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**The Parable of the Soils - The Hard Heart**  
**Matthew 13:1-23**  
**January 15, 2017, Jeff Germo**

[Craig Woelke to read passage]

**[2]**

**Matthew 13:1-23 (NLT)**

**<sup>1</sup> Later that same day Jesus left the house and sat beside the lake. <sup>2</sup> A large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat there and taught as the people stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup> He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: “Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds.**

**[3]**

**<sup>4</sup> As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. <sup>5</sup> Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn’t have deep roots, they died.**

**[4]**

**<sup>7</sup> Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. <sup>8</sup> Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! <sup>9</sup> Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”**

**[5]**

**<sup>10</sup> His disciples came and asked him, “Why do you use parables when you talk to the people?” <sup>11</sup> He replied, “You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others are not. <sup>12</sup> To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.**

**[6]**

**<sup>13</sup> That is why I use these parables, For they look, but they don’t really see. They hear, but they don’t really listen or understand. <sup>14</sup> This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that says, ‘When you hear what I say, you will not understand. When you see what I do, you will not comprehend. <sup>15</sup> For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes — so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.’**

**[7]**

**<sup>16</sup> “But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. <sup>17</sup> I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn’t see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn’t hear it.**

**[8]**

**<sup>18</sup> “Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: <sup>19</sup> The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don’t understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. <sup>20</sup> The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy.**

**[9]**

**<sup>21</sup> But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word. <sup>22</sup> The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God’s word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. <sup>23</sup> 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!”**

Ruthie and I have planted a garden every year for the last five years or so. We love the idea of living off the land. There is something thrilling about planting a little seed in the ground and having it grow to maturity so we can harvest it and then put the produce on our plates to enjoy. I don't know what it is. I think it is a God-given desire we have to be like him. He planted the first garden in Eden at the beginning of time and it was a perfect garden, before there was such a thing as weeds, or pests. There was the just the right amount of sun and moisture. The conditions were perfect for every kind of plant to grow without sweating over it. Adam and Eve simply had to pick the fruit and veggies as they needed.

That is sort of what I imagined our garden was going to be like. The first year we planted a garden we did okay. That was in Tsawwassen. We grew a variety of vegetables and they did pretty good. Then two years ago we planted our garden in Campbell River. We were very excited about our new home. We had a couple plum trees, an apple tree, we bought another apple tree and transplanted it, as well as a pear tree. We bought some blueberry and raspberry bushes, we planted grape and blackberry vines. We built some raised garden beds. We bought new soil and organic seeds. And then on the long weekend in May we planted our garden. We used organic fertilizer. We had visions of the Garden of Eden so we didn't want any harmful chemicals in our garden.

Then we watered the garden faithfully and a few days later we saw some of the first plants break through the soil. It was so exciting. Soon we would be reaping the bounty of our own Garden of Eden right in our own back yard.

Well, our vision of Eden did not exactly grow to fruition. Some of our vegetables and fruit did okay, but most, not so much. Two years ago we got 11 pears from our pear tree. Last year — none. Two years ago we got about thirty apples from our apple tree. Last year — none. Two years ago our potatoes did okay. Last year we got a bowl full. Our beets grew to the size of grapes. We got no plums. We got a few small carrots, a few zucchini, a small number of squash, and tomatoes. We got about five blackberries. Our grapes did okay, but the raccoons got most of them. Our peas did fantastic, but then we went on vacation for a couple weeks and the sun scorched them and they shrivelled up and died.

Our apple tree, the old one that produced zero apples for us, we found out was diseased with a European Canker and apparently we would never be able to plant another apple tree in that soil again. It was so diseased that I was able to shake it out and break off the trunk at the base with no trouble at all.

What we learned from all this, among other things, is that if you don't have the right soil conditions for a particular plant it will not grow to maturity. And there are so many variables. I thought all we would have to do is plant the seeds and add water and up would pop the Garden of Eden. Apparently not.

Well, the same is true in the spiritual realm. In order to grow to maturity, the soil of our heart needs to be right. That is what this parable of Jesus is all about. And, by the way, if you were not here for last week's introductory sermon, I would highly recommend you watch it or listen to it online. It's an important sermon where we looked at why Jesus told parables, and it is foundational for the rest of the sermons in this series.

