

Preparing the Heart's Soil: An Invitation to Grow Together | Matthew 13:1-23

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[0 : 00] Welcome to Ontario Community Church, where we're dedicated to encouraging, equipping, and engaging lives for Christ. Located in Ontario, Oregon, Pastor Patrick Daly preaches insightful sermons from the Word of God, offering practical applications for modern living.

We're delighted to share this sermon with you. All right. Well, good morning, everyone. How are we enjoying this snow? I got to tell you, I woke up this morning and I saw the snow coming down and coming from Hawaii and then coming from California.

You get snow every so often, but I love how it sticks to the ground and it's just really, when we think of that winter wonderland, I know it's technically fall, but I still think of it snowing, right?

I think of how my kids have so much, when they see it, they're like, oh, there's snow everywhere. They're really just shocked and they're taking it all in, and yeah, there's snow everywhere.

I love my kids and this is really, just really it's great for them to adjust and kind of understand the four seasons rather than just the constant 80 degree weather or 70 degree weather, although that sounds good for us right now.

[1 : 12] I mean, let's be honest here. So let's pray and we're gonna just begin in our, begin in our new sermon series, Thy Kingdom Come. Your Lord and Heavenly Father, we thank you for just giving us the time and the opportunity for us to gather together today as the body of Christ.

Father God, you are the God of all seasons. We think of the natural order, how there's summer, there's winter, there's fall, there's spring, all these seasons that we know in the natural world, but you are also the God of every season of our own lives.

You've been there for us since the foundation of the world. And we ask, Father, that you are with us. We pray that truth is spoken here and that lives are transformed.

We pray, Father, that we may all come to know you, grow in you and be moved to do good in your name. As we begin our first sermon today, Father, I ask that you bless every single person here today and you comfort those that are hurting or we also ask for healing.

Be with us as we're going over these parables of your Son Jesus Christ. These very simplistic lessons that are so easy to understand, but yet they have so much spiritual significance, lessons that we can learn, but also that we can apply to our life, our very lives.

[2 : 46] So Father, we ask that you are with us, lead us and guide us. May our ears be open to listen. May our hearts be open to you for your name is above every name.

And we thank you. We thank you for this church. We thank you for our lives. We thank you for just this time together. It is in the name of Jesus that we pray and we all say together, amen.

So the title of this sermon is Preparing the Heart's Soil. It is an invitation to grow together. And what I'd like to invite you to do, let us turn to the Gospel of Matthew.

We're gonna turn, it'll be on the screen here, Matthew chapter 13, verses one through 23. What's so interesting is we have a lot of teachings that Christ taught to his disciples, and they're simple.

So simple that even a child can understand them. Yet in its simplicity, there is such wisdom, there is such depth.

[3 : 54] There's so much that we can take away for our lives. And so what I want us to do, feel free to follow along in your ESV Pew Bible, your mobile device or your Bible of choice, and we're gonna read this together.

So Matthew chapter 13, you may read out loud if you'd like or read silently. That same day, Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.

A great and great crowds gathered about him so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach and he told them many things and parables, saying, a sower went out to sow.

And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground where they did not have much soil.

And immediately they sprang up since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched. And since they had no roots, they withered away.

[5 : 03] Other seeds fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked them. And other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain.

Some a hundredfold, some 60 and some 30. He who has ears, let him hear. Then the disciples came and said to him, why do you speak to them in parables?

That's a legitimate question. And Christ answered them, pay attention here. To you, it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

For to the one who has more will be given and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

[6 : 02] Indeed, in their case, the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled saying, you will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.

For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears.

And understand with their heart and turn I would heal them. But blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear. For truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous people long to see what you see and did not see it and to hear what you hear and did not hear it.

So it goes on in verse 18. Let's pay attention. Hear the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the words of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.

This is what was sown along the path. And what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the words and immediately receives it with joy. Yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

[7 : 18] And for what was sown among thorns, this is one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it.

He indeed bears fruit and yields. In one case a hundredfold and another sixty and in another thirty. I want you to go to verse 34 as well. Go down or go a little bit further here.

All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables. He said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken. I will open my mouth in parables.

