Tilling the Soil of Our Hearts

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, May 18, 2025
PASSAGES	Matthew 13; Psalm 115; 1 Timothy 6
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:24:11 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The four soils are not four kinds of people locked in from birth. They are four conditions of a heart — and a condition can change. That is why Matt can say he has hope for anyone, including the person who is sure he is the hard path.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Obedience is not waiting on a better sign. Matt heard an audible supernatural voice exactly once in his life and disobeyed it anyway.
- Forgiveness is not the same as trust. You can forgive someone and still never be alone with them again. Trust is built and earned; forgiveness is a gift you give.
- You cannot cut the card lengthwise. Holding on to what others owe you while releasing what you owe God is not on offer.
- False worship deadens. Psalm 115 says idols have eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear — and that those who make them become like them.
- Money is not the thorn. *Desiring* to be rich is, and a poor man can crave gold as thoroughly as a rich one. It is a condition of the heart, not of the checking account.
- The remedy for the fear of man is the fear of God; the remedy for loving glory from people is longing for glory from God.
- Peter denied Jesus three times and later gave his life for the ministry of the word. His weeping was not his ending.

- The right question is not what great thing you could do. It is: what small thing can you say yes to right now?

▶ 1:27:26

Matt opened with a story he does not tell often, and told it against himself. To his knowledge there has been exactly one moment in his life when he heard a supernatural voice with his own eardrums — and in that moment he disobeyed.

The one time he heard a voice

▶ 1:28:01

High school, long before he met Mandy. He was driving his girlfriend home; they were arguing; she got out and he pulled away without checking that she made it inside, which he knew was the decent thing to do and which mattered because she regularly forgot her key. He had rounded a long bend, out of sight of the house, windows down, when a car passed him fast and someone shouted: *She can't get in.* He looked back. There was no car.

"I just kept driving," Matt said. "I kept driving in the hardness of my heart."

He brought it up because of a particular bargain people make: if God would show himself more clearly — a light, a voice, a breakthrough — then obedience would be easy and commitment would follow. Matt's own experience says otherwise. Sarah, who had spoken earlier about obeying out of nowhere, was enabled by the Holy Spirit, but she also said yes. Obeying is a condition of the heart, not a function of how flashy God has been.

Part one: the note cards

▶ 1:30:50

The previous Sunday was less a sermon than an exercise. Everyone wrote on one side of a note card the ways people had sinned against them, and on the other side their own sins against God, others and themselves. In between came the parable of the unmerciful servant — the man forgiven an enormous debt who walked out and started throttling someone over pocket change.

The point of the game was the card itself. You can throw away both sides or keep both sides; you cannot slice it lengthwise and keep what others owe you while discarding what you owe. This is not a debt-remission program, Matt said, but a transfer out of the kingdom of darkness into the dominion of the

Son — and God is more generous than we would prefer, because he wants to be generous to our enemies too.

▶ 1:32:10

Then the clarification he thought the week probably needed. Forgiveness is not trust. If someone abused you, forgiving them is part of your own healing — and it does not oblige you to be alone with them again, or to hand over your house key, your car keys or your credit cards. Trust is built and earned. Forgiveness is a gift you give.

> *"I stand before the Lord and I say, I am not pressing charges. They don't need any wrath on my account. And I bless them."*

The parable, and the question underneath it

▶ 1:33:35

> "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."
>
> MATTHEW 13:3–8 ↗

The ending is plainly good — good soil, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold, abundance and health. But the disciples asked why he taught this way at all, and the answer sends the whole parable inward.

▶ 1:36:39

> "For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them."
>
> MATTHEW 13:14–15 ↗, QUOTING ISAIAH 6:9–10 ↗

Working eyeballs, working ears, and a dullness of heart underneath that stops understanding before it arrives. Isaiah met the same wall centuries earlier. And note where the sentence lands: if they turned, God is ready to heal.

How a heart gets dull

▶ 1:37:43

For a clue, Matt went to a song. Psalm 115 opens with the nations asking Israel where their God is — no statue to point at — and answers with an inventory of what the nations do have.

> "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them."
>
> PSALM 115:4–8 ↗

Eyes that do not see, ears that do not hear — the same symptoms Jesus names in the crowd. False worship makes the worshiper resemble what he worships. And statues are not the only candidates: the love of money is a false god, so are pride and arrogance, and none of them need a carved nose to deaden a heart.

Four conditions, not four verdicts

▶ 1:41:02

Jesus then explains the soils (Matthew 13:18–23). The path is the one who hears the word and does not understand it. The rocky ground understood and received it with joy, but had no root — it holds only while things stay easy. The thorns are "the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches," competing for the same nutrients and the same real estate in the dirt.

