

Four Soils (Part 1)
Matthew 13:1-23
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In the book of Romans, we have been studying the twin truths of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Some of you have had questions about how those realities complement each other. What is the real reason that people don't believe the gospel? Well, today and next Sunday, I want us to step away from our study of the book of Romans to study a passage that I think will help us understand Romans 9-10 even better.

As the ministry of Jesus had unfolded, there had been incredibly different responses to that ministry. Of course, the disciples and His committed followers fully embraced His claims and hung on His every word. The religious leaders accused Him of being possessed by the devil, conspired to take His life. And between those two extremes, there were a variety of responses, ranging from skepticism to superficial enthusiasm, from amazement to curiosity. The question is this, if Jesus, in fact, is all He claimed to be, if He is Israel's Messiah, and the Son of God, if He has authority to forgive sins and to give eternal life, then why didn't everyone accept Him? And especially, why didn't some of those, who appeared to be the most spiritual in the nation, accept Him? Even His own family. Why? Why are there people in your life who have been exposed to the gospel who haven't believed it. Well Matthew 13 provides the answer to those questions. Here, in this chapter, we find what I would call the apologetic for why not everyone then or now accepts the claims of Jesus Christ. You see, the way a person responds to the gospel of Jesus Christ reveals the nature of his or her heart.

Let's read the text I want us to look at this morning together, Matthew 13:1-9,

That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. And large crowds gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach. And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, 'Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.'

This is a monumental text in our New Testament and crucial to understand for us to reconcile divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Now as we come to this passage, one of the most important events in Jesus' ministry had just occurred. In fact, earlier that same morning, Jesus

had healed a demon possessed man and that event, and the response of Israel's leaders, marked a huge turning point. Look back in Matthew 12:22, this is earlier that morning.

Then a demon- possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, 'This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?' [*Maybe He is the Messiah*]. But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, 'This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.'

Here Jesus heals a man and in response to that healing the leaders of the nation commit, what He calls down in verses 31-32, the unpardonable sin. They know that He is not of Satan, and yet, knowing that, having seen the evidence, they say that He is to preserve their own position, to preserve their own place in the nation. In fact, Jesus says, beginning in verse 33, that what they had just said about Him, reveals their hearts. It reveals their hearts. Now, as you would expect then, in an effort to exonerate themselves, the scribes and Pharisees argued that the real problem wasn't with them, but it was with Christ. The problem was Jesus simply hadn't proven His identity sufficiently. They needed a sign in order to believe. Now, Jesus had done countless miracles of healing. In fact, he had just cast the demon out of a man, but they still wanted more signs. So Jesus is very clear in His response, look at verse 39, he answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;" In other words, "You are not getting any more signs, you've got the Scripture".

Now a short time later, still on that same day, another significant event occurred. This is all in the morning of the same day. Jesus' mother and His brothers showed up outside the house where Jesus was teaching and wanted to talk with Him. Look at Matthew 12:46, "While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak with Him." Now Matthew doesn't tell us why they came, but Mark does. Listen to Mark 3:20-21, "he came home," [*that is from choosing the 12, it is this day*], "and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. When His own people heard of this," [*this is why they left Nazareth to come to Capernaum*], "they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, 'He has lost His senses.'" Jesus' brothers, there were four of them, had concluded that Jesus was out of His mind. And they came to Capernaum to essentially take Him by force back to Nazareth. He was embarrassing the family.

Now, when you look at those events all in that one morning, that's why they showed up in verse 46, and when all that unfolds, those events raise some important questions. Why don't the people that you share the gospel with today always respond in faith. Or let's go back to what is unfolding here, why didn't the spiritual leaders of the nation in the first century respond to Jesus? Why didn't His own brothers who grew up in the same home with Him, believe in Him during

His ministry? And how can some of those, who attach themselves to Jesus, call themselves His disciples, turn out not really to be so? How does this happen? Well, in this parable, and the section that follows, Jesus explains. He explains why not everyone who hears, believes the good news, and even some of those who appear to believe, aren't truly His followers and disciples. So let's look at this passage together and begin to see Jesus' explanation unfold.

