

A Diagnosis of the Soils, Part 1

Scripture: Mark 4:1–20

Code: 41-18

Well, let's open the Word of God to the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Mark, and we're going to continue to take a look at what is known as the parable of the soils. The parable of the soils, a very familiar parable to students of Scripture. We're going to dig a little deep into the dirt, if you will, on this one – go down into the soil and discover all that we can as to its meaning.

But let me remind you of the story itself in the opening eight verses. Mark 4, "He began to teach again by the sea." That is Jesus by the Sea of Galilee. "And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that got into a boat in the sea and sat down. And the whole crowd was by the sea on the land.

"And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching, 'Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow. As he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came up and ate it up. Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

"Other seed fell among the thorns" – or the weeds - "and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."

Everybody would have understood the story. Everybody was familiar with this. This is Galilee; this is around the Sea of Galilee where there were fields as far as the eye could see. Everybody had experienced this kind of thing as a part of their daily routine all the years of their lives. The story is simple enough. They all knew that not all the seed that was thrown was going to be productive. They knew about hard ground, and rocky ground, and weedy ground, and good ground.

So, in that sense, it was a very, very simple story about very familiar things. However, the last statement of Jesus would have been the wow factor in the story where He said, "Other seed fell into the good soil, and they grew up and increased and yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."

That's the wow factor because that kind of product would never happen. No planting ever had that kind of return. So, that was not ordinary; that was uncommon, and that caused them to wonder, "What is He talking about?"

On the one hand, the sower looks like He is very unsuccessful in the first three soils. But in the last three, the success is beyond comprehension and expectation. It was not uncommon for Jesus to include in His parables that kind of an element that shocked people, and this would be that very thing.

Simply enough, it's a story about soils and their difference. Simply some are nonproductive, some are very productive. Simple enough. But what's it talking about? What's the point of the story? This parable is designed to help us understand Gospel evangelism. That's what it's designed to do. It's included in Matthew 13, it's in Luke 8, and it's here. It's given in Matthew, Mark, and Luke; it's so very important it needs to be repeated three times.

Now, we all know that the Church exists in the world for the purpose of evangelism. We're here to fulfill the Great Commission to go into all the world, preaching the Gospel to every creature, make disciples of all nations. That's what we do. We have been called to this mandate. That is the chief goal of the Church in the world. All other goals are intermediate goals. Becoming holy, being obedient, worshipping the Lord, all these things – coming to spiritual maturity – are to make us into the kind of Christians who have an effective witness because our lives back up our testimony.

But the ultimate end for which we live in the world is the proclamation of the Gospel. So, this is right at the heart of why we're here and what we do. We proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what the Church does. Our call is not into politics or morality; it is to the proclamation of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. And so, this is a very, very important parable for us to learn how the responses are going to come.

Here we are left in the world. Every generation of Christians - one after the other, after the other, until the Lord comes - with this responsibility to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth. And frankly, we can get very frustrated at it.

For many Christians, the effort seems disappointing, daunting, discouraging; we even get to the point where we give up. Maybe that's because we don't really understand what this parable is telling us. There are efforts to fix this dilemma that evangelicals are in. We give out the Gospel and it's rejected or it's received superficially, or it's received temporarily.

What's the problem? Why is that kind of response so consistently true? Contemporary evangelical mood would say, "It's our fault; the fault is with us. We're out of touch with the culture. We're out of touch with style. We're out of touch with the psychology of how people think, or the psychology of sales, or the psychology of overcoming consumer resistance. We're out of touch with popular thinking. We're not connecting with people.

"Beside the fact that we're really inept sowers, the seed is offensive; the message is offensive. I mean if you want to fill your building, if you want to fill your 20,000 stadium with all 20,000 seats occupied, you're going to have to come up with another message than the one about hell, and damnation, and judgment, and repentance, etcetera. We got to start talking about something that appeals to people on the level of their self-desires, their felt needs, their personal longings. We need a more acceptable message, and we certainly need more cultural savvy.

"In other words, in the language of the parable, the problem is with the sower, and the probably is with the seed. In the case of the sower, well, the sower might need a new wardrobe. Really, might need a black T-shirt with a skull and crossbones, and jeans with holes in the knees. That'll do it. And how about maybe he needs a designer seed bag? And then, if you can just look like that, and put rock music in the background, consumer resistance will fade away."

