

## **Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

How true it is that where Jesus builds a church, there Satan puts up a chapel. We hear this parable of our Lord. These words are, for us, words of life, words meant for our good, for our salvation. But as soon as we hear them, the devil goes on the attack. For with Jesus' own words, Satan attempts to turn us into judgmental Pharisees.

We hear this parable of the Sower and the Seed, and we immediately place ourselves in a different part of the field from where we place most others. It's easy for us to spot the rocky soil and the thorny soil among our friends and neighbors, and even among our family members. And we have no trouble identifying those who are the hardened path. But even as we are categorizing others, we are placing ourselves into that part of the field where the soil is good. "Why shouldn't we be the good soil?" we think to ourselves, "We're producing fruit. Maybe not a hundred-fold, but certainly upwards of thirty or sixty."

But if we are such good soil, why do we begin our worship service by saying that we are poor, worthless, sinners? The word "good" is simply not in our confession of sins. So why do we think that we are the good soil, but others are the bad soil?

The soil of the hardened path...we know such people--people whose hearts are stubborn. They hear the Word of God. They hear of Christ, but they just don't get it. It goes in one ear and out the other. People like this can be frustrating. And we tend to wash our hands of them. We write them off, and figure that God has written them off as well.

We all heard the words of such a person today. That's right, the soil of the hardened path was speaking today as our Epistle in Romans 8 was read from the lectern. The Apostle Paul--he was the soil of the hardened path. He heard the Word of Christ, but he stubbornly refused it. He turned violent against the church, persecuting the soil wherever the seed of the kingdom was producing growth. The disciples of Jesus had written him off, but not God. Jesus appeared to this hardened soil on the path to Damascus, and out of this hardened soil--the Apostle Paul--the seed of the kingdom produced growth--thirty, sixty, even one hundred-fold.

Then there's the soil that is full of rocks...we know such people. They believe until persecution comes. Their faith is a beautiful thing until it shrivels up under the scorching sun of fear and trouble. They do not stand up for Jesus. Instead, they fall away. They're weak, worthless...who needs them!

The Apostle Peter was such a man. He was the rocky ground. He walked out on the water toward Jesus. A beautiful act of faith! Until the waves came. Then he began to sink. He confessed Jesus to be the Son of God. A standout disciple he was! But then he turned around and tried to prevent Jesus from going to the Cross of Calvary. And there, on the way to the cross, this rock named Simon showed just how rocky his soil was. In the face of fear he denied his Lord three times.

The thorny soil...we know such people. They care more about the things of the world than the things of God. They would rather pursue wealth than the true riches of God's kingdom. They don't have much use for church because they always have better things to do, like making money

and enjoying life. We look down on such people. They do little to help and support the church because their soil is filled with thorns.

Zaccheus was such a man. So was the thief on the cross. They both were thieves. One stole legally. The other illegally. Both Zaccheus and the thief had little use for the things of God. Their hearts were full of thorns, for they loved money and the things money can buy. And yet both of these thorny-soiled souls are with Christ in heaven today. Jesus came to both men and sowed the seeds of the kingdom, and those seeds produced growth. Zaccheus returned the money that he stole and rejoiced in his Savior. The thief on the cross clung to the promise of paradise and he died in peace and joy.

You look at God's people throughout the Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. You look at the prophets, at the apostles, at all of Jesus' disciples, and you see soil that is bad--hardened, rocky, thorny. Where's the good soil? It's not them, and it's not us. Rather, we are poor, miserable sinners.

The good soil is Christ. Only He fully understands the words of His Father. Only He is soil capable of producing growth. Jesus, and only Jesus, is everything that is good. He is the good Seed. He is the rain that comes down from heaven which is good for the seed. And He is the good soil--the soil, and the only soil, in which the seed sprouts and grows to maturity and bears abundant fruit.

All the men and women in the Bible--Paul, Peter, Zaccheus, the thief, and all the others--were not good soil. But the good soil came to them, and the seed of the kingdom took root within them and bore much fruit in the harvest.

When I look at you, I see good soil. Not because you are good, but because you are in Christ. He is the good soil in which you live, and move, and have your being. And I don't care what you were before. And yes, I know that the stubborn hardened path still lives in your heart, as it lives in mine. And that there are rocks and thorns within you, as there are within me. But you are baptized into Christ. You belong to Him. He is your Savior who died for you and who lives in you. He forgives your sins. As He forgave Paul, and Peter, Zaccheus, and the thief, so He forgives you. Jesus does not count the rocks in your heart. He does not look at how many thorns are growing inside of you. He has taken you into His arms and placed you into His heart where there is, for you, only good soil. This is why His seed is growing within you. This is why you love Him, and you show your love by how you live. You are producing fruit, but really, it's Jesus, your good Seed and good soil producing fruit in and through you.

We don't want those rocks and thorns in our hearts. And we don't want that hardened path there. We want good soil. We want Jesus. And so the more of Jesus you receive--His words for you, His Holy Supper for you--the more His good soil becomes, for you, a place where the seed will grow. This is not my promise. It's His promise to you. Let's not give those rocks and thorns a chance. Immerse yourself in the good soil of Christ. When the harvest comes, you will have no regrets. Amen.