

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The parable of the sower is a pretty familiar text. It's familiar in the sense that you all know, even without having just heard it moments ago, that a sower scatters seed on his land. In the process, some lands on the road, some on rock, some among thorns, and some on the good farm land. Jesus also explained the parable for His disciples—in this case, probably more than just the 12—and told them what the different places where the seed landed represent.

- The path is those to whom the Word of God is proclaimed, but that Word is taken away from them so that, having come to faith, they might not be saved.
- The rock is those to whom the Word of God is proclaimed and receive it in joy at first, but who fall away in the times of temptation because they have no root.
- The thorns is those to whom the Word of God is proclaimed, but are choked by the anxieties, riches, and pleasures of this life, so they don't bear the fruit of of faith to maturity.
- The good farm land is those to whom the Word of God is proclaimed and take it to heart, holding it fast in steadfast endurance.

When Jesus first began explaining this parable, He essentially divided these people into two types. It's a hard saying, but since Jesus says it, it must be heard and believed. "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'" Those two types? Those who have been given knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom by God, and those who do not know the mysteries.

Let me help you reconcile this.

I'll begin by briefly talking about what everyone always wonders about when it comes to this text. Most everyone is concerned with the soils, and with good reason. "Why soil type do I fall into?" More importantly, perhaps, "How can I be sure I'm that fourth soil type—the good farm land?" Well, I think Dr. C.F.W. Walther<sup>1</sup> might say that if you want to be that fourth type, if you are so concerned about being that fourth type, then you probably are that fourth type. What you are likely more concerned with, then, is what it means to hold fast to the Word of God with steadfast endurance.

I've spoken at length in the past what that means. Simply put, it is similar to how things go when you love or admire someone. After all, one with faith in Jesus certainly loves and admires Jesus. So, in this love and admiration of Jesus, you would hang on every word He says. Some of the things He tells you are able to pull you through those times of tribulation, be it temptation or suffering, so you are emboldened to hang on even more. And some of the things He says point you to the goal of this faith and eternal life, and so you are able to hold fast to it with steadfast endurance. All of this, by the way, is by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in you and nothing else, as He works through the means of the Word of God.

And that brings me to the point that I want to make, something that is so easily glossed over in this text, and that probably because it is treated in so few words—seven in this translation. Before even getting to the soil types, Jesus said, "The seed is the word of God." What does that mean, especially in regards to today's text? Well, no matter the soil type, the Word of God does things—primarily, it creates faith. Notice how that was stated even about the path soil type; the Word of God was taken away from them so that even having come to faith (which would be a better translation of the Greek) they would not be saved.

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<sup>1</sup> I had in mind something I thought was in Law & Gospel, but as I preached the sermon, I had my doubts as to whether Walther said it or someone else.

The Word of God has the power to create faith. This it does by the work of the Holy Spirit, when and where it pleases Him. But, not all come to faith, not in that it doesn't please the Spirit to bring people to faith. And in some who do come to faith, the faith created lasts but a short while. I could stand up here and wax poetic about this all day; suffice it to say, some are so obstinate that they refuse to believe, and, at least for the sake of this text, some believe for a while, but come to a point where they lose that faith. Maybe there's something more alluring in the devil's playground, so the Word is taken away. Maybe temptations are overbearing in that they don't trust that God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is capable of overcoming them. Maybe the worries of this life are more compelling than the glories of the life to come. But in every case, the Word of God creates faith.

Still, Jesus does not force this faith on anyone. That's why Jesus gives His Word in parables, so that those in whom the Spirit has worked faith and the knowledge of the kingdom hear it and receive it in faith and those who do not have this knowledge don't receive it, but reject it. It may not seem like it, but this is all in keeping with the old Lutheran adage: if you're saved, it's all God's doing; if you're damned, it's all your fault. God gives his faith-creating Word. You receive it in God-given faith, or you reject it out of disdain or doubt.

So, do not hear Jesus' explanation of His parable to mean that there are some that Jesus saves and others that He doesn't. This isn't a text that proves the heterodox doctrine of double predestination. The Word of God is proclaimed to all; there are some on whose ears it falls, but they do not receive it in faith. Nevertheless, it is the desire and goal of God that all to whom the Word is proclaimed—which is everyone—are brought to the knowledge of salvation. As St. Paul wrote, "God our Savior...desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4), so it follows that He would have His Word proclaimed to all the world. So it is that He Himself said,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:18b-20)

Nevertheless, "[G]ood news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened." (Hebrews 4:2)

So, the reconciliation is this: Those who have been given the mysteries of the kingdom of God receive the Word of God in faith, in and through which they receive the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Those who do not know the mysteries reject the Word of God in disdain and doubt. If you are saved, it is all God's doing. If you are damned, it is all your fault. It is the Word of God that does things for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. That's what Jesus was teaching with this parable.

So, I don't think you need to concern yourself with which soil type you are. As I said, if you are concerned about being that fourth soil type—the good farm land—if your concern is how to be and remain such, then you probably are. How can I say that? Well, the one who is truly concerned with keeping the Word of God, bemoans those times when he does not keep the Word of God. Such a mindset is indicative of a faith which trusts in Jesus for forgiveness, life, and salvation; a faith which is created, nourished, and sustained by the Word of God.

Do you have your moments of disdain and doubt? You most certainly do. You live in this Vale of Tears, in this fallen and cursed creation. But, God has broken through the fallen-ness and curse and sent His Son as your redemption. The Word of God is proclaimed to you creating faith. In that faith, you have come here to confess your sins—your disdain and doubt of His Word—and His Word is proclaimed to you again, restoring, nourishing, and nurturing that faith that it first created in you. The Word of God is cast once again into the soil, transforming you into His righteousness and good soil, forgiving you for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.