Now notice Matthew's introduction to this chapter in verse 1, "That day...". This is part of that same, very long day that began with the rejection of Jesus by the spiritual leaders of the nation. It includes this teaching in chapter 13, and it ends with the healing of the demoniacs on the other side of the lake, late in the day. It was, "That day..." [*verse 1 says that*] "Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea." This is probably sometime before noon on that day. And so, He went out of the house where He had been teaching when his mother and brothers arrived and now He's on the side of the lake. His hometown, the place of His headquarters, for His ministry was Capernaum on the Northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee. And initially here, we are told, he sat down by the sea, presumably to continue His teaching.

Verse 2 says, "And large crowds gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat down," Jesus usually taught on the edge of the sea shore with the crowds fanning out onto the hill in front of Him, but the day a day or two before the crowds had gotten so great that Jesus had asked them to prepare a boat just in case, and here He needs it. Because of the push of the crowd, Jesus got into this boat that was anchored there near the shore. If you have ever wondered what that looks like, I wanted to show you. In 1986, a first century boat from the Sea of Galilee was unearthed and a model was built from that discovery. It was about 27 feet long, and about 8 feet wide, and more than enough room to hold 13 men. Jesus and the disciples often were in it together. So it was in a boat like this that Jesus sat down and He assumed the position of a rabbi teaching His disciples. Verse 2 says, "and the whole crowd was standing on the beach." Now the Greek word for *beach* here implies that Jesus had gone to one particular spot. Southwest of Capernaum there is a beautiful area between Capernaum and Tabgha, on the Northwest corner of the sea, and it is one of the few areas where there is a beach on the Sea of Galilee. There is a cove there, in fact, kind of an indentation in the cove which was likely the place where Jesus taught these parables. It's a strategic place to teach a large crowd since it has a kind of natural amphitheater and many tests have been done with someone standing there on that cove and speaking to huge crowds—thousands of people, and it works perfectly. In addition, that area was, and still is to this day, a wonderful place to grow crops. So while Jesus is teaching this parable, He could point to the surrounding fields to make the very points that he is making.

Verse 3 says, "And He spoke many things to them in parables," the Gospels, in fact, record over 60 parables of our Lord and Matthew records seven parables just on this day. Mark adds an additional one that Matthew and Luke don't, and Mark even says this in Mark 4:33, "With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it." So Jesus

may have taught many other parables that day, that are not recorded for us in the Gospels. Now, with that introduction, Matthew begins with the parable that is usually called, "The Parable of the Sower". Maybe you have called it that, and to a certain extent, that is true. It's okay to call it that, but understand, that's not the point of the parable. The focus of this parable is not the sower. It's not even the seed. The focus of this parable, and this is why it is so appropriate for us as we try to reconcile these issues of human responsibility and divine sovereignty, the focus of this parable is on the soil into which the seed falls. Now this parable is absolutely crucial for you to understand, in fact, according to Jesus, understanding this parable is foundational to understanding the rest of His parables. The disciples asked Jesus after He shares the story, what it means. Listen to His response to them, this is from Mark's Gospel, Mark 4:13, "And He said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables?'" In other words, this one is crucial to understand in order to unlock the meaning and to grasp the significance of the other parables. So it's crucial for us to understand what this parable is teaching. Now the parable is divided into two parts, here in Matthew's Gospel. You have in verses 3-9, the story. It's the story, the simple telling of the parable itself. Jesus spoke it publicly to the great crowd that had gathered there on the side of the Sea of Galilee as He was seated in a boat, anchored just off shore. So you have the story in verses 3-9; secondly, you have the interpretation, in verses 18-23. Now the interpretation He only shared privately with His disciples later that day.