I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world. And so these are the parables. We begin with this one so that we can understand, have an understanding of Christ's parable.

This is the first parable in which we have to understand the seed. We have to understand the word. And I want to go ahead and go to this image here.

[8 : 30] I really worked a lot to try to get an image here. So we have the symbolism of the parable here. We have the sower, right?

Christ being known as the sower who is the Word and he's sharing the seed onto different soils. And the seed is a representation of the Word of God.

And that seed gets scattered, right? Into different types of soil. And then we have the soil, which is a representation of our hearts.

It's the condition of our hearts. And for many of us, we can... Some of us are farmers. We can understand the importance of having good soil, right?

We can also think of... Well, we can think of the path. We can think of stones and lots of things on the soil. We can think of weeds as well.

[9 : 29] And how it can choke up. And these are the four soils from the parable of the sower. The first one is the path.

And that's a representation of hardened hearts. They can't receive the Word because they are not ready. And for many of us, we can think of someone.

Maybe you have been in a time where your heart was hardened towards God and His Word. There are people out there who are like the path.

Their heart is hardened towards God. Think of Pharaoh as an example. His heart was hardened. And he was rejecting the Lord and the Lord's command.

The second one is the rocky ground. And this is what we would call superficial faith. It's lacking depth or it's fading under pressure.

[10 : 31] And so we can think at times, well, you can plant something in the ground with a bunch of rocks. How many of us have done that before? It struggles, right?

And so in the spiritual sense, in this parable, it doesn't take full root. It's not very deep. And so, well, it's a call for us, for many of us, we can think of people that may have a superficial faith.

Maybe you have a superficial faith and maybe this is a call for you to have a deeper faith in the Lord. Well, then we have the third one. Now, this one's a scary one.

You see this kind of image of thorns, right? All the little spikies and whatnot going on. And the thorns can choke up the seed.

It's being distracted by the world and the worries of it. Think about that. How often and how easy is it for us to get distracted by the worries of this world?

[11 : 38] And here it's explaining that thorns are preventing the word from maturing. We're talking about spiritual growth in Christ, spiritual growth that comes from the word.

And so we have the thorns here. And then finally, we have good soil, a heart that receives the word, which leads to growing into Christ and bearing fruit.

You shall know them by their fruit, as it's said in Scripture. And it's a call for all of us. Maybe our hearts are not right with God, but let us be encouraged to have good soil and to produce good fruit.

This is one... It's very simple. You could show this to a child, right? And they'd understand it. Well, why is the seed not going into the ground?

We need to clear the rocks out of the way. Or we need to clear the weeds out of the way so that the plant can thrive. Or we think of the good soil in that case.

[12 : 48] It's so simple. And what are the lessons then that we can learn? We can interpret from these verses. And the first thing is the soil and the seed. Let us remember the seed being the Word, the Word of God, the Bible that we hold in our hands.

It does not change. Much like how God does not change, everlasting to everlasting, but the soil, the heart does.

We, if we have a heart and heart, we need to ask God for a softened heart. Right? If there's distractions in our life, we need to clear away from those distractions, focusing and fixating on the Lord.

Because God's Word will accomplish God's purpose. And let us also be reminded that the Word of God is living and active. And so the Word does not change.

But we do. This should be a call for us to come to the Lord, make that decision for Christ and grow in Him.

[13 : 56] Let that seed be planted within you and grow and be cultivated to bear much fruit. The second thing then is God meets people where they are.

And we have to think for a moment that no matter where you are, no matter where you come from, or even what you're going through, God extends an invitation for you to enter into a relationship with Him.

What matters is your heart being ready to receive the Word, much like how our hearts need to be ready to receive salvation through Christ.

When we think of Ephesians 2, verses 8-10, it is for grace you have been saved, not by works lest any man boast. And then we are created so that we can do good works.

And so Jesus invites us. When we have been burdened, when we have felt weary, when we have felt simply exhausted, He invites us to find rest, to find refuge in Him.

[15 : 21] I think of Psalm 51, verse 10, where many of you know that verse, where it says, create in me a new heart and renew a right spirit, or renew a new spirit, depending upon the translation within me.

And even though that's a prayer of repentance, it's encouragement for us to ask God for a new heart. And a renewed spirit within us.

