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The Parable of the Soils V - The Growing Heart
Matthew 13:1-23
February 5, 2017, Jeff Germo

This is sermon number five in our series on Jesus' *Parable of the Soils*. In this parable, Jesus talked about our spiritual hearts and the various ways our growth can be stunted. He then finished off his parable talking about what a growing heart looks like which is the topic of our conversation this morning.

Let me again, quickly paraphrase the parable. Remember, when Jesus told a parable, he didn't just tell a story to entertain the crowd. He told his parables purposefully. There were things going on around him in some of the hearts of the listeners he was addressing. He told his parables to shake people up, to get them unstuck, to wake them up from their spiritual slumber.

In the very large crowd of listeners were people of all walks of life. This parable has something for everyone.

So, Matthew says, immediately after Jesus' family came looking for him to restrain him because they thought he was out of his mind, he left the house and went to sit by the lake. The house he left was likely Peter's house in Capernaum which is right beside the Sea of Galilee. It sits halfway between the synagogue and the lake. You could literally stand by the house and throw a stone in one direction and hit the synagogue, and the other direction and hit the lake.

Now, I would imagine that Jesus would have had a whole bunch of things to process. He had just left the house where he had been hassled again by the religious leaders and then his family came to take him away because they thought he was crazy. I would imagine his thoughts were reeling. So, he walks to the lake, perhaps a two minute walk, he sits down to think and pray and be by himself. And Matthew says a huge crowd gathered around him. There were so many of them that Jesus got into a boat and pushed out a bit from the shore so he could speak to the crowd.

And he begins to speak to them in parables, one of them being this one.

There was a certain farmer during planting season who spread his seed in his field. The seed fell on the ground, but not all of it landed on ground that was fertile. Some of the seed fell on the hard packed ground. That seed was eaten by the birds. Some of it fell on shallow, rocky soil and it sprang to life quickly, but then just as quickly died because the roots had no room to grow. Other seed fell on the soil that was infested by weeds and it grew to look like a semi-healthy plant, but it did not produce any fruit. And still others fell on ground that had the rocks picked, the weeds pulled, and the ground tilled. It produced a rich, bountiful crop.

That ends the parable. Then Matthew says Jesus left the crowd and went back into the house with his disciples where they asked him to explain the parable to them. Today we are going to just look at the one soil type, the good soil, the healthy productive soil. Jesus explains what that part of the parable means.

[2]

Matthew 13:23 (NLT)

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!"

Now, obviously, this is the kind of heart Jesus is calling us to work towards. We all should be growing in every way. Jesus is saying, very clearly, that we should be the kind of people who not only hear God's Word, but who give the Holy Spirit permission to make the necessary changes in our character. That does not happen by accident. We will not mature, or grow in godly character, without effort. The Bible tells us that over and over again.

None of us will arrive at the place where we will no longer have need to grow. Even Paul said, ***12 I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.*** (Philippians 3:12) That day will come, but not while we are walking this earth. However, there should continually be noticeable growth in our character. We, and those around us should be able to see positive change as we allow the Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of the Spirit in us. If that is not happening, like I said last week, the Kingdom of God is not ruling our heart.

There are some people I meet who stand out as closely walking with Jesus. We had the privilege of being at Edith Smith's celebration of life a couple weeks ago. She was someone who seemed to be filled with the fruit of the Spirit. I didn't know her very well, but with every interaction I had with her I left her feeling more joy. I never heard her say a negative word. Blessing came out of her mouth. On the way to her service two Fridays ago, Ruthie said, "I just found a beautiful role model and she died." So, the memorial service was bitter sweet. Edith was 96 years old. She did not become like Jesus by accident. Her life was not easy, but she chose, with each difficulty she experienced, to grow from it instead of letting it bring her down. When I grow up I want to be like Edith Smith.

The Apostle Peter, later in his life, was someone I aspire to be like as well. He was someone, while Jesus was on earth, who was not exactly exemplary in his character. He often spoke out of turn. He put his foot in his mouth many times. He was jealous of others and overly competitive. He came across as brash and arrogant at times. That was Peter as a young man. He inspires me because when I read about him in the Gospels and then see what he wrote later in his life I feel like there is hope for me.

