

Name or Heart Change

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Preacher: Ray Sweet

[0:00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweep from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, if you'd like to learn more about us as a church, you can go to FCCGreensburg.com or you can check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, we're excited today to get into God's Word, but most importantly, let that Word get into us and transform these hearts. Now, let me ask you this. Have you ever thought about different words we use and ever wondered why it was named that?

Stop with me for just a second here and consider some different names that we have for things and if there could possibly be a better name. Like, why do we call that thing that you put your bread in, you know, a toaster?

Why do we call it that and not a tanning bread? Or my family's longtime business of car repair? Why not just call it autocorrect?

Or why do you call it a jet ski and not a motorcycle? Or what is it that thing called when you can't sleep? Insomnia, right?

[1:12] Shouldn't it be called resisting a rest? Okay, I'll stop. I'll stop. Okay. No, no, no. One more. One more. Why was his name Alexander Graham Bell and not the Lord of the Rings?

All right, my jokes are as bad as Pastor Tyler's, but I promise that there's a point to this. There are just some things in our culture that may have a better name.

And one, in my opinion, is a parable, or I've heard it explained, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. And this particular parable Jesus told has been called the parable of the sower.

If you'd like to follow along today, go ahead and grab your Bibles and turn three-quarters-ish the way to the first New Testament book, Matthew chapter 13.

And as you're turning there, welcome back to the third week of our series called Just Jesus. The world around us is loud and obnoxious. There's a lot of very bad opinions spewed as facts.

[2:14] And yet sometimes I just need to quiet my heart and hear the voice of Jesus. Let his word echo in my mind. And while all scripture is breathed from God to teach, rebuke, correct, and train us for righteousness, I'm excited for this journey to Easter where we will simply look at the words in red that came from our Savior's mouth as he walked this planet showing us what the kingdom of God is all about.

Because over the centuries, the religious leaders had perverted many parts of the word. Of course, they could still quote it accurately, but they chose to modify it in practice.

They chose to make the words serve their self-righteousness and their pride rather than humbling themselves before the words of life spoken by their creator. So it's perfectly fine if you want to continue to call this the parable of the sower because we give all glory to God, the one who sows his seed of the gospel in our hearts, makes it take root.

But I want to make the case that you could also call this the parable of the soils because this is the only part of the story that we can control as we let the Holy Spirit transform us into the image of Christ.

So let's look at Matthew 13, starting in verse 1, as we see some foundational truths of the kingdom of God. Here we are, Matthew 13, verse 1.

[3:44] That same day, Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it while all the people stood on the shore.

Then he told them many things in parables, saying, A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seeds, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

Some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had

no root.

Other seed fell among the thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil where it produced a crop 160 or even 30 times what was sown.

Whoever has ears, let them hear. You know, I'll never forget in Bible college getting a message from a friend of mine who said she was kind of confused about this parable because it just doesn't seem right that God would drop us on a certain kind of soil that we have no control over.

[4 : 49] And I remember saying to her, Hold on. The sower is God, but the seed is the message of the kingdom. It's the good news of Jesus with his death, burial, and resurrection that sets us free.

And of course, this also includes his heart for us to live a life of holiness, not so that we can earn our salvation because we absolutely cannot, but because of his glorious salvation that he freely lavishes on us.

And I told her, Listen, you're not the seed. You're the soil that represents our hearts and how receptive and willing and obedient we are to what the Holy Spirit wants to do in us as he tills up that soil, molding and shaping us into the image of Jesus.

So if you'd like to take notes today, don't forget, you can always go to the YouVersion Bible app. Absolutely free download. Y-O-U version. Go to events.

Go to First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana. And then you can see the outline that way. But let's look at four types of soils or hearts that you and I can have.

[6 : 00] The first one is the path or the hard heart. I've also heard this called the unresponsive heart. So skip down to Matthew 13, 19 with me, where Jesus explains exactly what this means.

He says, When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. You know, it's possible that as Jesus is teaching, those listening may have looked around them and seen a man sowing seed. That may have prompted Jesus' parable. And even if it wasn't happening right then, they understood this imagery because they lived it.

