

FOUR SOILS

In Luke 8:4-15 Jesus tells the famous parable of the seed and the sower, with the seed falling on four soils. *"A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold."*

HARD SOIL - The disciples asked what it meant. Just as not everyone understood the parable, so the same seed sowed in different soils results in different yields. Jesus explains, *"The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved."*

"The four kinds of soils are represented everywhere God's Word is proclaimed," observes JC Ryle. The crowds contained the curious, the critics, the convicted, and the converted. Believers are charged to preach the word to all people, in season and out of season, because the Good News is for all people to hear. And they are commanded to repent and believe.

As the word of God is scattered abroad, the hardened path would prevent seed from getting plowed in to take root. It gets trampled underfoot and eaten by birds, which Jesus says is the devil snatching it away. The hard soil gave no root. No root, no shoot, no fruit.

In another analogy, 2 Corinthians 4:3 says *"our gospel is veiled only to those who are perishing, who the god of this world has blinded to keep them from seeing the light."* It is only by the action of the Spirit of God that anyone is able to understand and see and come to the light. When you share the gospel with anyone, they are in the dark until God brings them to the light. Because we can't know whom or when, we keep on sharing the good news with everyone around us.

ROCKY SOIL - In verse 13, Jesus says, *"the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away."* Rocky shallow soil holds no moisture, and shallow roots don't last in hot conditions.

Perhaps you've known people who seem so happy to hear the good news, and respond with exuberance, but soon prove they never really believed. They have no root in Christ, so they do not bear the fruit of Christ. CH Spurgeon observed, "care more for one grain of faith than for tons of excitement." The old saying says "time and the devil will tell." Don't confuse an ecstatic earthly experience with the eternal work of the Spirit of God in spiritual regeneration.

Just being part of a church doesn't mean you're born again into union with Christ. He charged professing believers to bear the fruits of repentance, which is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 3 speaks about unbelieving Israelites who hardened their hearts in the testing in the wilderness. They went astray and fell away from the living God. Hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, they did not know God's ways and did not enter into God's rest in the promised land. When the going gets tough, the tough get going, not out of the church, but into greater strength and experience of trusting and obeying, through the training of God's word.

THORNY SOIL - In verse 14, Jesus says, *"as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature."* When someone professes faith in Christ, it is not for you to give assurance of salvation, because that is the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus saves all who come to Him in true repentance and faith, and their lives will bear fruit, not only in the midst of trials.

The rocky soil is the trial of adversity, persecution and testing. Here the trial is by prosperity, or the lack of adversity. Many scriptures warn against the complacency of comforts in life. Don't confuse the fruit of the Spirit of God with the weeds of worldly wealth.

"There is great gain in godliness with contentment. If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, the snare of harmful desires that plunge people into ruin. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils, and through this craving many people have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs" (1 Timothy 6). Instead, the root of faith in Christ will produce the fruit of the Spirit! □