

The Parable of the Soils - Guard your heart

The Parable of the Soils

What kind of condition is your heart in? I'm not talking about that muscular little pump that has served you so well up till now. I'm talking about the part of you that is available to God or not. I'm not sure where it's located but I do no it's somewhere very close to your will.

Often Christians preach on this parable as though the focus was on the Sower.

Sometimes the focus is on the seed. However, if you look closely, and take the context into account you will see that the state of the soil is what makes the difference in the outcome.

In the rabbinic writings known as Pirkei Avot (the ethics or teachings of the fathers) the sages identify four different types of disciples.

Please note that these disciples are evaluated by their attitude to study.

"There are 4 types of disciples that sit in the presence of teachers:

the sponge, who soaks up everything (without discernment),

the funnel, who takes everything in and then lets it all out again (no retention or application),

the strainer, who lets out the wine and keeps the sediment (only remembers the irrelevant) and

the sifter, who extracts the coarse flour (erroneous teaching) and keeps the fine flour (true teaching)." (Mishnah, Aboth, 5.15)

It is very likely that these four types of disciples were identified by the sages long before they were included in the rabbinic writings. You will see how they match the four categories of soil in this parable.

13:1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake.

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2 Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.

This parable is told in one of the most fertile parts of Israel. The volcanic soil is rich in nutrients but it is full of rocks and stones which make the choice of a site for an agricultural field very important. Caring for the soil determined the quality of the harvest.

3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed.

4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.

6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

9 He who has ears, let him hear."

So we have four types of soil which all receive the seed in the same way. However the state of the soil determines the outcome of the seed.

10 The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

11 He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.

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12 Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

13 This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

15 For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'

Some people think that Jesus was doing the equivalent of speaking in riddles. That unlike other rabbis who used parables to teaching and explain spiritual truths Jesus was making matters more difficult -almost willing people not to understand.

Many of the commentaries on this parable will take this approach. Yet a closer look at what Jesus says makes it

16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.

17 For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

18 "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:

19 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.

the sponge, who soaks up everything (without discernment),

20 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.

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21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. **the funnel**, who takes everything in and then lets it all out again (no retention or application),

James 1:23-24

23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;

24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

the strainer, who lets out the wine and keeps the sediment (only remembers the irrelevant) and **John 13:17** "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

23 But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

the sifter, who extracts the coarse flour (erroneous teaching) and keeps the fine flour (true teaching)."

James 1:25

25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

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An Important Difference

Clearly from the explanation of Jesus Himself, we learn that not all those who have ears to hear, really listen!

So Let me ask you the question I began with – How's your heart what kind of soil are you?