

Title: “It’s All About the Soil”

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Is. 55:10-13 & Matthew 13:18-23

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Lesson: *This is not about tossing seed (Gospel) haphazardly with disregard to where it lands. It is about helping to prepare the soil to receive the seed. To carry the parable a bit farther - it is about the farmer preparing the ground - every bit of it that he can in preparation for the seed. The same water/blood that feeds the seed in the field is the same one that runs off of the hard path, never permeating the ground. It's the same one that feeds the seed in the rocky ground and among the thorns. This water/blood covers all. How it is received is what makes the difference. We are to prepare the field. Do you plant or do you throw?*

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

A young man, deciding that he was going to be a chicken farmer, purchased 100 chickens from an old man. He rounded them up all up and took them to his farm. Several weeks later he called the old man, frustrated because the fruits of his labor were proving to be anything but. That afternoon the old man met him at the farm and in confusion he looked out across a field that was void of even a single chicken. Before he could inquire about the location of all the birds, the young man turned to him and said, exasperated: “I just don’t know what’s going on. They are not growing! Did I plant them too deep or did I not water them enough?”

I think we discovered the problem here, and it has nothing to do with the chickens that were “planted” or old man from where they came. The problem resides firmly within the young man and his inability to properly plant and nurture the seed (or chickens, as it is in his case). You see, success or failure of a fruitful harvest rests squarely upon his shoulders. Now, for chickens or vegetables, the risk might be considered low, but for eternal souls, the risk of “planting it wrong” is terrifying and a responsibility too great for me to accept. If it is really up to me, I’d rather not try to plant a single seed of the Gospel than risk messing up planting one.

But God assures us that we can’t single handedly destroy the plan he has for any person. We read in Isaiah today:

As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
¹¹so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

You see, if God wanted those chickens to grow, he would have had them grow. Right from the ground they would have sprouted and multiplied to the old man's amazement. And it is the same with people. We are called to bring the great news of the gospel to all those who will listen, but we are not to concern ourselves with the ultimate result of these efforts. God's word will not return empty; it will not return void. But that doesn't mean that we don't have some responsibility in how we plant. We can't just go out into the field with a sack full of gospel seeds and toss it carelessly. Or, to put it another way, our *goal* cannot be to return home with an empty sack, congratulating ourselves on a job quickly finished. No!

¹⁸ "Listen [again] to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. 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. ²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it."

Our goal is to plant every seed, and to do everything we can to cultivate the soil, to nurture and care for the seed that we have planted. Without the seed, without the Gospel, there is nothing but barren land. And without the seed, there would *never* be anything but barren land. That's exactly why Jesus descended from heaven, became man, lived a perfect life, and took on our sin: because there was no good soil to be found on all the Earth! There weren't even rocky or thorny patches - it was all just hardened ground, ground that rejected the very seed that God wanted to plant. But Christ came to Earth, picked up his cross, and planted it the middle of that field of sin, and there, in the midst of his enemies, in the abandonment of the father, he received the wrath that we deserved. In that field, from that cross, his blood fell upon the hardened ground and softened it, making it possible for seed to grow once again.

And that softened ground is our mission field. It starts in our home with our family and extends through our neighborhood, state, country, and world. It is a field where fertile soil can be found because the gospel message has already been planted and taken root - where the richness of God's harvest is visible, but there are also areas that are hardening, where the blood of Christ is drying and nothing good is growing. And it's this field, the good and the bad, that we are placed into. And we are called not simply to toss seed but to *plant*. To walk into the field, into the midst of the thorny bushes of life, and the rocky paths of consumerism, and build relationships. To care not just about the message but about the receiver. To do everything we can to *prepare* their ears and hearts, the soil, to receive the seed and to understand that which is expected to grow. You see, we are not just farmers, we are also cultivators. We are people that get our hands dirty and work the ground in preparation for the wonderful seed of the Gospel.

And so today I challenge you. Go out into the world, mark out your field - start small. Maybe it is your family, or your neighbor, or your coworker, but mark out your field and study the soil. And then, determine what you can do to prepare it for the seed of Christ.

Please pray with me.

Lord,

Continue to work in me to keep the soil of my soul receptive to your seed.

Continue to work in me to cultivate and prepare the soil of others so that they, too receive you.

Give me hands that stay dirty, a sack that never empties, and a heart that never stops serving.

And as I look back from where I came, show me a harvest that you produced through me.

Amen.