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The Parable of the Soils - I
Matthew 13:1-23
January 8, 2016, Jeff Germon

We are starting a brand new sermon series today. Over the next six weeks we will be looking at just one parable of Jesus. It's *The Parable of the Soils*. We are going to dig down deep to the core of this one. When I say we are going to dig deep, I mean our goal is to mine the depths of the passage and attempt to discover, not just what the passage meant to the people Jesus was speaking to two thousand years ago. That is the easy part. The hard part is doing the work after we hear from Jesus. What is Jesus calling *us* to? As Jesus' little brother, James said,

[2]

James 1:23–24 (NLT)

***²³ For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror.
²⁴ You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like.***

It is easy to study the Scriptures intellectually and come away with some more great knowledge *about* God, or learn a new Greek word, or biblical history, and think you are further ahead because you have increased your knowledge base. You don't even have to know Jesus to do that. The hard part, the thing Jesus is calling you to, is to allow him to bust through your old paradigms and change your heart so you live in a new way. That paradigm shift takes a work of the Holy Spirit as we give him permission to give us a new way of looking at life.

As Benny said last week, we need to allow Jesus, the King, to truly reign over our lives. The most natural thing for us is to push Jesus off the throne and put ourselves there in his place. We lull ourselves into believing that we know how to run our lives better than he does. We think we know what will satisfy us and make our lives more fulfilled. We don't realize that, many times, those things we think give us purpose, actually weigh us down and keep us stuck and spinning our wheels.

And so this morning, as with everything we read from God's Word, it's important that we do the hard work of letting Jesus speak to *our* hearts and allow him to change *us*. The natural and easy thing for us to do, is to take what Jesus says and apply it to someone else, like your spouse, or kids, or the person you are currently annoyed with. Let's make sure when we look at this parable that we humble ourselves and courageously ask Jesus to help *us* get unstuck.

[3]

There is nobody here in this auditorium who is completely where they should be, spiritually speaking. We all have blind spots. We all have things in our lives we are holding on to that Jesus wants us to surrender to him. There are ways every single one of us behaves that hurt our relationships, which means it hurts our relationship with God.

[4]

We need to give Jesus permission to show us how we offend him.

[5]

Before we look at this parable I want to remind you of the **purpose of parables**. Many people think parables are just nice stories with a moral, or a lesson like Aesop's Fables. They may include a moral or a lesson, but they are much more than that. In the parable we are going to

look at for the next six weeks Jesus explained to his inner circle of apprentices why he spoke in parables. We'll take a look at that later, but just let me give it away right off the bat.

[6]

The main reason Jesus told parables was to grab the attention of people in the crowd of listeners who were out of rhythm with the heartbeat of God to shock them into alignment with Jesus' kingdom-kind-of-life.

[7]

Parables are spiritual defibrillators. Thanks to our Young @ Heart ministry we have a defibrillator in our foyer in case someone has a heart attack while in our church building.

We've all seen these at work in the movies. Defibrillators are designed to send a counter shock into someone who suffers from cardiac dysrhythmia. I may be explaining this wrong, but from what I understand, which is very little, the defibrillator will shock the heart of someone whose heart is "stuck," back into a normal and healthy rhythm.

That is what Jesus does with his parables, but on a spiritual level. There were well intentioned people in his audience who were out of rhythm with the heart of God. They were spiritually blind. They thought they could see. They thought they had the answers, and maybe, at times, they did have some, on an intellectual level, but Jesus says they were actually dead and dark and ugly on the inside. He said they were like graves all painted up to look nice on the outside, but inside was stinking corrupted thinking.

[8]

Jesus used parables to break down old paradigms. There was a parable Jesus told about old and new wine skins (Matthew 9:14-17, Mark 2:21-22 and Luke 5:33-39).

He said if you put new wine into old wine skins they will burst. Who was Jesus speaking to and what did he communicate with that parable? He was speaking to the religious people of his day, saying that their old paradigms, the old way of the law, living by rules and regulations trying to justify themselves before God, does not work. His coming satisfied the law. It's done. There is a completely new way. It's not law. And, conversely, it's not freedom from the law to do whatever you want without consequence. It is something completely different.

Jesus introduced a new covenant to replace the old. This was already predicted by the Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. God said, through these prophets, that he will give us a new heart, *his heart*, so he can live his life through us. The old paradigms are demolished, replaced by the new paradigm of love governed by the rule of Jesus in our lives.

The old way of the law leads us to set *ourselves* up as judge and jury. It creates walls and bullies, hypocrites and atheists.