So, let's start, today, with the story, verses 3-9. Now the story that He tells here is a bit out of our field of experience although we can certainly understand and appreciate it, but it was very familiar in an agricultural society. Remember that Jesus is probably on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee, the Northwest corner there, adjacent to a large plain covered with fields and crops as He tells the story. Now let me give you just a little bit of sort of agricultural climatology background here, so you get a feel for what Jesus is sharing.

First of all, in ancient Israel there were primarily four crops. And those crops distinctively grew in different regions because of the topography. There was first of all barley which was primarily grown in the South of Israel. Then there were grapes. Grapes were grown in Judea in the area surrounding Jerusalem because it had just the right climate and landscape to grow grapes. Olives, they were grown in many places, but they were especially plentiful in Samaria, in the central hill country, in the middle of the land of Israel. And then in Galilee, where Jesus is teaching, the primary crop in the first century was wheat. So in Jesus story, it's likely that He is talking about the wheat that was typically grown in Galilee.

Now, when would this story be unfolding? Well, the climate in Israel is driven by two major geographic features that surround it on each side. You can picture the land of Israel if you have sort of a map of that part of the world in your mind or you can look at a map in the back of your Bible, but you had that little land of Israel, and to its east is a desert, and to its west is the Mediterranean. The weather is driven in two halves of the year by those two major geographic

features. Half the year, May to September, Israel's weather is hot and dry, affected by the desert to her east. The other half of the year, October to April, the climate is wet and cooler, affected by the Mediterranean on her west. You have read the Scriptures, you know there's what's called the *early rains*. These are typically light rains, they can begin in October, but often in mid-November or so through December, and that's the sign for those who are farmers to plant. Once the early rains come, it's a sign that the seasons are changing, and that it is safe to plant, and your plant is not going to be roasted by the sun. Most of the rainfall in Israel falls from December to February, but then you have the latter rains which fall in March and April. Obviously, the best growing season is during the half of the year with cooler weather and with rain. Farmers prepared their fields for planting, then, in the late fall. In October and November, they tilled the soil by pulling a plow behind some animal, typically a couple of oxen. They would use the plow that would cut a trough about 3-4 inches deep in the soil. And then they would plant. In April and May, they would then be able to begin the harvest; barley in May and the wheat harvest in Galilee, continued into June. But understand this, from the time that the wheat was ready and the rains stopped, until the hot winds off the desert began to blow in June and mid-June, there was only a narrow window when the crops could be harvested without their being destroyed.

So, with all of that understanding, come back to Jesus' story here. In Jesus story, it's October or November, and verse 3 says, "the sower went out to sow." Of course, he would have already carefully prepared his field. Now he's ready, having prepared that field, to sow the seed. The rabbis tell us that there were two common techniques for sowing seed. The first of them was by hand. You would simply have a bag with seed hanging off your body, and if it was a small field, a small area, then you might do something as simple as reaching in that bag with your hand and broadcasting the seed with your hand. If it was slightly larger, and that didn't make sense, then the farmer would take that bag that had the seed in it, and he would punch a number of holes in the bottom of that bag, that were just a little larger than the size of the seed, and then he would walk back and forth across his field in some preplanned pattern in order to get maximum coverage with that seed. If you had a really large field, then the common technique in that day, was to attach a number of seed bags with the same kind of holes, just larger bags with more seeds and more holes, to oxen and then you would lead those oxen across the field in the pattern that had decided. The seed would slowly drop out of those bags as the oxen walked across the field, scattering the seed, then, across the field. Now, you couldn't leave the seed, just sitting there on the surface of the ground for long, because if you did, the birds would come, and they were ever-present on sowing day, and they would quickly eat the seed. So what happened is someone would come immediately behind the sower with a leafy branch or some similar implement, to drag it across the part of the field that had been sowed. The goal was simply to move the dirt enough to hide the seed and to provide enough soil, enough earth, in which the seed could grow. That's the sower and the seed.