Really? So feverishly misguided are efforts in this direction that they're everywhere, trying to fix the sower and the seed. It's a waste of time. Absolute waste of time. The seed is perfect, first of all, and if you do anything to alter it, you've just corrupted it. A mutated Gospel is no Gospel. Can't tamper with the Gospel. And any sower, with any wardrobe and any seed bag will do as long as he or she is sowing the Gospel.

Why? Because Jesus is telling us here the issue is not the sower, and it's not the seed; it's the soil. The issue is the soil. The issue is the heart. That's the issue. We are so bent on the style of the sower in creating some kind of synthetic, acceptable seed, that we've mutated the Gospel into such a corrupted form that it no longer has the power to save because it isn't the true Gospel.

I've become continually exercised about this, to the degree that I'm in the process, even as I speak, of putting together a document that I'm going to get somewhere – I don't know, Newsweek magazine, The Wall Street Journal, somebody – send it to a lot of places and say, "I just want to make it clear that the kind of Christianity that you see on the television, with the prosperity gospel and all of that other stuff, is not Christianity; it's not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and we want to distance ourselves from it." Somebody needs to know that's not Christianity; that's not biblical Christianity; that's not historical Christianity. Biblical, historical Christianity is the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, preached in its purity and its clarity. The Church won't do anything about it, seemingly. Christian leaders don't want to address the issue. So, maybe we can get the world to take a look at it.

So, that's what this is about. On the one hand, proclamation of the Gospel can be a little bit discouraging. Right? You're going to run into the hard ground. You're going to run into the superficial, where somebody responds for a moment. It doesn't last very long, and they're gone. You're going to run into the person who makes a temporary commitment, but because they never really let go of what they truly love – the things of the world – they also disappear. It's very discouraging. We've all been there. We've done that; we've seen that.

But on the other hand, you can't forget the supernatural half of the story. Right? Where the soil is prepared by God, the results are staggering. There's enough motivation in the 30, 60, 100 to keep us going. You got to get to that part of the parable, and we will someday. Not today.

Now, so that's the parable, and that's kind of the intent of the parable. And we talked about that two weeks ago. Let's look at verses 9 to 13. We're just reviewing now. The hearers. Jesus says in verse 9, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." That's a very important comment, and we've talked about it a little bit last time, so I won't go over that again. Not everybody can get the message obviously.

As I told you, a parable unexplained is a riddle, and if you don't explain this, if you don't explain what you mean by it, then I can't even fathom its significance. But He says it's limited. This is limited to those who have the ears to hear. And then it immediately introduces us to those who do.

Verse 10, "As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the Twelve, began asking Him about the parables." The ones who had the ears to hear were the ones who believed in Him. He doesn't cast His pearls before swine. He now speaks in parables to the crowd. Go back to verse 1; the crowd is so large He has to get off the shore in a boat in order to keep from being crushed. And they all heard the story, but not until He was alone with His disciples and the Twelve did they get an

explanation. The understanding of the truth is not for everyone; it is for His followers.

In verse 11, He explains it. He was saying to them, “To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables.” Wow. Now, let me stop there and tell you something. That, dear friends, is a judgment. That is a judgment. Absolutely a judgment. Jesus didn’t always speak to the crowd in parables. This is a change. This is a shift. He spoke to them clearly, told them the truth, revealed the Gospel of salvation by faith, called for repentance, belief in Him as the Messiah. But they rejected Him. Their rejection has reached a final point, as we saw back in chapter 3 – remember? – when they said, “He does what He does by the power of Satan.” And the leaders said it, and the people bought into it.

They are now on the outside. And the implication is they’re fixed on the outside, because He quotes from Isaiah 6:9, “Seeing, they may see and not perceive; hearing, they may hear and not understand” – look at this – “otherwise they might return and be forgiven.” Whoa. Now, you know you’ve gone too far when God Himself prevents you from believing and being forgiven. They had gone so far - so far that the door was shut. They were only going to be hearing Him speak in parables that were unexplained.

Now He hides the truth from them. In Matthew chapter 13, it’s worth reading the verses 34 and 35 of that chapter. Matthew’s including these words from Jesus in this same context. It says in verse 34, “All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables. He didn’t speak to them without a parable.” This is a tremendously important turning point. All they get now are riddles they can’t understand. Because they won’t understand; they can’t understand.