Just as a reminder,

**[10]**

**The main reason Jesus told parables was to grab the attention of people in the crowd of listeners who were out of rhythm with the heartbeat of God to shock them into alignment with Jesus' kingdom-kind-of-life.**

**[11]**

So, as we said last week, Jesus' parables were like **spiritual defibrillators**. They were meant to catch the attention of his listeners and shock them from fantasy to reality, from death to life. They were meant

to wake people up and hopefully open their eyes to see that they were heading for destruction and offending the heart of God.

[12]

In *The Parable of the Soils*, Jesus describes **four heart conditions** using soil as a metaphor. Three of the soil conditions lead to the death of the plant and only one of them lead to a healthy harvest. Today we are going to just look at the first soil condition, the hard packed soil.

Before we dig into the passage let me fill in some of the context for you.

Just prior to Jesus telling the parable, the Pharisees and teachers of the law accused Jesus of being used by Satan to perform his miracles and healings. He tells them how ridiculous that is. If that was true, he said, he would be fighting against himself. That would be illogical. Then he zeros in on their hearts:

[13]

**Matthew 12:33–37 (NLT)**

***33 “A tree is identified by its fruit. If a tree is good, its fruit will be good. If a tree is bad, its fruit will be bad.***

So, here he uses the metaphor of a tree and its fruit to talk about the hard hearted Pharisees. In other words, if you compared the results of what Jesus was doing with what the Pharisees and religious teachers were doing, the religious leaders would be shown for what they really were; hard hearted religious bullies.

[14]

***34 You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what you say. 35 A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. 36 And I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak. 37 The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you.”***

Immediately after this, from verse 38 and following, Matthew recounts a time when the religious teachers and Pharisees came to try to trap Jesus again by asking him to prove his authority by performing a miracle, which is interesting, because earlier they said he was doing those miracles by the power of Satan. They use some mental gymnastic manipulation to try and trap Jesus. He doesn't want to play their little game. He says the only sign he would give them was that he would be raised from the dead after three days. He then goes on to rebuke them for not listening to him and for refusing to repent.

Then he says something quite confusing.

[15]

**Matthew 12:43–45 (NLT)**

***43 “When an evil spirit leaves a person, it goes into the desert, seeking rest but finding none. 44 Then it says, ‘I will return to the person I came from.’ So it returns and finds its former home empty, swept, and in order. 45 Then the spirit finds seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they all enter the person and live there. And so that person is worse off than before. That will be the experience of this evil generation.”***

What was Jesus saying by this? He was saying that the hard heart of the religious teachers and Pharisees was **a spiritual problem**. They were not of God. *They* were the ones who were being used by Satan, the enemy of our souls.

Immediately following this encounter something else happens. Listen to this.

[16]

**Matthew 12:46–49 (NLT)**

***46 As Jesus was speaking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. 47 Someone told Jesus, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, and they want to speak to you.” 48 Jesus asked, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” 49 Then he pointed to his disciples and said, “Look, these are my mother and brothers. 50 Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!”***

Now, that seems like a very strange response for Jesus to give to his family, doesn't it? Imagine you are at Starbucks and some of your family comes looking for you. They ask a barista if they have seen you and she yells out your name and says, “Your family is here looking for you.” And you look around and point at the other people hanging out in Starbucks and say, “These people here, they are my family.” That would be a little bit strange, or perhaps a lot strange.

It sounds like that is what happened, but it's not. There's something else happening that Matthew doesn't include in his version of the story. Look at what Mark includes in the parallel account in *his* Gospel. Same story, extra details.

[17]

**Mark 3:21 (NLT)**

***21 When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him away. “He’s out of his mind,” they said.***

His family, at this point in his ministry, think he's crazy. Later on, after Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead, they certainly believed. As a matter of fact, his little brother James wrote book of James in the New Testament and was later martyred for his faith in Jesus. But, at this point they think he is nuts.