Now we get to the heart of the story, and the heart of the story is about four distinct kinds of soils into which the seed typically fell. First of all, we have the hard soil, verse 4, "and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up." Now in the first century, farmers didn't typically have fences between their fields. Instead, what they would do, is between their property and their neighbor's property, there would be a path, a footpath, that marked the distinct line between their crops and that of their neighbor. Instead of their having some sort of the modern ways to get around their field, the tractors that would cover multiple rows at one time, instead, to make their own fields easy to traverse, they would divide up their own property into sections and they would have small paths that cut across their property in order that they could tend the crop. Now the farmers used those footpaths, both the ones between their fields and their neighbors fields, and cutting across their own fields, they used those every day. In addition, it was very common in Israel, for travelers in order to take a shortcut from point A to point B to use those same paths as well. And so these roads or paths became exceptionally hard-packed from constant use. Now, because the sowing techniques that I have described to you are not very exact, it was extremely common for some of the seed to land outside of the area that the farmer had tilled and prepared, and to land on one of those footpaths, either the one separating your field from your neighbor or on the footpaths that you had laid out within your own property. And when the seed fell on those hard-packed paths, since it couldn't penetrate the ground, and it wasn't covered with earth, almost immediately, the birds would have swooped down and devoured those seeds. That's the condition of the hard soil.

Now there's a second soil that Jesus mentions here, and it's the shallow soil, verses 5-6. Verse 5 says, "Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil." Now *rocky* here doesn't refer to loose rocks sitting around the field. No self-respecting farmer would have left the rocks around when he was preparing that field for planting. He would have removed all of the loose rocks. Instead, *rocky* here, refers to a large outcropping of limestone bedrock that is hidden beneath the soil, just a little deeper than a first century plow would have cut into the field. This was, and is, a very common problem in Israel. In this case, where you have this limestone outcropping beneath what looks like perfectly good soil, even where your plow had cut down not quite deep enough to expose it, you would plant. The seed would have been sown, it would have been covered, and it would have begun to grow. But because of the small amount of earth, that part of the field, when the sun really started to bear down, that part of the field would have become warmer than the rest of the field. A perfect, sort of, hot-house environment, for those weak plants. The roots though couldn't go down into the soil and so what happened? All of the growing energy expressed itself above the soil and so these seed, that would have been sown on the rocky soil just over this bedrock of limestone, they would have sprung up quickly and in the early days the crop that was beginning to grow, these plants, would have looked like they would ultimately be the best. They would have been the healthiest plants, they would have born the most wheat.

But the lack of earth created another tragic effect, verse 6, "But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away." Now obviously Jesus doesn't mean that the day after the seed was planted this happened. He is describing a period of time and it would have been different for the different plants. It would have depended on the heat and the sun. It would have depended on the level of the soil, but at some point, as time went on, this would become obvious. Eventually, the sun would be hot enough or the rainy season would begin to subside enough, and the hot winds would begin to blow, and those plants that looked so healthy, and so promising, end up scorched, and they literally burn up. They burn up. Why? Because their root system couldn't support the stalk of the wheat. There simply wasn't enough there. The plant couldn't get the moisture it needed, it couldn't get the nutrients it needed and eventually it withered away and died.

That brings us to the third kind of soil. The thorny soil, verse 7, "Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out." Now, don't be too hard on this farmer. Don't think that he's been careless in the preparation of his field. That's not the picture here at all. The typical plow in the first century, I showed you just a few moments ago, was pulled behind a pair of oxen, but it didn't plow like the plow perhaps you've seen that cuts some 8-10 inches deep into the soil, and because of the power of the engine that's pulling it, turns that soil over on itself. It wasn't like that at all. The first century plow only penetrated about 4 inches, barely making a kind of trench, where the soil could be somewhat prepared. So, when you finished preparing that 4 inches or so of soil, the soil could look really good, and you could go back over that 4 inches or so and pull out what you thought were all the weeds and all the thorns that you could see, but there is a problem. You see weeds and thorns, indigenous to that land, often go deeper than the plow will go. And so there, below that prepared soil, is the root. The roots of those weeds and thorns, maybe the seeds that were spread a previous growing season. It was very difficult to see if you had really gotten all of the weeds and thorns and the seeds that had been distributed before. The result was that you ended up sowing your good seed in what looked like good soil, but, in fact, was among thorn plants, weed plants, and seeds. So, again, looked great, you sowed your seed. The land looked good, looked like that was going to be a great portion of your field, but in a few weeks, you were not just growing wheat. You were growing a mixed crop of wheat and thorns and weeds. Now you tell me which wins.

