

THE SOIL ANALYSIS (Mk. 4:9,10)

Jesus has been telling the story about the different types of soil, and how receptive, - or otherwise, - they were to the seeds that were sown on them. Some fell by the wayside, some fell on stony ground, some fell among thorns, and some fell on good ground. All the people listening would have been familiar with what He was saying ... but *then* He introduced 'figures' that would completely have shocked them, **Mk. 4:8** *And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.* ... That was the issue that had them 'scratching their heads'. ... *That* would have made them wonder what Jesus was leading to.

So, what *does* it mean when Jesus said, *other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred?* Apparently, an average crop would have yielded about a 7.5% harvest ... a really good harvest would be 10% ... but the figures Jesus was talking about were unheard of ... some might even say, a gross and ridiculous exaggeration! Why did He say it then, and what did He mean, *some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred?* ... The Lord had *really* got their attention! ... On the one hand, the sower looked as if he was unsuccessful with the first three soils, but with the final soil he more than passed all expectations! What was going on?

This parable is designed to help us understand the presentation of the Gospel, - it is repeated in Mt. 13 and Luke 8 ... so it was and is important for God's people to understand. It is our purpose, - it is why we are saved, - to 'sow the seeds' of the Gospel ... to present Christ as Saviour. That is our calling, **Mt. 5:16** *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

However, we know how difficult it is to bear fruit and to see souls saved by the grace of God. We labour faithfully, we bring the Gospel with us into various situations, we try to explain it as simply and as best we can ... but we don't get the results we long to see. There is a real dearth of sinners coming to Christ and being saved ... and no matter how 'sinner-friendly' we try to present the Gospel, there's virtually nothing happening! And that is the problem!! ... The seed is being sown, but there is nothing, - or, very little, - sprouting up out of the ground. We are not seeing any results for our efforts. We give out the Gospel, and it is being rejected. No matter how we present it, it is not being understood as it ought to be ... What is the problem?!!

Some would tell us the problem lies with how we are presenting it ... They might have a point. Maybe we are only seeking the salvation of souls in a half-hearted manner. We say we believe about Heaven and Hell ... and the unsaved, - if they continue in their sin, they will be condemned to a lost eternity. ... Well, *do* we really believe that? Do we pray earnestly for our loved ones to be saved, and our friends and our neighbours? Do we have a burden for the lost? Do we pray for God to move so the power of Christ in salvation is made effectual? I trust we do.

However, those who tell us the problem lies with how we are presenting it go on to tell us we are out of touch. In other words, we need to update 'our sales pitch' to make the Gospel attractive. We are out of touch with 'what makes people tick'. We are not connecting with people. ... I remember sitting in a meeting and we were being taught the methodology of the salesman in trying to convert souls ... and it all sounded very well. ... The fact is, though, it is not within the capacity of even the very best of us to cause one single anxious thought in the mind of an unbeliever. So when you listen to these people telling you these things you could begin to feel inept, - a poor sower, - and that your seed isn't of the right calibre, and it's offensive, and your message is out-of-date. ... We need a more acceptable message. Leave sin out. Don't push the need for repentance. Mention Jesus in a 'nice' way that won't stir any controversy. ... And definitely leave out any of the 'hard stuff' relating to eternal destiny, judgment, and Hell!!

That is what is passing for the Gospel these days. ... Tell the people what they *want* to hear, not what they *need* to hear!

Here is how it is, though. The seed is perfect, - it is the Word of God, **Lk. 8:11** *the seed is the word of God ... Mk. 4:14* *The sower soweth the word*, - but if you do anything to alter or change it, you pollute it ... and it becomes a corrupted 'gospel' ... and a corrupted 'gospel' or a 'gospel' that has been tampered with in any way is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus warned, **Mk. 13:5** *Take heed lest any man deceive you: 6 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many ... 22 For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect. ... Seductive preachers with their false message ...*

In his opening words to the Galatians Paul wrote, **1:1** *Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)* **2** *And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia:* **3**

Grace *be* to you and peace from God the Father, and *from* our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: ⁵ To whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen. ... That was the Gospel he had proclaimed among them, and it had not changed in any way. He then went on to *warn*, ⁶ I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: ⁷ Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. ... How many 'gospels' are congregations being exposed to ... which bear no resemblance to the true Gospel of Christ? The answer is frightening!

Paul cautioned Timothy, **II Tim. 4:1** I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; ² Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; ⁴ And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables ... And there is no shortage of 'gospel fables' ... gospels that do not reach into the heart of man's real need, ... 'vain jangling' Paul calls them in I Tim. 1:5.

The greatest delusion is thinking you are something when you are not ... and the area where this is the greatest danger is where someone thinks they are saved, but they are not. They have come in some other way, but they don't know the voice of the Shepherd. They have never heard Him call.

Becoming a Christian goes against the grain of all we are and how we are made. I have been born in sin, shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me (Ps. 51:5) ... I started off in sin, - travelling away from God, - and, but for His grace, I would have kept going on that way for sin, - of itself, - would never have released its hold on me. You see, though, that is how we are saved ... by the grace of God, **Eph. 2:8** For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast.

