

7“And other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it, and choked it out.

14“And the seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

This is weedy soil. The seed germinates, but there's competition.

If this book delineates anything clearly it is that God, our God, is a jealous God.

Ex. 20:2 *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*

3 *“You shall have **no other gods** before Me.*

4 *“You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.*

5 “You shall not worship them or serve them; **for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God**, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

God demands single minded devotion. Deuteronomy 6

4 “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 “And you shall love the LORD your God with **all** your heart and with **all** your soul and with **all** your might.

Weedy soil produces christians in name who are compromised by other concerns. Thorns. Weeds. Competition for the water. Weeds get it first. Sustenance. Weeds trump wheat. They get all the water and all the nutrients available, and the wheat shrivels. It's stunted. It doesn't mature and reproduce itself.

*And the seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with **worries and riches and pleasures of this life**, and bring no fruit to maturity*

Worries, riches, pleasures. Merimnon, ploutou, hedonon

Merimnon is translated as anxiety. Anxious. And it's interesting the root word is merizo which means divided. And it goes right back to the jealous thing.

God says I want all of your heart, first. But merimnon is cares and concerns that take you away from God. God, I'll get to you later, but right now, I've got to take care of . . . what?

In Luke 14 we'll get to the parable of the invitee's to the feast.

16 But He said to him, “A certain man was giving a big dinner, and he

invited many; 17 and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' 18 "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' 19 "And another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' 20 "And another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.'

Jesus, You're on the to-do list, just not now. In Matthew 8 we have the same thing. 19 *And a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go."* 20 *And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."* 21 *And another of the disciples said to Him, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father."* 22 *But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me; and allow the dead to bury their own dead."*

Cares of this world. I have a field. I have a wife. I have a need for comfort. I need to bury my father (who commentators tell us probably wasn't dead, it's like my dad needs me to work in the business and when he's dead, then I'm going to devote myself to you).

Whatever. Whatever comes first in your life that's more important than following Jesus; that division of your heart into which direction your love and energy is going to flow is this word; merimnon. Worries. Cares. Anxieties. Things that are more important than following Jesus wherever He takes you. Jesus has to be first.

ploutou. This is the word for abundance. The root word describes a wide river. Lots of water. Abundance. Riches. Possessions. Wealth.

Do you get the feeling that maybe Satan designed America so it's almost impossible to be a christian? These words should frighten us. They're frightening me.

All these things steal your heart away from Jesus. Abundance. Wealth. Gotta get set up so I can retire and enjoy my abundance for my remaining days.

My mom didn't have much. But let me tell you, what she did have became increasingly inconsequential to her as her health failed. She was anxious to give stuff away. Stuff didn't matter any more.

I'm up to my eyeballs in stuff. Pam keeps telling me, don't bring home anything. No more stuff! We're out of room. I was like the guy in Luke, dreaming of a bigger barn for more stuff, and my dear wife sort of talked me out of it. That's a good thing.

Love of wealth, love of abundance, is a weed that chokes off devotion to Jesus. This is America. Don't tell me you're not experiencing this problem.

Almost 50 years ago, I wrote in my Bible these words. If my joy is based in what I have, and I lose everything, my joy is lost too. But if my joy is based in possessing Jesus, I'll always have joy because He has promised to never leave me or forsake me.

Our culture, our society, the people we work every day with, is based on this word ploutou. Abundance. At lunch the conversations are about wealth. Wealth management. Investment. Abundance. Toys. If the stock market's OK, we're OK.

Finally, hedonism. We get our word hedonism from this word. Pleasure. Our culture has gone pleasure mad. The biggest sin you can commit now is to question pleasure.

Sexual liberty must trump religious liberty. Damnation upon anyone, including God, who says I must regulate my liberties, my pleasures. The

only sin left, is to be someone who says this book defines sin. This book says some pleasure is always wrong.

Jesus said the pleasures of this world can choke out the next one. Pleasures can be a weed that kills the so-called christian. Appetites (said the overweight preacher).

Paul writes to Timothy; *Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica*” Josh Harris, in love with this present world has deserted christianity.

All of these words are different functions of the same thing. Priorities. If anything has a higher priority in your life than the Lord, who is Jesus the Christ, you are being choked, maybe slowly, maybe immediately, by weeds.

Ultimately the problem here is that something has limited the plant from maturing and reproducing. No fruit. The plant fails, the weeds win. No fruit. Three soil conditions that preclude fruit. America may be Satan's crowning achievement. So many diversions.

But finally; 8 *“And other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great.”*

15 *“And the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.”*

Good soil. Real christians hang on. They don't leave. They persevere. And ultimately, they reproduce in kind for the King.

Notice that the Word of God, the seed gets held tight. It's their most precious possession. *and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.*

Real christians don't walk away. They persevere. They hold fast to their

belief. If you do that, there WILL be fruit. Fruit is the whole point.

For 2000 years the church has had the defectors, the tares, the posers who are around long enough to cause dis-unity. False doctrine. Problems. Schisms. Troubles.

In the final soil I want to draw your minds to a distinction. Good soil. In vs. 8 “*And other seed fell into the **good soil*** and in Jesus exposition; vs. 15 “*And the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an **honest and good heart***

One of the doctrines that we learn when we get into some deeper soil is the doctrine of total depravity. Said simply, that doctrine is that the Bible teaches us that we're too dead from sin to do anything to cause life.

Jeremiah 17:9 “*The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?*

Ephesians 2 We keep ending up here; 1 *And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ*

Romans 3 *for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; 10 as it is written,*

“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

*11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;*

*12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE
BECOME USELESS;
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”*

According to those verses and many more that I won't mention this morning, we have a conundrum. There is no good soil. There is not one who has an honest and true heart. None. It's in the Bible.

Last week we spoke at some length saying that it's actually God who is in the soils business. The only way good soil ever occurs, the only source of an honest and good heart, is if God has quickened dead hearts to life.

We read that parable and our first inclination is that good soil is good people who hear and of course they believe because they're good. Like us. But that isn't what the Bible teaches.

People hear and believe because God creates living receptive soil. Faith to believe is a gift from God. Good soil is a gift from God.

I was sitting in a meeting with kids my age 49 years ago and the preacher was saying; *If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.* Ro.10:9 You have to have God's Spirit dwelling IN YOU. Or you're not a christian.

And I thought to myself, no wonder! No wonder! I didn't even know there was a Holy Spirit. I must NOT be a christian. So I went forward and waited for all the others to vacate and told that fellow, I guess I'm not a christian. He said, Do you want to be? I said, yes. We prayed.

What I learned much later is that when the lights came on, when that verse made sense and I realized I had never really been a christian, that

was God quickening me from the dead before I ever prayed that prayer.
God was turning dead soil into living soil. Here I still am, 49 years later.