The third thing then is to grow and to bear fruit. The seed will grow on good soil and bear fruit, showing spiritual growth.

It's just like the verse that I was saying, you shall know them by their fruit. Now when we think about it, there's an example that I learned many years ago.

I took a seminary class that was talking about faith, and that you want to have faith like an oak tree, right? Where the roots are so deep.

[16 : 26] It's very difficult, right? Many of us can think of a tree that's had some very deep roots. Well, it's very difficult to uproot that tree. Let your faith be like that, that can withstand the storms of life or any season of life for that matter.

Well, you don't want to have that compared to that of a mushroom. You guys see a little mushroom? Is it really difficult to get a mushroom out?

You just flip it over, and sometimes you may have to pull a little bit, but in my experience, you just flip it over and you're on your way. And we don't want to have faith like that.

We want to have faith that is deeply rooted in God and His Word, and letting God work in and through our lives that we are becoming more like Him every single day, following in the footsteps of Christ.

Think about that. Think of how powerful God's Word is for our life, knowing that the Word transforms our lives.

[17 : 37] And so the seed will grow and it will bear fruit showing spiritual growth. That's why when I have the opening question here, what would it look like if our hearts were ready to receive God's Word, to grow deeply, and to flourish abundantly?

I speak of spiritual abundance. I'm not talking about, you know, we're all going to have millions and millions of dollars. No, I'm talking about spiritual abundance.

That's something for us to think about. You will recognize them by their fruit, and then of course in Galatians 5 verse 22 through 23, we even have the fruit of the Spirit.

And here's the other thing. Being transformed in the things of the Lord, it's not just the fruit of the Spirit, it's you being transformed. Right?

Recently I've been very, I feel the Lord's been really working in my heart from Hebrews chapter 5 and 6, which has been talking about focusing on the deeper things of God and not arguing over the elementary things.

[18 : 44] Do you know in Scripture, it says that the laying on of hands and baptism is an elementary thing? But yet that is something that people argue about more than, well in my experience, more than anything else.

But yet that's an elementary thing. And we as Christians are to grow in our faith, right? We are to bear fruit, we're to grow in our understanding of the Lord to the point where we lay aside these ridiculous elementary arguments.

We are to be baptized. That's important, but that shouldn't be something that we divide over. We should focus on the transformation that comes from the Lord, seeking the things that are higher, letting God work in and through us so that we can bear fruit.

And we, just like that image of Christ scattering the seed, we too can sow seeds to other people. Do you get it?

Does that make sense? Not only do we have Christ who is the great sower, every time the word is being proclaimed, Christ is the sowing of seeds, the scattering of seeds upon other soils.

[19 : 56] It is the continuing of the process in that. The fourth thing then is to sow the word to others. As you grow in Christ, you are called to scatter the seed of the word.

It is the proclaiming of the Gospel, it is the sharing of the good news, right? Sharing in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As you grow, scatter that seed, it reminds us of the Great Commission to go out and to make disciples.

Last week we talked about the Ministry of Reconciliation, which is sharing the Gospel. We're also called to share in our testimony how God works in our life. How has God worked in your life?

Have you shared that story with someone? I'm telling you, who you can speak to is remarkable, it's unique to you. Who you can reach out to may be different than who I can reach to, and the person next to you.

We are to be ambassadors for Christ, and we are to sow seeds with joy. Let's think of that. And in all this then, it comes then with the question of, well, what can we do to apply this, right?

[21 : 10] Well, the first thing is to, I want you to ask yourself the question then, what kind of soil represents my heart right now?

I encourage you to really think about that. Think of the four soils here. Only you can answer that question truthfully. It's between you and the Lord.

And I encourage you, be encouraged to have a heart that is open to God. Be encouraged to have a heart that is open to His Word and transformation that comes from Him.

The softening of the heart. For some of us, we're focused on the truth of God's Word. But maybe we need to focus on the love and the grace that comes from God.

Others, we might be focused on the grace and the love of Christ, but we need to focus on doubling down here. It's a balance between grace and truth.

[22 : 10] And so, think about that. Think about how where you are and how is your soil? How is your relationship with the Lord?

And the second thing then, is to move your heart to good soil. The first one is for the path is to be open to God.