He wrote his second letter near the end of his life, probably about 35 years or so after Jesus was crucified. Here is what he wrote.

[3]

2 Peter 1:3–11 (NLT)

³ By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. ⁴ And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.

[4]

⁵ In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.

[5]

⁸ The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins. ¹⁰ So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away. ¹¹ Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

[6]

What is Peter saying here? Growing in maturity takes effort. ***“Make every effort...”*** Pick the rocks that keep you shallow. Pull the weeds that distract you from growing. Till the soil of your heart so you remain soft and pliable and ready to learn from Jesus. We don’t have to live as passive victims.

[7]

⁹ ...those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins.

Each of us, who has received God’s forgiveness based on the death of Jesus, has been given a free gift. We can’t do anything to merit that gift. It is completely and utterly free — no strings attached. Not only do we not have to earn our salvation. We also do not have to pay God back in any way.

That is what Paul said in Ephesians 2:8-9.

[8]

Ephesians 2:8–9 (NLT)

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

God saves us by his grace - period. However, he has saved us for a purpose.

[9]

Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

¹⁰ For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

We are God’s masterpiece. He is chipping away at our rough edges over a lifetime as we cooperate with his Spirit. He is working on a transformation of our character so we will become people who know how to love each other, **so that others would see Jesus in us.**

It’s so easy to forget why we have been saved. We talked about this a few weeks ago.

[10]

If you are counted as one of God’s children, at some point in your life, you received the forgiveness of God, not based on anything you did, but because you trusted in what God did by sacrificing his only Son to pay the penalty for your sins so you could have a relationship with the holy God, the Creator of everything.

At the point where you trusted Jesus, he moved into your heart, in some spiritual way. You were made right with God. When God looks at you, he does not see your sin. Instead, he sees the righteousness of Jesus.

[11]

Some day we will all die, and if we have trusted Jesus we will join him in heaven. Or he will return and take those who trust that his death paid the penalty for their sins to heaven.

The thing that is so easy to do is to stay stuck there and think that is all there is. The easy and very lazy thing for us to do is to think that God saved you simply so you would be saved — end of story. You have your ticket to heaven. Now you can just coast and wait passively for Jesus.

That is so far from the truth. If we live like that we aren’t really living. There will be no growth.

God saved us to give us purpose — now. We have a reason for existing — now. He gives us meaning — now. We aren't just to passively wait until we die so we can join Jesus in heaven. What a pathetic existence that would be.

[12]

We are God's masterpiece. He continually chips away at us making us more and more like Jesus as we walk with him **so others will see the reflection of Jesus in us and join us on the journey towards the heart of God**. That is living the life he has called us to. That gives our life purpose and meaning. This is the way to live fruitful lives as we grow in the fruit of the Spirit. Jesus said in John 15, if we remain in him and he in us we will bear fruit that will last.

Ruthie has been tutoring a young lady for several years who is now in her final year of her Bachelor's degree at Trinity Western University. She started tutoring her in high school and has worked with her every year since. She has seen such amazing growth in Laura.

Last week Ruth helped Laura edit a paper she wrote for one of her classes at TWU. She was so very moved by how Laura is purposefully growing that she had to read it to me.

We asked her if we could share an excerpt from her paper with you. Here is how Laura is purposefully growing with Jesus as she describes her growth process.

[13]

"I think that in order to thrive in any other aspect of wellness, one must attend to their spiritual needs. When I am not pursuing an authentic relationship with God I find that I may become over fixated on a particular area of wellness in my life, which I turn into an idol. When I do this I am unhappy and clearly trying to fill the void for God with something temporal.

[14]

This can lead to greater unhappiness but still aimlessly trying to fill the void with things and expectations that leave me empty and unfulfilled. However, when I am letting God pursue me and I am trusting him, I feel more calm and gentle. As I go through my day I feel satisfied because I'm not relying on an unreliable source to bring me happiness.