Matt refused the fatalistic reading. These are not four types of person running from birth to death on a fixed track; they are four conditions of a heart. "And because of that," he said, "I have hope for anyone."

▶ 1:43:44

Take the path. Plenty of people who understand today could once have said honestly that they did not. Understanding is a quantity that moves. Those who seek find; those who knock have the door opened; books get reread and words get explained. The Ethiopian in the chariot could not make sense of Isaiah on his own and said so, and help arrived (Acts 8:30–31). If someone tells you they know nothing about Jesus and have no time, you have time for one sentence — he said he is the way, the truth and the life — and you can come back tomorrow.

▶ 1:45:23

Take the rocky ground: joy, then collapse when it gets hard. Peter stood in a courtyard and swore he did not know what anyone was talking about (Matthew 26:69–75), and the same man later gave his life for the ministry of the word. He wept bitterly, and that was not his end. Jesus told another story about two sons sent to work: one said yes and did not go, one said no and went (Matthew 21:28–31). The one who repented is the one who obeyed.

Pulling the thorns

▶ 1:46:39

The cares of this world are the harder soil to work, and Matt named them one at a time with a remedy attached to each. Man-pleasing first —
"If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ." Then the version of it John diagnoses in the authorities who believed in Jesus and stayed quiet rather than be put out of the synagogue, because they loved the glory that comes from man. Wanting glory is not the problem; wanting it from the wrong source is. Glory sought from God will choke out the cares of the world rather than the reverse.

▶ 1:48:22

> "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe."
>
> PROVERBS 29:25 ↗

The antidote to fearing man is fearing God — do not fear those who can only kill the body. And that fear is a door, not a wall. Proverbs does not tell the fool to run along; it says
the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. There can be a beginning.

▶ 1:49:35

> "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."
>
> 1 TIMOTHY 6:9–10 ↗; SEE ALSO 1 TIMOTHY 6:6–8 ↗

▶ 1:50:12

Matt stopped anyone excusing themselves on grounds of income. Poor people can be obsessed with riches too — it is like longing for a woman who is not your wife. You can lust after gold that does not

belong to you. Read the words again: *those who desire to be rich*, not those who are rich. Money is not evil and having it is not evil. The love of it is the root, and it is a condition of the heart, not of the checking account.

Give him permission

▶ 1:52:06

The close was practical. Let the Holy Spirit run this process. If you missed the note-card exercise, do it at home; if you did it in the room but the names on the card belonged to people sitting beside you and you could not do it wholeheartedly, find a time and do it for real. Burn the card in the driveway or tear it up — the method is not the point, the letting go of bitterness is, because a root of bitterness will destroy us. Add to that the counterweights: purposeful generosity as a way of loosening your grip on money, forgiving people even when at first it is only words, and growing a fear of God in place of the fear of man.

"We're born with nothing," Matt said, "and we're going to leave this planet with nothing except what God has done in our hearts."

▶ 1:53:27

And then the question he actually wanted people to leave with, which is deliberately small. Not the grand assignment — you do not have the strength to go convert the government of China — but: what do you have the strength to do right now? What one little thing can you say yes to today? Ask the Holy Spirit, he said, because we believe here that God speaks. The prayer that closed the service asked for exactly that: clear out what is choking the word, give us depth of soil, uproot to your own heart's content. "Lord, we give you permission to till the soil of our hearts."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Matthew 18:21–35
- Matthew 13:3–8
- Matthew 13:14–15
- Isaiah 6:9–10
- Psalm 115:4–8
- Matthew 13:18–23
- Acts 8:30–31
- John 14:6
- Matthew 26:69–75
- Matthew 21:28–31
- Galatians 1:10
- John 12:42–43
- Proverbs 29:25
- Matthew 10:28
- Proverbs 9:10
- 1 Timothy 6:6–8
- 1 Timothy 6:9–10

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt disobeyed the one audible voice he ever heard. Where have you been waiting for a clearer sign before obeying something you already know?
2. Forgiveness is a gift; trust is earned. Where have you confused the two — either withholding forgiveness, or handing back trust too quickly?
3. Psalm 115 says we become like what we worship. What have you been shaped by lately, and what has it made you deaf to?
4. Of the four soils, which condition describes your heart this season — and what specifically would tilling it look like?
5. Matt asked for the small yes, not the grand one. What is the one thing you have the strength to obey this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8BDDC5tCQo&t=5051s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.