It’s like Pharaoh hardened his heart, and now God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Why? He didn’t speak to them without a parable to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet. This is a fulfillment of prophesy. Verse 35, “I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world.” That’s a prophesy from Psalm 78. That’s Psalm 78, verse 2.

Let me tell you something interesting about that. Psalm 78, verse 2. Psalm 78 introduces a parable, a dark saying, a hidden saying that is then the basis of a judgment pronounced on Israel. Now, if you follow that idea along in the Old Testament, I’m going to tell you something you need to think about; you can look at it when you read your Old Testament in the future. Parables in the Old Testament are connected to judgment. Parables in the Old Testament are connected to judgment. Psalm 78 is that illustration. It is a dark saying; it is a hidden saying; it is a parable. It’s stated to be a parable in verse 2.

The parable is given, and the parable then is a picture of Israel’s judgment when you come to 2 Samuel, chapter 12. Nathan tells David a parable, a parable about a man. A man who had some sheep. A neighbor who stole his sheep, etcetera, etcetera. And that is a parable that ends up in a pronouncement of judgment on David.

In Judges chapter 9, verses 1 to 21, Gideon’s son, Jotham, tells a parable to the men of Shechem because they had chosen the murderous Abimelech to be their king, and killed all his brothers. And the parable is told, and then it is explained as divine judgment coming on those sinful people.

In Ezekiel chapter 17 and chapter 24, you have Ezekiel giving a parable that is explained as a

judgment. In Isaiah chapter 5 and chapter 6, you have Isaiah giving a parable that begins in chapter 5 about the vineyard. And the question is even asked, "What is this vineyard? And who is He talking about? And what's going on here?" And He pronounces the Babylonian judgment on Israel. Their captivity when they were hauled into Babylon is the meaning of the parable.

So, what our Lord is doing here, this is a significant turning point in His ministry. When he starts talking in parables, He is saying, "Judgment has come." They had rejected when they could understand, and now they can't understand. These parables are judgments on Israel's rejection.

They cannot understand; they cannot comprehend; they cannot then turn and be forgiven. And their judgment will come, and their judgment did come in 70 A.D. in the destruction of Israel. And those who were still alive by then would very likely have been slaughtered and catapulted into a godless hell. And this is a very critical moment in the life of the ministry of our Lord Jesus. And He uses the illustration of Isaiah, because that's such a dramatic parallel, because that's a parable in chapter 5 that ends up in a pronouncement of judgment at the end of chapter 5 and on into chapter 6.

So, Jesus is going to speak to His own and explain this parable. It's critical for them because they need to know what to expect. You can imagine that having watched Jesus do evangelism, what do you think they would have concluded? Well, what did they conclude? I told you that two weeks ago. They came to Him and said, "Why are so few being saved? What's going on here? You know, You're supposed to be the King, and this is supposed to be the kingdom. This is the kingdom having arrived. The kingdom is broken into human history. The Messiah is here. Well, nothing's happening. What's going on?"

And the first three kinds of soil, that was nothing new. Nothing new at all. They saw the health record ground in the Pharisees. They saw the superficial ground in a lot of other folks; some disciples who followed for a little while and went away. They saw that.

Well, what our Lord wants them to see in the story is the thirty, sixty, hundredfold. That you can't see it now, but you are going to see it in the future. In fact, the next few sections in this chapter in Mark 4 kind of build on this, particularly verses 26 to 29, where it talks about you sow and you go to bed, and the crop comes up because there are powers beyond you that produce it. And it's going to grow. It's even going to grow like the next parable - the mustard seed – starting small, becoming huge.

So, this is a parable meant to encourage. It's meant to explain the resistance and the rejection, but to encourage with the great, inexplicable results.

So, let's go to the explanation in verse 14. The explanation. In verse 13, "He said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable?'" Of course no; it needed to be explained. "'How will you understand all the parables?'" You have to have an explanation for everything.

Verse 14, "'The sower sows the Word.'" Now, let's first of all look at the sower. What does it say about the sower? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. It doesn't say what kind of clothes he wore or what kind of bag he had. It's just anybody who sows, anybody faithful to proclaim the Word is a sower.