Here's what Jesus said to some of the religious people of his day:

[9]

Luke 11:37-46 (NLT)

³⁷ As Jesus was speaking, one of the Pharisees invited him home for a meal. So he went in and took his place at the table. ³⁸ His host was amazed to see that he sat down to eat without first performing the hand-washing ceremony required by Jewish custom.

[10]

39 Then the Lord said to him, “You Pharisees are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and wickedness! 40 Fools! Didn’t God make the inside as well as the outside? 41 So clean the inside by giving gifts to the poor, and you will be clean all over.

[11]

42 “What sorrow awaits you Pharisees! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore justice and the love of God. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things. 43 “What sorrow awaits you Pharisees! For you love to sit in the seats of honor in the synagogues and receive respectful greetings as you walk in the marketplaces.

[12]

44 Yes, what sorrow awaits you! For you are like hidden graves in a field. People walk over them without knowing the corruption they are stepping on.”

Now, here is one of my very favourite parts.

45 “Teacher,” said an expert in religious law, “you have insulted us, too, in what you just said.” 46 “Yes,” said Jesus,

“That is very astute of you. Yes, I am speaking to you. Let me continue.”

“what sorrow also awaits you experts in religious law! For you crush people with unbearable religious demands, and you never lift a finger to ease the burden.

He carried on throwing a whole bunch more similar criticisms against these religious people, and then he said, in verse 52:

[13]

52 “What sorrow awaits you experts in religious law! For you remove the key to knowledge from the people. You don’t enter the Kingdom yourselves, and you prevent others from entering.”

[14]

Just to be clear, these are well-intentioned religious people. Why does Jesus speak like this to them? Why doesn’t he soften the blow a bit? Because they were spiritually stubborn religious bullies who would not change and they were preventing people from coming to Jesus. In their pursuit of religious perfection, they were actually holding the door of the kingdom shut tight so the people Jesus was trying to reach could not enter.

Jesus was not at all afraid to hurt the feelings of the hard of heart. You see him do that all the way through the Gospels.

[15]

He did so to shock them into getting their spiritual hearts back into rhythm with the heart beat of God. That is also why he used parables.

So, with all that background let’s read this amazing parable. And keep in mind as I am reading this that there is a diversity of people in the crowd. There are some very religious people. There are some who are curious about Jesus and his message. There are others who are trying to trap him and get him killed. And there are those who are eagerly receiving every word he says.

[16]

Matthew 13:1-23 (NLT)

¹ Later that same day Jesus left the house and sat beside the lake. ² A large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat there and taught as the people stood on the shore. ³ He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: “Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds.

[17]

⁴ As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. ⁵ Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn’t have deep roots, they died.

[18]

⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. ⁸ Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! ⁹ Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”

[19]

¹⁰ His disciples came and asked him, “Why do you use parables when you talk to the people?” ¹¹ He replied, “You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others are not. ¹² To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.

[20]

¹³ That is why I use these parables, For they look, but they don’t really see. They hear, but they don’t really listen or understand. ¹⁴ This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that says, ‘When you hear what I say, you will not understand. When you see what I do, you will not comprehend. ¹⁵ For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes— so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.’

[21]

¹⁶ “But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. ¹⁷ I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn’t see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn’t hear it.

[22]

¹⁸ “Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: ¹⁹ The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don’t understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. ²⁰ The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy.

[23]

²¹ But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word. ²² The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God’s word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. ²³ The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and

understand God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"

[24]

So, there it is. It is a pretty simple parable. And we are privileged to listen in as Jesus explains the meaning to his apprentices. This parable is about the condition of our hearts and our receptivity to the rule of Jesus in our lives. Jesus describes four soil conditions corresponding to the spiritual condition of our hearts.

Each week for the next four weeks we are going to flesh out each of these conditions and what Jesus is calling us to, and how to get unstuck from the things that keep us from flourishing as followers of Jesus. The final week we are going to take a look at what that means for us as a church. In other words, how do we become the kind of church in which followers of Jesus will find a safe place to flourish and grow to maturity so we are allowing Jesus to rule our hearts and seeing his Kingdom come to Campbell River as it is in Heaven. That is the goal.

That is the way Jesus taught his apprentices to pray. You know the prayer.

[25]

Matthew 6:9–10 (NLT)

⁹ Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. ¹⁰ May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

That is why we are on this earth. Jesus wants to use us as his instruments to bring his message of the Good News of Jesus to Campbell River, so his will is done here just like it is in heaven.

I've said this over and over again, when we allow ourselves to get involved in the mission of Jesus, the purpose for which we exist, our lives will start to make sense. Until such time we will have an ache in our hearts that will never be satisfied and that ache will manifest itself in many different ways. This parable of Jesus is for everyone. What Jesus wants to do with each of us over the next few weeks is get us unstuck in whatever is keeping us from fully living the kingdom-kind-of-life that Jesus has called us to.

