

# *A Spiritual Spring for the Week*

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Sermon Text: Matthew 13:1-17  
Sermon Title: "God's Word Is Raining Down on Us"

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA  
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You need good soil to grow anything. Any gardener knows this. Any child in elementary school has learned this. You need three things in order to allow a seed to grow. Adequate sunlight to give the seed energy. The right amount of water to give it nourishment. Enriched soil with plenty of nutrients and minerals to allow the plant to live on. I lived in North Dakota for three summer months, and the soil up there is black, black, black. You can grow anything in that soil because it is so rich in nutrients and minerals. I lived in Arizona for 15 months, and the soil there is brown and dry. All that can pretty much grow there are cacti. You need good soil to grow anything. Any gardener knows this.

That is why we read the Parable of the Four Soils, and we understand what is going on. Only one of the soils is the place to plant crops. The one type of soil is so pressed-down and impacted that nothing could grow there. No nutrients, no minerals, no possible way to produce anything. Two of the soils could have

some nutrients and minerals in them. Jesus says that the seeds in those types of soil grow pretty quickly. But there is nothing to sustain the growth. Either the sun kills the plants or the thorns choke the plants. There is only one type of soil that produces anything. Only the enriched soil can bring about a crop that can feed 30, 60, 100 people, and even whole villages.

We read this parable and we know exactly where we want to be. We want to be the enriched soil. We want to get rid of all the stones and all the thorns. We don't want to be so hard-pressed and packed down that we cannot allow anything beautiful to grow. We read Jesus' parable, and we zero in on that last type of soil. We get it. We're right there. And we do everything we can to become the types of soil that God can use.

That seed that Jesus mentions, falling through the fingers of the caring farmer: watch where the seeds are falling and see what they are doing to us.

The seed doesn't just fall on the enriched soil, does it? The soil with all the nutrients and minerals is not the only soil that is blessed to receive the seed, the word of God. All four soils watch the seed raining down on them. Yes, even the seeds fall on the hardened soil that doesn't care about the seeds,

doesn't care about the word of God or care to understand what God can do for them.<sup>1</sup> God will rain his word down on them, as well. And that is a good thing, because not all of us are at the enriched soil level. Some of us might be at the rocky soil level or the thorny soil level, consumed with worriers and pains. Some might be so hard-pressed and crushed-down that they cannot see God or feel God anymore. It is a good thing that God's word is touching each type of soil, because any soil could be any one of us, at any given moment, and we need to the word of God to touch us.

The hard-pressed, packed-down soil. When Jesus explains the parable, he says that the hard-pressed soil are hearers of the word.<sup>2</sup> He really says this in Matthew 13:19. God's word falls on them just like on anyone else, but the problem is they do not understand. They don't get what God is saying because they are too logical about God's word, or they really don't like what they are hearing, or they cannot accept the fact that God loves them and wants to transform them. The seed doesn't penetrate the granite state of their hearts. The hard-pressed soil people might even be in church on a Sunday morning,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Matthew 13:19.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: Volume 2, The Churchbook, Matthew 13-28*, cf. 490.

going through the motions of singing and praying and listening; but inwardly they have dropped out.<sup>3</sup>

Inwardly, nothing connects with them, and they go back to the parking lot as empty as they were before.

Any one of us could be hard-pressed and packed down. We could be weary of life, and so when we come here we remain weary, and God's word rolls off of us like water off a duck's back. But the word of God is still raining on us. The gracious and careful Farmer still throws the seeds out to us, and he wants us to loosen up. Stop arguing, stop philosophizing, stop being lazy. The word of God falls on us in order to loosen us up. Turn us into enriched soil. Show us what our meaning and purpose are. We are not people born just for today but born and raised for eternity, Rick Warren reminds us in his famous book, *40 Days of Purpose*. Our lives begin here and carry on to heaven with God. Life is our reward. Resurrection, revitalization, rejuvenation. See and hear what God is doing. Receive his word. And be hard-pressed and packed-down no longer.

The rocky soil and the soil with thorns. If we think about it, both soils are pretty much the same. The rocky and thorny soil people also hear God's word, and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., cf. 491.