All of us do that; we're all commanded to do that. And if you, for any minute, think that it's to your style, or it's connected to your personality, or it's connected to your wardrobe, or it's connected to the

music, you better think again. You better think again. This is just the sower, and the sower is defined as simply somebody who sows the Word. Anybody who throws the Word.

What is – what is the issue then? The seed? The seed is the Word. “The seed” – says Luke 8:11, Luke’s parallel is the Spirit of God. It is the Word from God; the saving Gospel; the Word of the kingdom, if you will; the Gospel of the kingdom; the message that God has sent; the biblical Gospel. Can we say that? It’s the biblical message.

“Faith comes by hearing the Word,” Romans 10. “You’re begotten again” - 1 Peter 1:23 – “by the Word.” In 2 Peter 1, it says that everything pertaining to life and godliness has been granted to us through the true knowledge of Him. And that true knowledge of Him is revealed in Scripture.

So, the sower is anybody who sows the seed. The seed is the Word of God. I don’t need to beg the issue, but 1 Thessalonians 2:13 – you remember? – Paul says, concerning the Thessalonian believers, that he is so grateful; he’s rejoicing in the Lord because they received – he says in chapter 2, verse 13 – “the Word of God which you heard from us; you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the Word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.” It’s the Word that has the power. You all agree with that?

Paul says in Romans, “We’re not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation.” The power is in the Word. Any sower who sows the Word therefore wields the power. If you follow this through the book of Acts, you come into chapter 4, verse 31. And what do they do? They proclaim the Word of God. Chapter 6, verse 7, what do they do? They proclaim the Word of God. Chapter 8, verse 14, they proclaim the Word of God. Chapter 11, verse 1; chapter 12, verse 24; chapter 13, verse 5, verse 44. On and on they said nothing but the Word of God. The word that came from God, the biblical Gospel. This is the seed, the living and abiding Word of God by which we are given life.

So, the issue in the story here is not the sower. It doesn’t do any good to tamper with the sower. And you certainly don’t want to tamper with the seed. To say something as foolish as, “Well, we’d be much more effective if we changed our style, or if we changed our message is ludicrous when compared with the simplicity of this parable. The issue does not lie with the sower; it is irrelevant. The sower’s personality, the sower’s wardrobe, the sower’s style. There’s only one possible seed containing the power, and that’s the true Gospel.

So, the issue in the variables here is what? The soil. The soil. I’m amazed at how many people - who would affirm reformed theology, would affirm the sovereignty of God in salvation - who don’t seem to get this, don’t seem to make the connection. The issue is the soil.

And when we’re talking about soil here, what does that refer to? Matthew 13:19 tells us that the soil is the heart in the parallel passage in Matthew. The soil is the heart. And that’s exactly right - man’s heart or man’s mind. The Gospel going into the mind of the person. So, the basic truth of the parable is this: the result of all Gospel proclamation by anybody and everybody is dependent on the condition of the heart. Did you get that? It depends on the condition of the heart.

Don’t pat yourself on the back. It’s not you; it’s the heart. And if you think you can do something about the heart, guess again, because you can’t. I can throw seed, but only God can plow soil. Only

God, by the Holy Spirit, can plow the heart. That's a foundational truth to understand. "No man comes to Me except the Father draws Him." And by the way, in that John 6 passage, Jesus repeats that same statement in another form in the sixth chapter, and it's worth being reminded. John 6:65, "For this reason I've said to you no one can come to Me unless it's been granted him from the Father." Unless it's been granted him from the Father.

So, the only way that they're going to be – there's going to be good soil is that it's divinely prepared by God. Chosen. Prepared. The Spirit of God is come and done conviction. The heart is made ready and there's a response. You couldn't possibly imagine that it would be any kind of human ingenuity that could make this happen - certainly if you're talking about thirty, sixty, a hundredfold - because what's happening in the hearts that are responsive is a massive explosion of a harvest; something that just would have to be by divine power. And that has to be by divine preparation.

So, are you starting to get a feel for what this is about? This is both clarifying to us and encouraging is it not? Now we're going to understand why people respond the way they respond; and we're going to be encouraged that when people do respond, it is supernatural, and their lives explode in a spiritual harvest. We aren't talking about influence.