And how do I know the grace of God has been made effective in my life? Paul, again, gives us the answer ... the grace of God produces in the life of the believer a change, **II Cor. 5:17** if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And the change produces what the Bible describes as 'the fruit of the Spirit', **Gal. 5:22** the fruit of the Spirit is

love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ²³ Meekness, temperance ... ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Jesus used a similar analogy, **Mt. 7:20** by their fruits ye shall know them.

So, we need to take care how we sow, and also that we sow the only seed that comes from the granary of Heaven, that is produced by God ... Only God's grace saves, and changes a life ... and only God's grace keeps us worthy of His Name. No updating of the Gospel is allowed. The product Jesus used, and the disciples, and Paul is the only seed we must sow.

All the synthetic gospels, and prosperity gospels, and good works gospels, and new age gospels that have *slithered* their way into many a church have 'done the Garden of Eden thing' and corrupted the true Gospel until many cannot tell apart the one from the other ... It is what the serpent succeeded in getting Eve to fall for. ... Satan is doing his work, promoting his false 'gospel' ... From the beginning of time, he has put up to be an 'evangelist' ... but the illusive 'gospel' he presents has nothing good in it whatsoever! ... *That* is how serious it is ... It is not the Gospel according to the Bible, for it is the 'gospel' according to men ... and even the devil himself!

But even where the Gospel is truly preached in accordance with God's Word, with the emphasis on the cross-work of Christ on Calvary, and with the confidence in the Holy Spirit's power to generate the dead soul of the sinner ... we must accept there is most definitely the hard ground that seems so impenetrable. And we are also faced with those who 'flirt' with the Gospel ... those who make a temporary commitment that, after a short time, shows it has no real growth or substance ... Yes, it's hard sowing the seed, and it can 'wear you down'.

What keeps us going though? What encourages you when you hear someone bemoaning the fact we see few people saved, as if it is our fault, and as if it is up to us ... we are using the wrong methods, or God has abandoned us? ... Here is what encourages me? I know I do not have the power to save a single solitary soul. I cannot even get into someone's heart sufficiently to impress upon them to believe in Christ as Saviour. I could not preach a Gospel sermon that would create one iota of conviction of sin ... no matter how sincerely I preach and want to see sinners saved. The only means by which the sinner is saved is when the soil is prepared by God ... and that is how when He does what He alone has the power to do, the results are staggering, *some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.*

The only Gospel that saves for time and eternity is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ ... and believer ... you and I are privileged by God to be saved. God chose you in eternity, and in time, He prepared the soil so when the seed would be sown, it would fall on good ground, and yield fruit to spring up and increase, so that it would bring forth ... not man's results, but the results which God alone can achieve in the life of the sinner saved by grace, *some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred* ... and for which He alone receives all the praise! No other sower of the seed can produce the harvest Christ produces. It is His Gospel alone that saves, and it penetrates the very best of soil ... and He waters it, keeps the weeds and the birds away ... and He stops people tramping through it and hardening it. ... He guards its growth!

And look what happens in v.10, *And when he [Jesus] was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable.* They are listening intently to His every word, and they are trying to receive what He is saying. ... I know we are going very slowly through this Gospel of Mark, but here is a verse that shows us how intently we need to listen! *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

We read similar words in the Book of Revelation. Now all Scripture is inspired of God, but the Book of Revelation specifically says, *1:3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.* ... And look at what else it says ... *2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit ... 11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith ... 17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith ... 29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith ... 2:6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith ... 13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith ... 22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith ...*

If you know Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, you have heard the voice of the Holy Spirit calling you to salvation ... and your ears are open! He may have used a preacher, or He may have used your Christian mother or your Christian father, or your Sunday School teacher, or someone else who was given the privilege ... but ultimately, it was the Holy Spirit of God Who spoke deep into your heart in a way you could not fail to hear His voice and heed His call ... and you freely responded by believing in Christ as Saviour.

The Holy Spirit *continues* to speak though. He does not speak to you once at salvation, and then leave you. He keeps on speaking to you, and here is *how* He speaks to you, *Jn. 16:13 he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things*

to come. **14** He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you. ... He will impress upon you that your life is for the living testimony of Christ. Jesus is not simply a priority in your life ... He has become the very reason as to why you are living. No matter what responsibilities you have, He rules above everything else, **1 Cor. 1:31** Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God ... **Col. 3:17** And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him ... **23** And whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; **24** Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

You see, good ground does not just produce good fruit for a while, and then stop producing ... Good fruit growing in good soil has a good gardener 'looking after' it ... and, as a consequence, it will keep on producing good fruit.

We have only managed to progress a very short distance in this chapter ... but I trust we see how it is the Lord's will for us to listen and to make progress in accordance with the Holy Spirit working in us to produce the fruit He requires. He has promised, **Is. 55:11** So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth ... the word that is sown as a seed ... it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it. ... And then by way of illustration, He uses the language of the sower and the gardener again ... **12** For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap *their* hands. **13** Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign *that* shall not be cut off.

May the Lord bless each of us in the study of His Word today! Amen.