You know this, weeds always choke out the good plants, because their roots grow more quickly, they steal all the moisture from the soil, they rob all the nutrients and little is left for the good plants, for the wheat, and the wheat in this case, Jesus says, was gradually choked out. Now, maybe you don't live in this agricultural world and so a lot of this story is one you just have to kind of understand, not from experience, as I walk through with you, but this part of the story you get if you live in North Texas and you have a yard at all. It happens to me every Spring, here in Texas. We make sure sometime between now and when Spring breaks out that our flower beds are all carefully prepared and their mulched and you stand back and look and it looks

beautiful. There isn't a weed to be seen. So, we plant. We plant our annuals or perennials or whatever it is you like to plant and we hope that maybe it will be different this year. But Spring hits, and it isn't very long until you go out to those flower beds that just a few weeks before looked absolutely pristine and you have to go on a safari to find the flowers that you planted. You have to use a machete to hack your way through the weeds, they are already waist high. You search and you search, and finally, you find those plants that looked so beautiful when you planted them, but now they look so bad that you wouldn't think of buying them. The weeds have choked out the growth and development of the real plant. That's what Jesus is describing with this seed that fell among thorns.

The final kind of soil, in verse 8, is the good soil. The good soil, verse 8 says, "And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty." The farmer is grateful, that much of the seed that he sowed, fell into the prepared soil. Soil that had plenty of depth. Soil that was uncluttered by thorns and other worthless plants. Soil that had really been truly prepared, and that soil would yield a good crop, Jesus says. Different seed, based on a variety of circumstances, produce different yields. Some argue, that in the first century, the average yield was somewhere between 8-15 to 1. But it's true, we are told, that there were also seeds, in the first century, that in some cases, did, in fact, yield a hundredfold- that is an incredible yield. So it was actually possible in Christ's day. A thirty fold yield would have been a healthy harvest. A sixty fold yield was wonderful, and a hundredfold yield would have been an extraordinary yield, and extraordinary year, and your barns would have been filled with plenty. Now that's Jesus story.

What is astounding to me is how He ends this story. Look at verse 9, "He who has ears, let him hear." Do you understand, that what I have just shared with you, is all Jesus said to the crowd? He told them a story and then His application was this, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." It was more, obviously, than a call to physically hear the message. It was even more than a call to superficial understanding. When Jesus said in verse 9, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear," it was a call or an invitation to consider what He was sharing deeply and profoundly, weighing all the implications and responding appropriately. But the question that comes into my mind, should be the question that comes into yours. Why? Why would Jesus have told this story and not explained it to the crowd? After all, they were there to hear Him teach. If it doesn't make sense to you that Jesus did this, then you are in good company, because the disciples didn't get it either. They had the exact same question. Verse 10, "the disciples came and said to Him, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?'" Can you imagine the disappointment of the disciples? I mean, they have this mindset that more is better and that morning circumstances converge to produce a huge crowd. It's so big, that Jesus can't even do what He normally does, which is stand on the shore and teach the sort of natural amphitheater of people who gathered. Instead, the crush of the crowd is so great, he has got to get into a boat and anchor just off shore so that every one can see

and hear. A huge crowd has gathered, and Jesus tells them a story about a sower, and some seed, and some soils, and then he says, "If you have ears to hear, hear. Thank you for coming."