God's word grows for a time. But then those folks give up on God's word when things get dicey. Jesus explains that for the rocky soil people tribulation and persecution arises to kill their enthusiasm for God.<sup>4</sup> Tribulation and persecution around Jesus' time meant being arrested and brought to a trial, beaten and possibly crucified. We may understand why people might lose their enthusiasm about faith. But tribulation and persecution for us is not a severe, not like it was in Jesus' time. For us we may suffer a few negative words or one callous action, and that is enough to kill our enthusiasm. We may be that rocky soil that is so happy to have God's word in our lives. We love reading the Bible, we love worshipping, we love fellowshiping. Everything is right with the world. But then our faith is questioned. Somebody says to us that God doesn't exist, or that God doesn't care, and we believe it. The joy is gone and the seed doesn't grow.

Then there is the thorny soil: We might be the thorny soil people who do not allow questions about our faith to drag us down. No, people questioning our faith do not bother us, but we let cares and worries of this world to steal our joy and drag us down. For example: 16 days of the government shutdown in DC.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Matthew 13:21.

Affordable Healthcare, what it can or cannot do for us. Having to visit the doctor once a week. Watching our children or grandchildren growing up in this broken and aimless world. Bad grades. Bad workplace. The subdivision I live in is fighting the Henry County School Board over rezoning our children from the Union Grove Schools to the Eagle's Landing Schools. We definitely do not want that, because we live where we live to send our children to Union Grove and give them a greater advantage toward a better education. Just pick any one: there are so many cares, so many worries, in this broken world to fill our hearts with so much woe. God's word cannot and will not grow in that mess.

But the word of God is still raining on us. The gracious and careful Farmer still throws his seed out to us. Stop doubting, stop worrying, stop running around like Chicken Little, fearing the sky will fall. The word of God falls on us in order to remove the stones and the thorns. Turn us into enriched soil. Show us what our meaning and purpose are. We are not people born just for today but born and raised for eternity. Our lives just begin here and carry on to heaven with God. Life is our reward. Resurrection, revitalization, rejuvenation. See and hear what God is doing. Receive his word. And be rocky and/or thorny

no longer.

After teaching his parable Jesus says, “It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven...”<sup>5</sup> It has been given us to know, to understand, to grasp, to become intimately involved with the mysteries of God’s kingdom. The word that Jesus uses, to know, is the same word used to describe the highly-intimate relationship that a married couple has. The mysteries of God’s kingdom are to become a part of us, surrounding us and filling us up. The mysteries are shared with all, even the hard-pressed, even the rocky, even the thorny. We all have the opportunity to know those mysteries of God, and become intimate with God.

And after so much has been given, more will come our way. More to know, more to become involved with. Jesus says, “Whoever has, more will be given; and he [or she] will have abundance...”<sup>6</sup> More seed and more word and more mystery come our way to open our eyes so we may witness God’s compassion, to open our ears so we may perceive God’s will, to open our hands so we may accomplish God’s work, to open our hearts and minds to receive even more of God’s mysteries. However we find ourselves – as hard-pressed, as rocky,

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 13:11.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 13:12.

or as thorny – the word of God still falls on us. The word of God still chooses to transform us.

Whatever we have in the conditions we are in should be turned into blessings toward God. Whatever we have, and we might think we don't have much, but whatever we have must go back to God with joy, with thanksgiving. What little money we have needs to go back. Even if it is a little here and a little there, it is all good. What we give shows to God that we know his word falls on us, and that we want more. We want to become even more intimate with those mysteries that God reveals. We want to grow closer to God and stronger in God.

What little talent we have, it is all good. We should shared with all. We don't have to be a big-name preacher to move people's hearts. We don't have to be a popular athlete that catches the imaginations of all. We don't have to be a political pundit or business guru that everybody asks questions of. Most likely we will never become these kinds of people, but it doesn't matter. What little we have should be returned to God in joy, in thanksgiving. It proves that we are getting it: the seeds of God are falling on us, and we are welcoming them.

What little time we have, it is all good. God wants



all of our time, but right now we might have to start with baby steps. God the Farmer needs to till the hard-pressed soil within us, loosen us up, make us less hostile and more receptive to God's mysteries. A few more stones need to be removed along with a few more thorns. Any questions or doubts about our faith need to be addressed, and that takes time with God. Any worries and stresses we face on a daily basis need to be attended to, and that takes time with God. The more time we can free up, the more we show to God that we are willing to accept his words of transformation.

Whatever we have, whatever condition we may be in, we must turn it all around and hand it to God with joy, with thanksgiving.

One might need good soil to grow anything. Any gardener knows this. However, God will work with any kind of soil. God will not withhold his word from anyone. God gives us opportunities to grow closer to God and stronger in God. God makes us into enriched soil, ready for a harvest to arrive.