These are the people who have hardened hearts. Certainly, if you have a hardened heart, I pray and we should pray that your heart will be softened and that your soil will no longer be solid like that, rejecting the seed.

Can you think of someone who has a hardened heart? Maybe it's yourself. Maybe it's something you need to reflect on. So be open to God, His Word and His salvation that is freely given by faith in Jesus Christ.

Think of Psalm 139 when it says, search me, oh God, think about that. For the rocky ground then, it is to grow deep roots.

[23 : 26] Some people who have superficial faith, they're so excited and that's great. Grow in that faith. You're already working on it, right?

That's good. You've got to have deeper roots. Remain in Him in all seasons. Let the roots be grown.

So that's something for us. Be rooted and built up in Christ. And we also have to think of times where there's the testing, the trials and the tribulations that come in our life.

Do you remain rooted even when times are bad in Christ? Do you remain rooted in Christ when things are good? That's the question.

And then there's, for those who have thorns in Christ, there is nothing to worry about. How many times do we see in Scripture where it says, be not afraid or some translations fear not, right?

[24 : 27] Think about that. So we're not to be afraid. We are to seek first the kingdom of God. We're not to be anxious. We are to trust in the Lord with everything that we are, right?

And not lean in our own understanding. I know you've probably heard me give this analogy before that, where you see that verse, trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not in your own understanding and all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your path straight.

The foundation of leaning is a wall, right? Trust in the Lord with all your heart. I would think you would say, and trust not in your own understanding.

But the leaning, our understanding is like a wall. Well, walls can be tipped over, but the foundation of Christ is a sure foundation, right?

We always think of the solid rock. That's something for us to think of. And we also have to be mindful that when we're concerned about the things of this world, it can distract us.

[25 : 36] And finally, we go to the good soil then. Bear fruit, right? Just like it says in Genesis, be fruitful and multiply, right? We always think of it having children, but we can also have spiritual implications as well.

Bear fruit and sow the seed for others. Be an ambassador for Christ. The first thing, the most important decision you can make is to make a decision for Christ and receive that seed.

Grow in Christ and let your light shine before others. Exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. Abide in Christ to bear much fruit.

And to sow the seeds with joy for others. And I want you to think about all of this, how important it is for us to get to a place where we receive the word, where we receive the seed.

And as I mentioned, think about where your heart is with God. How is your soil? I mean, let's put that image on there, the four soils, one more time.

[26 : 48] I want you to really reflect on this. This isn't literal, right? It's just an idea here. It's a spiritual truth though. It's a call for us to reflect on our lives, how our soil is, and to get to the place where we have good soil.

Let the Word of God work in and through you. Be on a path of holiness. Be on a path of becoming more like Him. Become more like Christ.

Produce those fruit. And I pray that for each and every one of us, those that are watching online and those here today, I pray that if you have a heart and heart, it will be softened.

I pray that if you have a superficial faith, that you will have a deeper faith. And I pray if you have weeds in your life, you will clear out those distractions and you focus on Christ.

And I pray that if you have good soil and you've been faithful to the Lord, which many of us have, that you continue to produce good fruit and you too can share in the good news of the Gospel, you can share in your testimony and share about the seed being the Word.

[28 : 08] Let Christ work in your life so that we can make a difference in this world in the name of Christ. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for this time and this opportunity to go over this incredible parable.

Speaking of the four soils, Father, I pray that each and every one of us, if our hearts are not right with you, may they become right with you.

I pray that if there's anyone that hasn't made a decision for Christ, may they make that decision for Christ. I pray for those that may have felt hurt or maybe they have just had that sense of frustration that there will be healing in their heart.

Father, we are just reminded of how you are good and you are the constant in our lives. May we believe in your Son Jesus Christ first and be on a path of being molded like you.

You are the potter and we are the clay. And I pray that these seeds of the Word will help us grow in our understanding of who you are, our understanding of the Word.

[29 : 26] This is such a simple parable yet there's such profound spiritual truths. And Father, as we sing this last song, may we lift up a shout of praise for who you are, God.

You are good and we love you so much for sending your Son Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. And all of these things we pray and we all say together, amen, amen.

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May God's blessings be with you.