Now the disciples in verse 10 say, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" The Greek word for *parable* comes from two Greek words one means *to cast* or *to throw*, the other means *alongside*. Literally then, the word *parable* means *to cast or to throw alongside*. It really refers to comparing one thing with another by laying them beside each other. That's what a parable is, that's what it does. This word is used often in the Septuagint in a variety of forms. Now Jesus, of course, had used parables before this. But He would use parables with crowds after this, and always, without explanation. Now there are a number of possible reasons that Jesus used parables throughout His ministry, I mean you understand them. They are a powerful way to illustrate the truth, right? They are also a way to encourage and improve understanding. You connect something that is harder to understand with something that is familiar, and it encourages and improves understanding. Jesus told parables, I think at times, just to improve the people's memory of the truth, because by tying the truth to something they saw all the time, when they saw that thing day in and day out, it reminded them of the truth that Jesus taught. So those were all good reasons to use parables, and I am sure that throughout His ministry those were reasons that Jesus told parables. But, here in Matthew 13:11-17, Jesus gives His disciples only two reasons that He told this story to the crowd and didn't explain it. And these are the two reasons; number one, to reveal the truth to those to whom it was granted. Look at the beginning of verse 11, "Jesus answered them, 'To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,'" Look at the beginning of verse 12, "For whoever has to him more will be given," and then go down to verses 16-17,

"blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

Jesus says, on the one hand, I want you to understand, go back to verse 11, that's really the key. On the one hand, I am speaking in parables and not explaining them, in order to reveal the truth to those to whom it's granted to understand the truth. And secondly, to conceal the truth from those to whom it has not been granted. Notice the second half of verse 11. He says verse 11, "Jesus answered them, 'To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to *them*...'" In Luke's gospel, He uses the word to those *on the outside*. He divides all of the world into His followers and those who aren't and He says, "to those on the outside to them it has not been granted." And then you see the same contrast in verse 12. First of all, to those it has been granted, "whoever has, to him more shall be given." And here is the other side, "but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." The understanding that he has, erodes. Notice the beginning of verse 13,

"Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing, they do not hear, nor do they understand. In their case the prophesy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,

'You will keep on hearing, but you will not understand; you will keep on seeing, but you will not perceive; *[why, for, because, here is the reason]* the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they scarcely hear, and *[notice this]* they have closed their eyes, otherwise they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them."

Now, let me step back from that passage just a moment, and remind you that there are a couple of reasons people don't receive the truth from Jesus Christ. Reason number one, is Satan's doing. Look at 2 Corinthians 4:3. Part of the reason people don't get the truth of the gospel, is the work of Satan himself. 2 Corinthians 4:3,

even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, *[How? How did it become veiled?]* in whose case the god of this world *[The god of this world system, Satan himself]*, has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

So Satan is involved in blinding people of the truth of the gospel. So it's by Satan's doing that people don't see and understand the gospel. But secondly, it is also by their own doing. Turn over to John 3. It's not just Satan's fault, notice John 3:19. Right after the most famous verse in the Bible, Jesus says in verse 18,

"He who believes is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already," *[Already found guilty]*, "because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment that the light has come into the world," *[Jesus and the truth that came with him]*, "and men love the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and cannot come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

Do you see there is human responsibility here? There is, "I see the light, I don't want it. Because I like what I do. I like my sin. I want control of my life. I want to be in charge." You go over to chapter 8 and you see this same point. John 8:43,

"Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear my word." *[And why can you not hear my word? It is because of who you are, verse 44]*, "You are of your father the devil, and you," *[notice this]*, "want to do the desires of your father."

