TITLE: Plowed Ground

TEXT: Mt. 13:3-9 & Mt. 13:18-23; Rev. 3:1, 4:5, 3:14-22

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about plowed ground. There are basically only two types of ground. Fallow ground and plowed ground.

Fallow ground is ground that is uncultivated, bare, empty, unplanted, crop free.

Plowed ground is ground that has been cultivated, turned over, been disrupted, disturbed, worked.

A.W. Towzer spent 31 years pastoring the Southside Allegiance Church in Chicago. During his life in ministry he diligently preached the Word of God and wrote many books that became the conscience of modern evangelicalism.

His works have become modern day classics and are required reading for most evangelical Bible college students.

His devotion to the word of God will go down in Church history with other hero’s of the faith such as C.S. Lewis, D. L. Moody, Meyer and many of the other great theologians and bible expositors who have, by their writings, contributed so much to the Church today.

A.W. Towzer, in his book “Paths to Power” talked about the two types of ground. Fallowed ground and plowed ground.

He said this: *The fallowed field is smug, contented, protected from the shock of the plow and the agitation of the harrow. Such a field, as it lies year after year, becomes a familiar mark for the crow and the blue jay….Safe, undisturbed, it sprawls lazily in the sunshine, the picture of sleepy contentment….Fruit it can never know because it is afraid of the plow and the harrow…*

*In direct opposite to this, the cultivated field has yielded itself to the adventure of living.*

*The protecting fence has opened to admit the plow, and the plow has come as plows always come, practical, cruel, business-like, and in a hurry.*

*Peace has been shattered by the shouting farmer and the rattle of machinery. The field has been upset, turned over, bruised and broken, but its rewards come hard upon its labors.*

*The seed shoots up into daylight, its miracle of life, curious, exploring the new world above it.*

*Nature’s wonders follow the plow!*

In reality there are basically only two kinds of lives also, the fallow and the plowed.

I believe this is just as true within the Church as it is any place else in life.

Our life will consist of one of two types of soil.

It will either be fallowed ground or plowed ground.

Towzer goes on to describe how he sees the two soils of human hearts…

*The man of fallow life is contented with himself and the fruit he once bore. He does not want to be disturbed. He smiles in silent superiority at revivals, fastings’, self-searchings’, and the travail of fruit bearing and the anguish of advance. The spirit of adventure is dead within him…*

*He has fenced himself in, and by the same act he has fenced out God and the miracle of life.*

*The plowed life is the life that has thrown down the protecting fences and sent the plow of confession into the soul…Such a life has put away defense and has forsaken the safety of death for the peril of life.*

*Discontent, yearning, contrition, courageous obedience to the will of God, these have bruised and broken the soil of their heart and life till it is ready again for the seed. And, as always, fruit follows the plow.*

Jesus was actually the original giver of this message, and He also used the analogy of soil.

**Matt. 13:3 -9 (NIV) 3Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed.**

**4As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9He who has ears, let him hear.”**

How many times in Scripture did Jesus use the analogy of a farmer? It seems it was many. Jesus must have been very agriculturally minded.

Here He talks about various types of soil….

The path, were the soil would have been packed down and hard from all of its traffic, The rocky places, too rough to be turned by the plow, The thorny places or weed beds, where the seed would be choked out…. and finally the good soil, soil that had been disrupted and disturbed by the plow and made a good home for the planted seed to grow…..

Then Jesus masterfully makes the connection between the analogy of the soil and the human heart….

**Matt. 13:18 -23 (NIV) 18“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.**

**22The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. 23But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”**

What Jesus is saying here is that the soil of our hearts will fall under one of these four general conditions.

1. Hard, like the soil of a well traveled pathway. Too hard for the seed of Gods Word to penetrate. Where the seed God sows just lies on the surface and never makes any penetration…The Enemy sees the seed lying there on the surface and uses his deception to come and snatch it away before it can have an impact on our life…..
2. Rocky, like soil on the side of a mountain.

A combination of dirt and rocks but more rock than dirt. The rocks make an easy channel for the seed to get out of the sun and hidden from the enemy so he can’t snatch it away, but there is not enough soil for the seed to develop a good root system so as the days get hot and the rocks heat up the shallow root system dies out and the young plant dies because this man, when trouble or persecution comes he shies away, turns back to his old way of life ….