Talk about people who have influence – you know, when somebody becomes a Christian, comes to know the Lord Jesus Christ, that person has such power coming through them by the Spirit of God resident in them, and the truth that they proclaim, that God will use them to bring others to Christ, and others to Christ, and it just becomes exponential, and it spreads. Doesn't it? That's the 30, 60, 100. Not all of us are going to have the same spiritual impact, but we're all going to have an impact that could never be explained as human. That's the point.

It can't be explained. That's why Paul says – I read it to you in 2 Corinthians 3 – we're not adequate for these things. This can't be human. So, the bad news is expect rejection. The good news is when the soil is prepared by God, there's going to be an explosion of spiritual fruit, and the harvest will go on and on and on and on.

A nice young man in our church was recently in Prince Edward Island, and I had said in the church service that my great-grandfather was the pastor of Saint James Kirk – Presbyterian Kirk in Prince Edward Island back in the 1800s.

So, when he was up there, he started digging around and found all kinds of things about my great-grandfather. Thomas Fullerton was his name, and he was pastor there at the main church in Charlottetown for about 28 years. He was a chaplain in the Canadian military, and he went to the Boer War in South Africa and fought, and did ministry among the troops. And you look back at that, and you say, "Okay, there's" – his father was also a pastor, who had been in Scotland and then gone to Australia and come there.

And at some point, the Lord plowed the heart of that family, and it just kept going, and it kept going, and it kept going, and it came down through my – from my great-grandfather, to my grandmother – his daughter – and then through her to my father, and then through me. And this is the explosion. And we're all in this process somewhere. All of our lives intersect. And that's the good news in the story, and the disciples needed to hear that, because it all basically looked like it wasn't going anywhere.

Well, getting ahead of myself a little bit. Let's go back and look at the individual soils. The first soil – we'll just call it the roadside soil – in verse 15, "These are the ones who are beside the road where the Word is sown. And when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the Word which has been sown in them." They're just hard-hearted. It just bounces.

And Satan is the birds – depicted in the birds back in verse 4 – that come along and see the seed and snatch it away. It never penetrates; it makes no impact at all. Hard, beaten path; nothing penetrates, nothing absorbed. Preached the Gospel again, and again, and again, and again. Give the Gospel again, and again, and again by continual self-destroying rejection. They go long past the place of grace, long past the hope of faith and forgiveness. And Satan just snatches it away.

It's a powerful analogy. This is the condition of a human heart, the heart of man or a woman. In the case of the parable, Jesus is talking about the leaders of Israel. They're the hard hearts. You might think that because they were religious, they were the soft hearts. No, no, not even close. They were the hard, impenetrable, apostate, unbelieving, God-hating, Christ-rejecting, hard ground. It's the condition of the heart that corresponds to the smooth hardness of the footpath that crosses the plowed field. The heart is a thoroughfare, crisscrossed by the mixed multitude of sins day after day after day.

The fields weren't fenced, and neither is this heart. It's an unprotected heart. It lies exposed; it lies unprotected; it lies open for all the evil stompings of all comers. It's never broken up by the softening of conviction, repentance, soul searching, holy fear, or even the sweet, winsome realities of grace and forgiveness. This is the callous heart. It is impenetrable from the terrors of the Lord or from the wooings of His love. It responds to neither.

The Old Testament would say, "This is the hardhearted, stiff-necked people." Nothing new for Israel. That was used to refer to them in the Old Testament. The sower's good. The sower's just a sower. The seed is the seed, but the issue is the heart. This may be the fool in Proverbs. Read Proverbs, the first chapter, and see the fool who doesn't take the truth, will not receive, the wisdom of God. And this is the Jews. This is the leaders and the people who followed them, who eventually killed their Messiah. Any thought of truth, any thought of Gospel is just snatched. Never lasts at all.

We've all seen people like that. We know people like that. I know a number of people like that. Some even come to mind. They're like the people in Acts 17:32. It says they sneered at the resurrection. They're sneered at the resurrection. They're out there. You're going to see them; they're a reality.

Even more importantly, look at your own heart. Is that you? Is that you? Have you heard this message again and again and again, but you just live out there, and you let sins just stomp you hard day after day after day after day, week after week after week; you live this unfenced, unprotected life where it's just overrun by the trampling of iniquity? Is that you?