Going back 2,000-ish years, picture a man with a seed bag slung over his shoulder. And while he tried to be careful where he threw seed, it was impossible for some not to fall on or next to the roads that separated one field from another.

These narrow paths that have been packed down where no seed could grow. Now, what does this type of heart look like today? And no, when it says this person does not understand, it's not because they can't.

[7 : 14] It's not because they can't comprehend or the message isn't presented clearly. These are the people who are completely hardened to the good news. They don't want to understand.

Those who want nothing to do with Jesus and will shut down any conversation before it gets traction. I have some in my family like this, just like you might.

And Proverbs 1-7 actually says this. It describes them. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. There are many reasons why this may be the case.

It could be like a baby who sits in a poopy diaper and doesn't want change because while it may stink, man, it's nice, warm, and it's all mine. I just don't want to change anything, right?

And I don't want anyone, including God, telling me how to live my life, even though my way, if I'm honest, leads to emptiness. Maybe they've been church hurt by someone who claimed to love and follow Jesus.

[8 : 13] Or they even got burnt out by a church full of politics and favoritism and no purpose. They couldn't separate that hypocrisy from the true character of God. Listen, don't miss out on what God has in store for you because of someone who didn't represent Him well.

Think about it this way. You don't stop going to work just because there's a poor employee that's around you, right? And don't let an unhealthy believer or church keep you from an awesome God. Also, let's realize the church will never be perfect on this side of eternity. Because you and I, we are far from perfect ourselves. The old joke is the church stopped being perfect the second you and I walked in.

See, that's the point of the gospel. We're jacked up. We need Jesus. So I'm sincerely sorry if you've been church hurt. But no, God wants to come into that and He wants to bring healing.

Don't let false teachers or pride or fear or prejudice, stubbornness, procrastination, whatever else, don't let that keep you from experiencing God's amazing grace.

[9 : 23] And then second, so you got the hard heart. Second is the rocky ground. We'll call this the superficial heart. So the first one wants nothing to do with Jesus whatsoever.

The next three at least are moved in some way by the kingdom. Here's what Jesus says in Matthew 13, verse 20. See, Jesus isn't talking about random stones in the soil because farmers always picked up things like rocks and sticks.

He's talking about an underlying layer of solid rock shortly below the surface. So everything looks healthy on the exterior, but not too far down is solid rock that stops the roots from going as deep as they need to.

So there's no depth there. This plant, with plenty of moisture, springs up probably quicker than the rest and for a brief time even appears healthier and hardier.

But when the sun starts to beat down, its roots can't get deep enough and they get scorched and then wither and die. What kind of heart is Jesus talking about here?

[10 : 43] He's talking about a superficial one that's all emotions and no true commitment. One that's all about the religious experience and the feelings of the moment, not the call from Jesus to turn away from sin, surrendering everything to his lordship.

You know, early in ministry, we had a couple start attending the church where we served. And they come in and immediately they place membership.

They got involved in about everything. They were full of all kinds of good words for me and the church. And just things went really well at first. And I thought, man, this is awesome.

Maybe these are the mature leaders that I've been praying for. Wrong. And pretty quickly, I started to notice that, man, conflict follows them everywhere they go.

And within six months, they were having it out with several people in the church and fingers were even being pointed at me, even though I didn't have anything to do with it. And to make a dramatic story short, they ended up leaving the church.

[11 : 46] And it's amazing how peaceful things become after that. A few months later, they called and asked to meet with Bethany and I. And we sat down in our living room and we hashed everything out as they said they wanted to come back to the church.

And with the hard feelings that I knew others would have towards them because they had said some stuff, I laid out a plan for them to come back gently, slowly work their way back into different roles, kind of mending and building relationships along the way.

And I thought the meeting went really well. We hugged and they were smiling. We were having small talk on the way out the door. And then I find out that I deeply offended them with my plan not to just throw them back on the stage week one.

And they left again before they ever came back. See, the rocky superficial heart springs up quickly. And it looks like this on fire Christian. They're serving all over the place.

Here, every time the doors are open, sounds superficial. At least for a short time, they sound super spiritual. And I'm not here to say whether they're saved or not because God's got that part under control.