It is not that you are enslaved by Satan and it's against your wish. You are enslaved by Satan and you love it. That's what he is saying. You want it. So understand this, Satan blinds people to the gospel, but those who want to be blind. When people don't respond to the truth of the gospel, Satan's responsible, he blinds them. But ultimately, they're responsible. John 3, John 8, their sin and their love for that sin, drive them away from the truth, away from Christ, away from the gospel. And we'll see this, in Jesus interpretation of the soils, next time. There is massive, human responsibility.

But Jesus tells His disciples, back in Matthew 13, that God also takes responsibility. Look again at Matthew 13:11, "To you it has been..." *[notice that, 'has been', passive voice]*, "granted." God has granted it to you. Jesus takes his disciples back to sovereign election.

So what do we do to all this? Let me speak to you this morning. If you are here, and you either don't understand the gospel, or you don't understand why it's important, or you simply haven't responded to it. If that is true of you, Jesus wants you to know, it's your fault. You can't blame other people. You can't blame Satan. And you certainly can't blame God. The invitation of Jesus still stands, back in verse 9, "Let him who has ears to hear, hear." That's Jesus' invitation to you. The gospel is still an invitation extended to you. The Bible ends with that invitation. "If you are thirsty, come and drink of the water of life." It's an open invitation, and I plead with you today, to respond to that invitation. If you've had ears enough to hear, it's because it has been granted to you, but you have a compelling responsibility, to come. And if you harden your heart against the gospel, understand this, you alone, will bear the responsibility, when God takes further action in judicial hardening of your heart. Because it will be because you already hardened it. God won't be responsible. You will be responsible. And I pray that won't be true. Please, come to Christ, today. But if you are here this morning, and you have come to understand the gospel and you have come to believe it, you know what God is saying? You can take absolutely no credit. You can take no credit. Celebrate the sovereign grace of God. God granted you to know and to understand His truth. He gave you a love for the Light- to really see, to really hear, to really understand, so that you would return, this text says, that is, repent. And that He would heal you. It's all grace, notice verse 16, "Blessed are your eyes and your ears."

You see, do you understand that this passage is saying exactly what Romans 9-10 say? The condition of your heart is because of how you were born and your own choices. You take full responsibility. And if God acts to further harden your own self-hardened heart that's not God's problem; it's right and just. But, on the other hand, if you are the kind of soil that has been

prepared to receive the gospel, it's only because of God. It's only because it has been granted to you. So, bad soil, that's our problem, entirely. Good soil, it's God's grace, alone.

Now, there's another lesson here for us who are in Christ. And that is- just persevere in sharing the gospel. Just be like this farmer. Keep sowing the seed. Why? Because you don't know, ultimately, the condition of the soil. So don't worry about that. Just keep sowing. Just keep sowing the seed. You let God worry about the condition of the soil. You just be faithful because it's through the gospel God gives life to the dead, and we don't know which soil God has prepared. Maybe that person that you'll share the gospel with later today or on the plane tomorrow or at work or at school, maybe God will have prepared their heart to receive it. And they'll be like Thessalonians where Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 2:13,

we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit... [*There is election*] and faith in the truth. [*There is human responsibility. And...*] It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, celebrate God's amazing grace in your life, that He didn't leave your heart the way it was. And just keep sowing the seed.

Let's pray together. Father, we are amazed by Your grace. Thank you for this simple story and yet, so profound, so many rich truths here for us to discover, and Lord, we haven't even looked at our Lord's explanation yet. Father, I pray that this foundational parable would be one that we come to fully understand, to embrace, to believe, and to see as the grid through which we see the world. Father, I pray for those here this morning who have never responded to the truth of the gospel sown on their hearts, that Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world. He lived a perfect life, He died as a substitutionary sacrifice for those who would believe, and you raised Him from the dead, and that all who believe in Him, would not perish, but have eternal life. Father, may this be the day they believe that gospel because you have prepared their hearts. But Father, if they don't, help them to see, it is their own fault. Father for the rest of us, help us to celebrate Your grace. Thank you that you didn't leave the soil of our hearts the way we left it. But that You prepared it to receive Your truth. We thank you, we bless you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.