So, we have the religious teachers and the Pharisees accusing Jesus of being possessed by the devil, and then Jesus' family comes looking for him and tries to restrain him because they think he is out of his mind. In response he says,

[18]

***“Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” 49 Then he pointed to his disciples and said, “Look, these are my mother and brothers. 50 Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!”***

“Those who belong to me are the ones who obey God”, Jesus says. “My family are the ones who listen, receive and obey my words.”

It was immediately after this that Jesus told the parable of the soils. He is telling it in response to the various people in the crowd who will not receive the truth. He was trying to shake them up and wake them from their spiritual slumber.

[19]

We've already read the passage, so I'm not going to read the whole thing again. But let me just paraphrase what Jesus said.

[20]

Throw yourself back two thousand years to first century Palestine. They didn't have modern machinery to till their soil or plant their seed. They would have had a single blade plow pulled behind an ox to cultivate the field, and they would have had to seed by hand.

A farmer would likely have had his seed in a shoulder bag. He would reach into the bag and spread the seed as he walked along. It wasn't a very precise process. In between the rows would have been paths to walk on and as he threw the seed down some of it would have landed on the hard packed path. Those seeds would have been in the open and easy pickings for the birds.

In Jesus's explanation of the parable he likened the birds to Satan snatching the Word of God away from people because their hearts were too hard to receive it.

Let me refer you back to what Jesus said to the hard hearted religious teachers and Pharisees.

[21]

**Matthew 12:43–45 (NLT)**

*<sup>43</sup> “When an evil spirit leaves a person, it goes into the desert, seeking rest but finding none. <sup>44</sup> Then it says, ‘I will return to the person I came from.’ So it returns and finds its former home empty, swept, and in order. <sup>45</sup> Then the spirit finds seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they all enter the person and live there. And so that person is worse off than before. That will be the experience of this evil generation.”*

What was Jesus saying? **He was saying that hard hearts are a spiritual problem.**

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If your heart is not soft to God's Word, you have a spiritual problem. The Gospel of Jesus cannot penetrate. If you are filled with anger, or jealousy, or bitterness or resentment, you have a spiritual problem. This is not something to take lightly. If you use your tongue to slander or gossip about other people, **you have a spiritual problem.** If you go around spreading disunity and whining and complaining and being generally negative, you have a spiritual problem. You have a hard heart.

This is very serious stuff. If you continue to close your ears to what Jesus is saying, your heart will get harder and harder the longer you refuse to listen.

If you belong to Jesus, you have his Spirit living in you. He will speak to you and let you know when your heart is misaligned with his.

The Holy Spirit whispers to you, “Don't do it.” You hear, but you don't listen. Your heart gets harder. Or, someone hurts you. You don't deal with it. Instead you remain bitter. Your heart gets hard. You don't listen to Jesus. Pretty soon you can no longer hear his voice. It is imperceptible. And the problem with hard hearted people is that many times they are blind to the fact. They have become so set in their ways from continually refusing to listen to the voice of Jesus that they have become spiritually blind. That is how Jesus accurately described the Pharisees and religious teachers of his day.

It is so hard to reach hard hearted religious people.

[23]

Remember Jesus' story we call *The Parable of the Prodigal Son*. We tell it as if there is only one wayward son. Truthfully, there were two wayward sons. The hard hearted, bitter son who stayed home with his father was more lost than his younger brother who left home with an early inheritance and squandered it recklessly. The younger brother finally came to his senses and returned home to cast himself at the mercy of his father, not expecting that his father would welcome him. His father did of course.

He was so excited that his son had returned that he, not only welcomed him with open arms, he threw a party for him. Meanwhile his older brother heard about the party. Look what happened:

[24]

**Luke 15:28–32 (NLT)**

***28 “The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him, 29 but he replied, ‘All these years I’ve slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. 30 Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!’***

***[25]***

***31 “His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. 32 We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’ ”***

That is how Jesus ends this parable. He leaves it hanging. We are left to wonder, “Will the older brother finally see the light and stop judging, and instead celebrate that his younger brother has come home, and then move emotionally closer to his father? Jesus leaves those questions open. It’s a sad ending to this very hopeful story.

This is the problem with hard hearted religious people. They constantly look at others and judge. They don’t apply Scripture to their own hearts. They continually want others to change, but never see the need themselves. They hold themselves up as the standard by which everyone else should be judged. They are almost impossible to reach with the Gospel of Jesus because they think they don’t need him.