[13 : 00] But I know this. If your faith is based on just coming to church and getting a feeling, if it's all about an emotional experience, God, you have to make me tingle from head to toe.

Or even this desire to be seen and be heard, then we've missed the point. I'm fearful, like this passage explains, that it's not true heart change.

And in Matthew 7, Jesus talks about people who say, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons and do this for you? And he will say, Matthew 7, 13 and 14, away from me.

I never knew you. In our church world, it may look like, hey, they come and they raise their hands in worship and they speak Christianese and they serve here and they serve there and they share their testimony one day.

But the next day, they're running back to the world. Here's what Jesus says in Matthew 7, 26 and 27. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

[14 : 04] The rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew and beat against the house, and it fell with a great crash. See, the rocky heart is all about the benefits of salvation, but not the cost of salvation.

The rocky heart wants God's blessings over every area of life, but their heart is shallow. And when persecution comes because of the word, they fall away just as quickly as they came in the first

place.

When families start prodding about their faith, when it costs them friendships or invitations or worse, when there's a cost associated with their faith, those emotions start to fade and they walk away. You know, every pastor I know who's done this for more than a second would be nodding their head right now because we've seen this hundreds of times. This is the person who comes in like Haley's Comet, serving here and there, going to every Bible study, always creeping closer and closer towards the microphone.

And while I would never want to be a wet blanket to anyone trying to grow, we have to make sure in the spirit of March Madness that we're learning to dribble before we do a 360 windmill dunk, okay? [15:16] A humbly coming before Jesus in true repentance of sins, ready to grow one day at a time into his image. And if he never gives me anything else, if life continues to be hard, if persecution comes because of my faith, Jesus, I will stay true to you, the one who saved my soul.

And to quote John MacArthur, Church, let's get past the superficial, and let's go deep in our walk. And then third is the thorny ground, the worldly heart. This is the soil that looks good at first, but it's infested with thorns. And as the grain begins to sprout, so do the thorns.

These tough, thistle-bearing weeds come up, and scripture tells us, choke out the good plants, taking most of the space and moisture and nourishment and sunlight for themselves.

Let's look at how Jesus says it here in Matthew 5, verse 22. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

[16:52] Church, can I be honest about this one? This is one I think American Christians can struggle with the most, especially living in a nation where even the poor among us have luxuries that most of the world does not.

I'll never forget when Bethany and I, my wife and I, went to Port-au-Prince, Haiti. It was back in 2015 on a mission trip. Our eyes were open to what a third world country looks like.

And while our hearts broke for the poverty that so many lived in, my heart fractured even more for the false sense of security that we have in our nation. Because I saw these Haitian Christians living with such a joy and peace that I wanted.

I saw them worshiping with an enthusiasm and a freedom that I admired. And I came back feeling sorry for us because we often put faith in our prosperity, in our possessions, our power, our prestige, and our position more than we do in our faith in Jesus.

And it's so easy to do if our hearts aren't fully sold out to the Lord. 1 Timothy 6.10 For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

[18:04] Not money, but the love of money. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. And then we look at 1 John 2.15-16 Do not love the world or anything in the world, it says.

If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life comes not from the Father, but from the world.

And to quote John MacArthur one more time, he says, A professing believer who is unconcerned about sin in his life and does not hate evil and love righteousness, giving strong evidence that the soil of his heart is weedy.

He will eventually discover that his love of the world and his identification with Christ's word cannot coexist. I know it's culturally acceptable to have a healthy slice of the world and just a dash of Jesus on the side.

I know others will often encourage a compartmentalized type of faith where we have one foot in the world and another foot in the church. We have a Sunday behavior, a Wednesday behavior, and a Friday night behavior.

[19:14] But you won't find that in the Bible anywhere because Jesus wants us to forsake it all to discover true life in him. Because as I've discovered in my own life, the people who chase after prosperity, possessions, power, prestige, position, if that's their ultimate goal, they're the ones who discover that it never satisfies anyways.

But when Christ is truly on the throne of our hearts, he will take care of all that other stuff and we may just find that he's all we needed in the first place. And then last, guys, let's talk about the good soil, the receptive heart.