And you come, and we deposit some seeds, and before you've gone a mile out of here, they're gone. Are you so comfortable where you are in your unbelief that you're impenetrable? That's a scary place to be. And it may have been that you've passed the point of grace, and you will not believe, and you cannot believe. Maybe you need to cry out to God to plow deeply your hard heart.

The second soil – and we'll stop with this one – is the stony soil, verses 16 and 17. "In a similar way, they are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the Word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary. Then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the Word, immediately they fall away."

Now, there's just so much to say about this. How am I going to do this? Oh, frustrating. Let me just dive in at the point of joy here. Now, we already know these are people who have superficial dirt at the top, but there's rock bed underneath, just below where the plow was. So, when the seed goes in and starts to grow a little bit, everything pushes up because the roots can't go down. So, you have this artificial idea that, "Oh, this is wonderful." Look, it's growing; it's going everywhere. But because the roots can't get past that hard rock bed, they can't get to the water. And when the sun comes out, it burns the plant before it ever produces anything. That's this kind of person.

This is the person depicted as the one who receives the Word with joy. This defines for me an emotional response. An emotional response. With joy. And we all look at that, and we say, "Oh, you know, I talked to so-and-so, gave them the Gospel, and I don't understand it. You know? They're not around; they don't come to church; they don't confess the Lord. And they were so happy when it happened."

Let me give you a simple principle. Joy is not the distinguishing factor of true conversion. Joy is an emotion. It is not the distinguishing factor of true conversion. In fact, a more likely distinguishing factor of true conversion would be sadness, brokenness, mourning.

What does James tell us in James 4:6 to 10? Weep. Mourn. That's what conviction produces. "Blessed are the ones who mourn," Matthew 5. Don't ever assume that because somebody is demonstrating joy after having prayed a prayer, or whatever they did to assume they were making a commitment to Christ, that that signals reality. It does not. In fact, more often than not, it may be a give-away that that's not a real conversion at all.

Joy comes. Joy comes in the wonderful relief and release of true conversion. Let me tell you something, never make a Gospel appeal to people's emotions. Never. Never. That's why we don't have some kind of an emotional appeal here and play all kinds of schmaltzy music in the background. I don't want you to do anything because we worked your emotions up.

Never appeal to people with any kind of Gospel appeal that is directed at their emotions. Why? Because you can manipulate people's emotions. And frankly, most people have issues in their lives that make them sad. And if you work well enough on their emotions, and you're clever enough at it, you can promise them happiness. And when they make some kind of superficial step, they'll have a momentary kind of relief. There'll be a kind of newly-stirred-up feeling that they have. "Oh, now God's on my side. Now I'm going to heaven. This is wonderful; and You've accepted me, and You've embraced me." It may not signify anything at all.

The world is full of people who would like to be happy. Agreed? The world is full of people who would love to be accepted, and loved, and go to heaven. If you appeal to the emotions, you're going to get emotional reactions. And emotional reactions are not necessarily consistent with true conversion. Warm affections newly stirred up.

Look, there are so many people who have gone through this route. I'm telling you, this is the – this is what we all grew up with kind of in churches, a lot of us – you know? – where they play this music – turn on television. Watch how these TV preachers and evangelists deal with crowds. They get an organ. They crank the music up. Somehow they get these people at a fever pitch emotionally. Then they play at their feelings. This is an illegitimate thing, and it's tragic. Don't ever appeal to people's emotions.

You know, my approach to evangelism is to say, "Here's the truth." You drive it at the mind because all things pertaining to life and godliness, as I read for you in 2 Peter 1, pertain to the true knowledge of Him. So, here's the truth. Shut down the organ. Shut down the humming. We don't need that. Let's talk about the truth of your condition and Christ's provision, and the emotion will take care of itself. I think you were all very emotional this morning when you were singing those hymns. Weren't you? Was there a lot of joy in your heart? You were lifted up; you were encouraged. But that's the emotion that comes out of the true conversion, not the emotion that substitutes for it. We don't need to do all that – all that kind of emotional manipulation.

There's a second thing you never want to do. You never want to appeal directly to people's will, because the world is full of weak-willed people. Are you aware of that? If you're not, then you tell me how those phony evangelists get people to send them enough millions of dollars they can buy three jets.