1. Thorny, like soil that is full of weeds—full of thorns and thistles…the soil is good enough but the weeds of this life, the worries and the cares of this life, materialism, keeping up with the Jones’s, overgrow the seeds God has planted and slowly choke out His word in our life…

Or----

1. Good, like soil that has been turned with the plow and cultivated so the seed of Gods word is received and can get the nutrients they need to root deep and grow to maturity and produce a crop of even more seed that can be planted…. Producing **a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”**

According to Jesus each of us will find that the soil of our hearts will fall under one of these 4 categories.

Hard, rocky, weedy or good.

Only one category will produce a crop and that is a heart of good soil.

So, how do we get a heart of good soil that God can sow the seed of His Word into that will grow and produce a harvest of 100, 60 or 30 times what was originally sown?

Especially if we find that the soil of our heart is better described by one of the other three conditions….

It has become hard or rocky or become a weed bed of materialism and the cares of this life?

We need to let the Head Farmer, let Jesus come in with His heavy machinery and plow and cultivate -- shake up the soil of our hearts.

We need to allow Him to apply the herbicide of the Holy Spirit to our lives to get rid of the weed beds of the cares of this life so that we can faithfully serve Him and Him alone.

In the book of Revelation Scripture tells us about a Church that had allowed the soil of its heart to become hard, rocky and full of weeds…

In Revelation Jesus has a message to the seven Church’s.

Theologians have different interpretation on just who Jesus may have been referring to..

Some believe that these messages were primarily intended for the 7 Churches in Asia Minor to whom they are addressed…

But I believe that this interpretation conflicts with the rest of the book of Revelation in that it is obvious that the rest of the book applies primarily to the Church age just prior to the return of Christ….

Another prominent view, the one that I prefer, is that the number 7 here, as elsewhere in Scripture, is used symbolically for Gods completeness.

Gods act of creation took 7 days…6 days work with a day set aside for rest..7= Gods complete creative work….

**Rev. 3:1 These are the words of him who holds the seven spiritsof God and the seven stars.**

**Rev 4:5 Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.**

The literal translation of this is the seven-fold spirit of God. Or the completeness of Gods Spirit. The completed work of the Holy Spirit.

The Judgments: 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 bowls speak of Gods completed act of judgment on the earth…

It just seems practical to take the letters to the seven Church’s to mean or represent Gods complete message to the complete Church…..

The letters to the Churches are just as relevant for us today as they were in the day that they were written….

If that be the case then listen to what Jesus has to say to the Church of Laodicea in the seventh letter…..

**Rev. 3:14 -22 (NIV)14“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:** **These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. 15I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!**

**16So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.**

**19Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. 20Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.**

**21To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”**

If you had to give a general description for the Church in the West today, particularly the Church in the United States today, how would you describe it overall?

Keeping in mind that we are a government of the people, by the people and for the people. We are a self governing nation in that respect. We choose our leaders. We select the ones that will represent us in the affairs of government.

In the last 70 years we have invited God out of our schools and public places, we have made the killing of our unborn children legal through legalizing abortion on demand in many states.. We have granted civil right status to behaviors that the Word of God says are sexual perversions and that no one who practices them will enter the kingdom of God…

We have laws that two people of the same sex can now be legally married.

There is a spirit of confusion upon many of or youth where they don’t even know if they are a male or a female and some of our elected leaders cannot even define what a woman is when asked the question.

Through all of this what has been the reaction, as a whole, from the Church?

As a whole, I think, not hot, not cold, but at best lukewarm… Passive is a word that comes to mind..

Jesus says….

**15I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.**

**17You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.**

I read a story of a vessel discovered a century ago, among the icebergs of the Arctic Ocean, with the captain frozen as he was making his last entry in the log-book. The crew was discovered, some in their hammocks and some in the cabin, all frozen to death. The last date in the log-book showed that for thirteen years that vessel had been moving among the icebergs, "a drifting sepulcher, manned by a frozen crew."

Could this be the current condition of the Church in America?

Chilled by formality, worldliness, and sin, we have sailed away from the sunny region of blessing and prosperity, and floated into the icy waters and deadly slumbers of the frigid waters of worldliness and apathy.

If this is true, if we are the Church or Church age that Jesus is referring to here in Revelation then what can we do about it?

Only one thing-- Allow Jesus to come in with His heavy machinery and plow up the soil of our heart.

Breaking it up and turning it over so that it can once again receive the seed of His blessings…

Jesus goes on to say….

**18I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.**

**19Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. 20Here I am! I stand at the door and knock.**

**If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.**

**21To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”**

Church, do you have an ear to hear what the Spirit says to the Church this morning?