See, this is the one who comes by faith to Christ fully realizing that they've sinned against a perfect holy God and are in desperate need of his grace.

But also, we come with a repentant heart, all in, with one desire, to live for Jesus, being molded daily into Christ's image.

So Jesus, your word, your will, your ways, period. Here's how our Savior put it in Matthew 13, 23.

But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it.

[20 : 31] This is the one who produces a crop yielding 160 or 30 times what was sown. Now, understand something. The difference between soils isn't that the good soil is any more moral before coming to Christ.

No more educated, doesn't have a higher IQ, they don't have an extra heavenly splash of faith. The only barrier here is unbelief. And anyone who's willing to surrender all to Jesus Christ and live for him on his terms is fertile ground.

Key words there. His terms. See, this is the heart of David that he prayed in Psalm 51, created me a clean heart, O God. Or like Psalm 42, as the deer longs for the streams of water, I long for you, O God.

And when persecution comes, big or small, I will keep trusting you, knowing you've got me in your hands. When the worries and the riches and the lust of this world try to keep pulling me away from my purpose and the Lord Jesus, I'll keep my eyes heavenward, realizing those temporary treasures don't even compare to the joy and peace in Christ in this life and even the permanent glory that will be revealed in eternal paradise for those who stay faithful to the end.

According to Jesus' words here, what's the evidence of good soil? He says it produces fruit. A crop yielding 160 or 30 times what was sown.

[22 : 01] And this is where we kind of have to disconnect from all the modern technology in agriculture and realize that, listen, in this culture, they did it the old-fashioned way. And even if we yield a crop on the low end, 30 times what was sown.

Did you know that at least four, that's four to five times the average in first century Palestine at the time? And for those of you who know farming way better than I, listen to these yields.

When your heart is receptive to Christ and you are that good soil that He can do incredible things in, that 60, that 30, that 100 times equals a yield of either 3,000, 6,000, or 10,000 percent depending on God's perfect will and our obedience to Him.

And listen, my wife said that I'd make a terrible farmer, okay? And actually she's right. But let me leave you with this powerful verse of what a life truly immersed in Christ looks like.

Psalm 1, 1 through 3. Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the company of mockers.

[23 : 15] So all those things, the first three hearts, you could fit that into those categories. But blessed are the ones whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on His law day and night.

That person is like a tree planted by the streams of water, picture that, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do prospers.

You know, the point of this parable is that if our hearts are truly receptive to the Lord, He can do immeasurably more than you and I could ever ask or imagine in us.

He can take your life and mine and produce a yield that will make people who knew us before stop in their tracks and say, only God can do that with them.

And we say, absolutely. It's only by His grace that that old life in me has died, making me a brand new creation in Christ.

[24 : 15] So beckoning back to the start of this message, I'm not sure we need a name change, but a heart change instead where all that I am must belong to Christ.

That's the fertile soil. That's the good soil that Christ can do incredible things in. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, I just thank you so much for just your words of life and hope that you have spoken over us today.

I just pray that as this word has gone out that you will take it. We know you say that your word never comes back void. So take this word, speak truth in life, convict these hearts, and mold us into the image of Christ.

And Lord, if there's anyone listening to my voice who may be the hard heart, who may be the rocky soil or the thorny soil, Lord, I just pray that you will just deal with these hearts and we can see that

true hope is only found in an all-out commitment to Jesus Christ.

Help us to see that. Help us to live that. And Father, I just pray that you will do an incredible work that whoever is listening to this as they surrender their hearts fully to you that you can produce a yield 30, 60, 100 times what was sown.

[25 : 42] So Father, we give this to you and pray that you continue to work in our hearts. And we pray all of this in Jesus' precious and holy name. And God's people said, Amen and Amen.

Hey, before we close out here, once again, my name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana. If you have questions about your faith, if you'd like to talk about what it means to give your life to Jesus, if you have questions about First Christian Church of Greensburg, we would love to come alongside you and answer those for you, help you on this journey and your walk with Jesus.

Here's a couple ways you can reach out. You can call the church office. That's 812-663-8488. That's 663-8488.

Or you can email me at ray at FCCGreensburg.com. Hey, thank you for tuning in today. God bless you and have a fantastic week.