You can manipulate people's will to do anything – anything – if you're clever enough, and if you create enough self-interest. Right? "Oh, I know what's going to happen when I send in my money. I'm going to get rich. I'm going to get healthy. I'm going to be successful. God's going to pour out all kinds of goodies on me. All that driving self-interest is behind all of that. And if you want to, if you want to go after people's emotions, you can get them. And if you want to go after their weak wills, you can get them.

But if you're going to proclaim the Gospel, you have to go after the mind, and it has to be a true understand of the Gospel. It's about knowledge and how you respond to the knowledge. The Church of Jesus Christ is flooded with, I have to say, tares who came in emotionally and from a weak-willed response. But they're not the real thing, and it shows up. Verse 17, "They have no firm root."

So, they're just temporary. Huh. Temporary converts. Man oh man – wow, so many that have gone through my life. So many, many, many, many. And even when you preach the Gospel to the mind, you still get superficial converts. What finally does it for them? What chases them away? First, affliction. "Oh, guess what? You told me I'd get rich. You told me I'd get healed. You told me that Jesus would make me successful? Guess what? I have cancer and my husband left me. I'm out." Any kind of pressure. Thlipsis is the Greek word. If it's not real, the pressure will prove it.

That's why Peter says – and it's so important – that trials prove your faith. That's why you long for trials, because when you come out of a trial, and you have experienced an enduring faith, that's giving you assurance. If you ask me how I know I'm a Christian, I can't tell you there's some mystical way. You know how I know I'm a Christian? Because I've been through enough trials in my own life and enough trials in the lives of people around me for enough years, and I have seen that no matter what the trial is, and no matter how it comes, my faith never waivers. That's not credit to me; that's the faith that God gives that saves. It's like a rock.

A false faith, when the trial comes, and you can't cash in, and you don't get what you were told you were going to get, and Jesus doesn't do what you thought He was going to do, you're gone. Even worse, persecution. You're not going to take that. Hey, that wasn't in the bargain, because you came in on self-interest. People who appeal to the will and appeal to the emotion appeal on the level of self-interest. And self-interest is going to lead you down a very, very dead-end street, because life's not going to be like that. God isn't going to promise you to make you healthy, wealthy and prosperous the rest of your days. No way.

So, when the trouble comes, you're going to bail. Or when the persecution comes, you're going to say, "Well, I didn't bargain for this."

Jesus was talking to the people right there, sitting there with Him, named disciples. How do I know that? Because in John 6 it says, "Many of His disciples walked no more with Him." Gone. Why? Well, they weren't going to suffer. He was just talking about the fact they're going to have to eat His flesh and drink His blood. He starts talking about death. They say, "We're outta here."

And He says to the other disciples, the apostles, "Will you also go away?"

And we hear that triumphant statement of Peter, "To whom shall we go? You and You alone have the words of eternal life, and we know You are the Holy One of God. We're hanging in here." It's because they were given the gift of a real faith. I mean this is like building the house on the sand, isn't it? If it's built on emotion and weakness of the human will, purely predicated on self-interest. Trouble in life, persecution in life will reveal all of that.

And we'll stop there and have some organ music. No, we won't. We will, Steve; yes, we will. All right, let's pray.

Father, first our heart goes out to those who may be in our midst, who fall under the category of these two soils: the hard, resistant, sin-stomped heart, or that superficial, only temporarily soft, self-centered, self-indulgent, self-seeking heart. Lord, we pray for those people. We pray that the Gospel may come to them, that there still may be time for them to come in true faith in the wonderful work of Christ on the cross and through the resurrection.

I pray that there would be nobody here who would fit into that category of those who can't return and can't be forgiven. While there's still time and opportunity, before it's eternally too late, would You, with Your grace, woo them, plow hearts, soften that soil all the way down deep so that the seed can go in and truly produce life.

Lord, we are both saddened by this, because it is a judgment – parables mark judgment – but we're ready to be gladdened by what we are yet to see about how glorious will be the results when the Gospel which we proclaim falls into good soil. We sometimes have that privilege of leading someone to true salvation by Your power, and then to watch their lives unfold and multiply so wonderfully. Give us that opportunity again, Lord, as we remain faithful. To Your glory we pray, amen.

END

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