



## The Harvest Depends on the Heart

In late October, we finally received enough moisture to plant thirty one acres of winter grazing for our growing Cattle for Christ herd. We are so grateful for the many people and businesses that helped us by donating the oats, ryegrass, and equipment to get this done.

The land we planted (the use of which was graciously donated by our dear friends Jack and Janice McIntosh), though all in one section, is very diverse in its makeup and has a long driveway that passes most all the way through it. There are parts of the pasture on the west side of the drive where we are trying to build up the soil. It has a lot of red clay knolls, some rocky places, some washed out areas, and some small areas of good topsoil.

Across the driveway on the east side is a small piece of bottom land (shaped much a large bowl with deep sides). This section itself is diverse in that it has some red clay, some areas with really good topsoil, and some prairie mud (I'm not sure what the official name is for what I refer to as prairie mud, but it is the kind that on a wet day, the further you walk, the taller you get!) The remaining land that we call "the west hay field" and "behind Jack's house" is all real fertile top soil that will grow whatever you plant.

As Jack and I drilled the seed into the first pastures, we noticed that even after the soaking rain, some of the land was still so hard that the drill could not penetrate and the seed was left on top of the ground. In other places where the soil was rocky, most of the seed made it into the ground, but I am not sure if it is deep enough to survive.

The good bottom land that has been laying out for years was covered with briars and weeds so we had to mow it before we could plant. We know the soil is fertile in this bottom; our concern is that the briars and weeds will grow back before the grazing can push its way through, and will smother the new plants.

Finally, on the third day we planted the pastures with the really good soils. Within just two or three days you could see that most all of the seed had germinated and the new growth is visible from the highway. Every day you can see new growth. With adequate rain and fertilize, the good soil of these two pastures will grow and produce our best grazing: perhaps allowing us to double our stocking rates when we turn the cattle in.

Portions of the poorer pastures where there is some good soil will still produce good grazing. Other portions of these same pastures however will not produce because the soil was either too hard to accept the seed in the first place or too hard to allow for the establishment of a root system that will sustain it during the dry times. Perhaps the seed planted among the briars will survive and produce good grazing—but only if the mowing killed or controls the briars.

Now if you are a rancher, a farmer, or a gardener, you can visualize all that I have just honestly described—you have seen it before. Also, if you are familiar with God's Word, you know that Jesus himself taught these same truths using this same analogy. In Jesus' teaching however, the seed was the Gospel (the Good News of Jesus Christ), and the soils represent the conditions of our hearts and the possible responses to this Gospel; only one of which is acceptable to God or profitable.

Take a moment to look at two accounts of this parable taught by Jesus as recorded in Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23, and Mark 4: 1-9, 13-20. In these passages, Jesus tells the parable of the soils and then explains its meaning.

This teaching of Jesus so closely parallels my actual account of sewing the winter grazing for the Cattle for Christ herd. It also accurately describes the hearts of each of us and of all the people around the world with whom we seek to minister and share the Gospel.

The “path” is the hard packed ground, the clay knolls, those whose hearts are so hard that they will not accept, nor do they desire anything to do with God or the things of God—they just turn away and the seed is left exposed to be eaten by the birds.

The “rocky” places are like parts of the west side pasture, the seed sprouted and stayed alive as long as it was cloudy and rainy, but because it had no roots, the first sunny and windy days dried it up and it died having never produced or multiplied.

The “thorny” land is like our east pasture—the bowl with good soil but overgrown with briars and weeds. In our American culture (and even in the church), this may be the most prevalent condition of our hearts. It is also the condition that we must all constantly guard against and deal with in our own lives. We get so busy, so distracted, so in love with this world and the things of this world that we do not have the time, energy, desire, or money to do God’s will. Instead, we are consumed by our culture and allow these things to choke out and to smother what the Holy Spirit wants to do in and through our lives. We have everything that we need to produce an abundant harvest for the Kingdom of God, but there is just too much stuff, too many distractions, too many briars. One day, we say, we will get our priorities right and we will allow Jesus to really be Lord of our lives. We say that we love Him, it is just that right now we have too many things to do, too many goals to reach, too many bills to pay—but one day soon, me and Jesus will get it all worked out. One day, I will allow God to be my Lord, but not today.

Finally, there is the good soil where the seed is well received and almost immediately sprouts and grows rapidly, producing an abundant harvest. These are the hearts of people who not only hear the Gospel, but who hunger to know God more intimately, who crave and study His Word, and who commit their lives to doing His will. These are the ones who can truthfully say “Jesus is Lord”—not only with their lips, but with their lives.

It is not accidental that Jesus teaching involves illustrations and truths that we as farmers and ranchers actually encounter every day. As I planted, I thought about the soil types and the potential for good grazing long before I thought about this Scripture. It was as I read this particular piece of Scripture days later, that I was reminded of the actual planting event and was able to better relate to and apply these truths to my own life. His teaching so accurately describes the condition of each of our hearts and our individual response to what He has done for us.

You see, our God is not a far off God that we can’t know or relate to. He is just the opposite; a Father God who loves us individually and who woos us, who draws us to Himself so that we can know Him intimately and personally. In fact, He loves you, He loves me, and He loves every person in the world (rich or poor, good or heathen, black or white, young or old, educated or illiterate) so much that He sent His only Son to us through the birth of the baby Jesus. He came to us as a person, in a body just like ours, so that He could show us Himself, show us His heart, and show us His love. He came so that He could shed His own blood and die for us, in our place, for our sin. Someone else may give their life for you, but only the blood of Jesus can wash away your sin and reconcile you to God.

By turning away from our sin and living for Him (repentance), and by putting our trust in Him alone to save us from our sin (faith), the sin that separates us from Him is washed away and our relationship with Him is completely restored (Acts 20:21). The only question is: what is

your response to Him at this moment? If you are completely honest with yourself, which soil type would you have to say describes your heart? Which soil type describes your response to what Jesus has done for you and the teachings of His Word?

If you would like to discuss this topic more, if you need prayer, or if you want to help us take the Gospel and love of Christ to the rest of the world, please contact us. We pray that you have a very Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year!

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