We need to buy from Him gold refined in the fire.

Do you know how gold is refined?

They take the raw ore that contains the gold but also has a lot of other minerals in it and they smelt it..

They make a fire hot enough to melt the gold and the other minerals within it, and the gold, being the heaviest mineral, stays to the bottom and the other materials, the impurities, float to the top where they can be skimmed off and removed.

What is left is the pure substance of Gold….

The hotter the fire the more of the impurities are removed. The hotter the fire the more pure the gold becomes….

Jesus pleads with us here…

**18I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.**

God wants us to be refined as pure gold…

He desires that our life become a precious material…

White clothes signify righteousness, Living righteous and holy lives.

The salve is the salve of the Holy Spirit. Our yielding our lives and our wills to the Holy Spirit is like applying a salve to our spiritual eyes that will enable us to see and discern the will of God for our lives..

If we are going to be refined as pure gold it will require that we pass through the fire so that all the junk in our life can be skimmed off so that what remains is the pure substance of a sanctified life that is dedicated and fully committed to Christ…

Example: Several years ago we went on a train trip out to Seattle Washington to see our son Troy and on the way back we took the northern route home. As we were coming out of eastern Washington, we come out of a mountain range and there were miles and miles of apple orchards…

Apple trees for as far as the eye could see in any direction.

The conductor announced that this particular area supplied something like 1/3 of the world’s apple supply!

He went on to share that what made this such good apple country was the soil. The soil had come from volcanic eruptions thousands of years earlier and as the ash from those volcanic eruptions built up over time it became rich, nutrient filled soil.

Some of the richest soil on the planet was the result of volcanic eruptions…

We need an eruption of the Holy Spirit within our nation today!

We need an eruption of the Holy Spirit with the Church!

We need an eruption of the Holy Spirit of God in our own lives!

We need to allow God to plow the soil of our hearts, turn it over, break it up and bruise it and once again make it fertile soil where He can sow the seed of His word and His seed can root deep and grow producing a crop 100, 60 or 30 times what was sown!

What we have seen happen in our nation over the past few decades should alarm us all…

The things we have come to embrace as a nation are worse than anything that even cities such as Sodom and Gomorrah were found guilty of…

Removal of God and prayer from our schools, the taking of innocent life through abortion on demand, the proliferation of pornography on the internet and the further destruction of the family unit through same sex marriage. Gender now determined by how one may feel on a given day.

And if these unconscionable acts are allowed to continue our fate as a nation may very well be the same as that of Sodom and Gomorrah..

I don’t see that God would have a choice when it comes to one day judging America for her sins without issuing a public apology to Sodom and Gomorrah for their judgment!

What will be the position of the Church? Will we continue sit back in apathy and do what we have so often done in the past…absolutely nothing--

Or will we rise up in righteous indignation and start demanding that these ungodly national decrees be reversed..

Starting to hold our elected leadership accountable for the times they do not represent us in the affairs of government…

I believe that America will be judged on a lot different scale than most other nations of the world….God has blessed us with a true republic where we choose those who will represent us in the affairs of government, and in that regard we are, in fact, a self governing nation…

Scripture says **to whom much has been given much will be required!**

Someone once said that: *Tolerance is the last virtue of a decadent society!*

All the great societies that have ever existed that had become tolerant of evil for tolerance’s sake have ended in ruin!

We will be judged on the same scale as they?

Founding Father and The father of our bill of rights, George Mason said it well…

*“As nations can not be rewarded or punished in the next world, they must be in this. By an inevitable chain of causes and effects, Providence punishes national sins by national calamities”.*

How would you describe the condition of the soil of your heart this morning? Hard---Rocky---a weed bed?

Or plowed and tilled ground that is receptive for the seeds that God wants to sow?

Are you allowing the Holy Spirit to continually till the soil of your heart making it receptive and sensitive to the seed that God wants to sow within you?

Church, don’t settle for a life of apathetic existence as a Christian…. Allow God to plow the soil of your heart so that you will produce a crop of 100, 60 or 30 times what was sown….

This is the hope for you and I and it is the only sure hope for our nation today

**2 Chr. 7:14 -15 (NIV) 14if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. 15Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.**

Are you willing, to not do just what is necessary to bring about true healing and restoration to your own life, but do what is necessary to bring healing and restoration to our nation as well?

Will we humble ourselves and pray and seek His face and turn from our wicked ways, so God will once again hear from heaven and will forgive our sin and will heal our land?