***[26]***

Here’s the good news. It is not impossible with God. I know, because I used to be one of them. It took years and years of God teaching one painful lesson after another, stripping me of everything I thought would justify my existence. I had to learn that I am not the judge. I had to learn that I am no better than anyone else. I had to learn that all the good things I did *for* God, in an attempt to justify myself before him were just empty religion. It was an extremely difficult lesson. Let me tell you, I would never go back to what I was - never.

I also know it’s possible because I have seen God do the same transformation in the hearts of others. In another church where I was the pastor, many years ago. I preached a sermon on the *One Anothers*, in the New Testament, which I am going to preach at the end of this sermon series. The *One Anothers*, are every occurrence in the New Testament where any of the writers tell us how to treat each other.

For example, “Love one another,” “Be at peace with one another,” “Live in harmony with one another,” “Carry one another’s burdens,” and things like that. There are many such admonitions in the New Testament. The week after I preached that sermon an older lady from the church contacted me and told me the sermon had spoken to her.

She told me that she had always been a very negative person who continually judged others. She could be down right nasty, but always justified her behaviour, calling it “righteous indignation.” She said the Lord spoke to her through his Word while I was preaching and she was convicted about it all week and had to call me and confess her sin. I asked if she would be willing to share her testimony at church the next Sunday and she very bravely told about how she had been so blind to her own sin and negativity. She was someone people avoided because every time she opened her mouth toxic stuff would ooze out.

I’ve talked to the pastor who was at the church a few years ago and he said she has become his greatest cheerleader. He said the change is nothing short of a miracle. He said that she is such a joy to be around now. People no longer avoid her. That, my friends, is what God can do.

Jesus described in John 15 how this happens.

***[27]***

## John 15:1–5 (NLT)

<sup>1</sup> *"I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. <sup>3</sup> You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you.*

[28]

*<sup>4</sup> Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. <sup>5</sup> "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.*

Every single person in this room needs this pruning Jesus offers.

John said in **1 John 1:8 (NLT)**, *"If we claim to be without sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth."*

There are times when each of us has hearts that are hard. We need to let Jesus prune us. The only way it is possible is by spending time with Jesus and giving him permission to change you. It's not easy. It takes a tremendous amount of courage. It takes humility. It is painful. But it is so worth it to get the life you've always wanted and maybe didn't even know it.

This is why we have our Growth Groups. If you are not yet in a Growth Group talk with Adrian and he will make sure you get in one where you can learn to be comfortable being uncomfortable and grow in community with others who struggle just like you. Everyone struggles with loving. None of us are very good at it. There are only two kinds of people in the world; those who struggle and know it, and those who pretend they don't.

Jesus came so we could live in freedom. "The truth will set you free," he said. As long as we pretend we are okay we will live frustrated lives. Jesus called us to something much more exciting, the abundant, full, complete life with him, walking in the light of fellowship with one another.



**Parable of the Soils II**  
***The Hard Heart***  
**Matthew 13:1-23**  
**Week of January 15, 2017**

**Objective of this study:** To check our hearts for hardness and to move towards God's heart for us.

[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 **Psalm 51:1-13** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

**Welcome**

The Grinch or Scrooge?

[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 12:22-13:23; read also Mark 3:21.
  1. What events give context to Jesus' *Parable of the Soils*? How do these conversations lead to Jesus telling this parable?
  2. Who in Jesus' audience was the parable directed at?
  3. In thinking about the hard packed soil on the pathway, how does Jesus relate it to the human heart?

**Work (30-45 minutes)**

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

1. What is some evidence of having a hard heart? Think of behaviours, attitudes...
2. What some different ways a hard heart will hurt relationships? How would you think about others and relate to them?
3. How does a person develop a hard heart?
4. Read John 15:1-5, and 1 John 1:6-9.
5. What is a good response when the Holy Spirit (through His Word, or through another Jesus follower) shows you areas your heart is hard?
6. What are some ways you can prevent developing a hard heart?
7. What are some things you can do to ensure your heart remains soft?
8. Spend the rest of the time in prayer for each other.