[15]

- 1. One of my spiritual goals would be to gain wisdom and knowledge from Godly people. A way for me to enhance this could be to go to chapel at least once a week as a minimum. It only takes 30 minutes out of my day. I have a friend who goes practically everyday and I know that I would be able to join her. I know that if I asked her, she would be able to keep me accountable for going to chapel on Thursdays.**

[16]

- 2. My second spiritual goal is to view people in the image of God. It is far too easy to let my surface level understanding of a person taint my opinion of them. I want to be able to look at a person and appreciate them just for being created by God. I heard another professor talking about this and he gave the idea of having the word masterpiece on one's mirror.**

[17]

For me, it could be helpful to tell myself that the person I am starting to think ill about is actually a masterpiece. This will be helpful because I will be reminded of how little I know about that person and how God created that person with a beautiful plan.

[18]

- 3. Lastly I want to be able to trust God when I feel a lack of peace in my heart. Oftentimes when I feel a lack of peace I know that God is telling me something. However, out of selfishness, I tend to do what is most rewarding in the moment.**

[19]

A way for me to trust the lack of peace could be for me to remind myself of a particular situation that occurred after I did not trust the lack of peace and the pain it caused me. This will let me know that God's peace will keep me safe. To ensure I do this I will probably have to ask my mum to hold me accountable when I know what I am doing is wrong but I am still tempted to do it anyway."¹

This is a young lady, I think twenty-one years old, who is learning how to purposefully grow with Jesus. What she described is the process of discipleship. This is how we grow. What she is describing is how to develop a healthy, growing, spiritual heart.

[20]

We will not mature by accident. We won't coast to maturity. We will only mature, as Peter said, as we purposefully cooperate with the Holy Spirit, through the power of the risen Christ who lives in us, and put to death our old selfish ways, allowing him to replace them with the fruit of the Spirit.

In Colossians 3, Paul tells us how to pick the rocks, pull the weeds, and till the soil of our hearts as we cooperate with Jesus and what the good soil will produce. Listen closely.

[21]

Colossians 3:5–17 (NLT)

⁵ So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. ⁶ Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming.

[22]

⁷ You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. ⁸ But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. ⁹ Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. ¹⁰ Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him.

[23]

¹¹ In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. ¹² Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

[24]

¹³ Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

[25]

¹⁶ Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

This is how we cooperate with Jesus to prepare our hearts for him to grow good fruit in us. This is when life gets exciting as we see Jesus working in our hearts.

[26]

We are going to celebrate communion together in a couple minutes. When we do this we remember that Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins. He purchased freedom for us. He paid for our life by his death so that we could live the life he called us to. Let's take a couple minutes of silence and meditate on this truth before the servers come forward.

¹ Excerpt from an essay written by Trinity Western University student, Laura Paterson.



Parable of the Soils V
The Healthy Growing Heart
Matthew 13:1-23
Week of February 5, 2017

Objective of this study: To allow the Holy Spirit to reveal what needs to change for our hearts to be healthy and productive.

[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 **Colossians 1:3-6** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome

Pulling weeds, or shovelling snow?

[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 13:23; Ephesians 2:10; 2 Peter 1:3-11; and Colossians 3:1-17
 1. What do each of these say about the process of discipleship (growth)?
 2. What are the things we need to intentionally pick out, pull, (rocks or weeds), and what do we need to purposefully seed, or nurture and grow instead?

Work (30-45 minutes)

(Be careful not apply this next part to someone else)

Sermon Quote: "What is Peter saying here? Growing in maturity takes effort. *"Make every effort..."* Pick the rocks that keep you shallow. Pull the weeds that distract you from growing. Till the soil of your heart so you remain soft and pliable and ready to learn from Jesus. We don't have to live as passive victims."

Sermon Quote: "We are God's masterpiece. He continually chips away at us making us more and more like Jesus as we walk with him so others will see the reflection of Jesus in us and join us on the journey towards the heart of God. That is living the life he has called us to. That gives our life purpose and meaning. This is the way to live fruitful lives as we grow in the fruit of the Spirit. Jesus said in John 15, if we remain in him and he in us we will bear fruit that will last."

3. What resonated with you in the study? How is the Holy Spirit speaking to you? How do you feel you need to grow?
4. Take the rest of the time to pray for each other about the things you shared.