We aren't going to say too much more about the parable this morning, but I would like to look at one thing to help prepare our hearts to receive his Word as we look at this parable over the next few Sundays. I want to take a look a little closer at why Jesus says he speaks in parables. That will help us to understand the context a bit better.

In verse ten, after Jesus told them this parable and the disciples were totally confused, they asked him why he speaks in parables. Here is his response:

[26]

¹¹ "You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others are not. ¹²To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.

[27]

¹³ That is why I use these parables, For they look, but they don't really see. They hear, but they don't really listen or understand. ¹⁴ This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that says, 'When you hear what I say, you will not understand. When you see what I do, you

will not comprehend. ¹⁵ For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes— so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.'

Now again, you have to remember, there were different kinds of people in the audience Jesus was speaking to. They were at a variety of places spiritually. There were those who were very eager to hear and receive, and there were those who had purposefully decided to close off their hearts to Jesus. They listened, but they didn't really hear. And there were many somewhere in between. We are going to be addressing four different heart conditions over the next four weeks and talk about how to be the kind of person who is ready to receive Jesus' words and grow to become like him.

Jesus quoted the Old Testament in Isaiah 6:9-10 here where God, through the prophet, about 700 years prior to Jesus, was reprimanding his people who were hard hearted and had totally closed off their ears from hearing God's heart. Look at what Jesus says about them.

[28]

¹⁵ ...the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes— so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.'

Jesus wanted to heal them spiritually but they wouldn't let him. He ached for them. Some of you will remember when Jesus was on his way to be crucified. He was riding a donkey and he came over the crest of the hill from Bethany and the city of Jerusalem came into view and Jesus started weeping heavily and said this through his sobs:

[29]

Matthew 23:37 (NLT)

³⁷ "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God's messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let me.

He longed for them to be healed, but their hard hearts would not allow him to do it. Jesus spoke in parables to shock the spiritual hearts of those who were out of rhythm with God's heart, back in line with Jesus' kingdom-kind-of-life.

The main question for us this morning is obvious;

[30]

Which kind of heart does God want us to have?

Jesus is not trying to force us do things to make us unhappy. He is not calling us to live miserable lives. He is calling us to the life we've always wanted. He's calling us to let him break the chains that keep us from living *the life*. He is calling us to perfect freedom, governed by the law of love. His love. He wants us to be so captured by his love that every fear, all anxiety, all bitterness and resentment, any angry thought would be swallowed up by his immense love.

In closing, while we prepare our hearts for communion, I am going to read a prayer for us from Paul's letter to the Ephesian Jesus-followers. It's a prayer I have read many times here. As I read it truly let Jesus capture you with his love. Listen carefully to what Jesus wants for you. Let him change you. After I read it let's have a couple minutes of silent reflection and then those who are serving communion will come forward.

[31]

Ephesians 3:14–21 (NLT)

¹⁴ When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, ¹⁵ the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. ¹⁶ I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. ¹⁷ Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.

[32]

¹⁸ And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. ¹⁹ May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

[33]

²⁰ Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. ²¹ Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.



Parable of the Soils — I
Matthew 13:1-23
Week of January 8, 2017

Objective of this study: To understand the purpose of parables and to ready our hearts to hear and receive from Jesus.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Ephesians 3:14-21** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome

What is the biggest change you have seen in your lifetime?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word (30-45 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read Matthew 12:46-13:23
 1. How does Matthew 12:46-50 give context to Jesus' *Parable of the Soils*?
 2. What do you remember from the sermon about the purpose of parables?
3. Read Matthew 13:13-15
 1. Why could the people referred to here not understand?
 2. What was God's desire for them? See also Matthew 23:37
4. Read Ezekiel 36:26-27 and Jeremiah 31:31-34.
 1. How does this relate to Jesus' parable?
 2. What is the heart condition God desires for us?
3. Read Ephesians 3:14-21 again. Look at all the imagery. How does it relate to Jesus' parable and what he desires for us? How would this change your life if you really comprehended the depths of his love, and were rooted in it?

Work (30-45 minutes)

1. How are you feeling about mining the depths of this parable over the next few weeks?
 1. As you read the parable is there anything you are looking forward to? Any fears you have?
 2. What would you like Jesus to do for you through his Word as you dig in?
2. Read Ephesians 3:14-21 as a prayer for each other again.

3. Spend the rest of the time praying for each other that your hearts would become ready to receive whatever it is Jesus wants to do in your life as you marinate in his love.