Soil Testing: Rocky Ground

“I’ll Serve the Lord as Long as There are no Difficulties or Discouragements”

Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-27; Luke 8:4-18

Introduction:

1. It happened in Galveston, Texas. It concerned a woman and her parakeet named “Chippie.” It seems that the woman was cleaning Chippie’s bird cage with a canister vacuum cleaner. She was cleaning the bottom of the cage with no attachment on the tube, when the telephone rang. She turned her head to pick up the phone, continuing to vacuum the cage and as she said, “hello” into the phone, she heard the horrible sound of Chippie being sucked up into the vacuum. Immediately she put down the phone, ripped open the vacuum bag, and found Chippie in there, stunned but still alive.

Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed it, ran into the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held the bird under the water to clean it off. When she finished that, she saw the hair dryer on the bathroom sink. She turned it on and held the bird in front of the blast of hot air to dry him off.

A few weeks later a reporter from the newspaper that originally published the story went out to the house to ask the woman, “How’s Chippie doing now?” She said, “Well, Chippie doesn’t sing much any more. He just sort of sits and stares.”

Many of us can identify with Chippie. Life has sucked [inhaled] us up, thrown cold water on us, and blown us away. And somewhere in the trauma we have lost our song. (John Gipson, KEYNOTER, February 21, 1991, page 2.)

1. The rocky ground was not only rocks in the soil but also bedrock—a ledge of rock with a shallow layer of topsoil. Mark 4:5, 6; Mark 4:16, 17
   1. The seeds sprout quicker.
   2. The plant wilts sooner.
   3. A good example of rocky ground: go South on Hillsboro Pike, turn left into Fieldstone Farms, turn into the next street to the left; there is the ledge of rock covered with thin top soil.
2. When I experience a sudden spurt of growth, I might want to ask myself, “Is this because I have no depth?”.
   1. Natural growth is natural, continual, gradual. 2 Peter 3:18, Charles B. Williams; 2 Corinthians 3:18, RSV
   2. A sudden change may be more for manipulation than for transformation and spiritual healing.
      1. I may be bargaining with God.
      2. I may be trying to cut a deal with friends or family.
      3. If that is true, the wilting will be as fast as the sudden growth.
3. If I learn I have no depth, the good news is that I can change.
4. I can deal with the rocks in my life in a constructive way.
5. WHAT ARE THE ROCKS?
   1. Tribulation for the word’s sake. Mark 4:17
   2. Persecution for the word’s sake. Mark 4:17
   3. Temptation. Luke 8:13
   4. I will have rocks. Job 14:1; 2 Timothy 3:12
6. WHERE DO ROCKS ORIGINATE?
   1. Enemies. Acts 14:22
   2. Natural problems.
      1. Sickness.
      2. Storm.
      3. Earthquake.
   3. Associates. John 12:42, 43
   4. Family. Matthew 10:35, 36
   5. Good people. Matthew 16:23
   6. Inside me. James 1:13-15; James 4:1
7. WHAT SHOULD I DO WITH THE ROCKS IN MY LIFE?
   1. Large boulders, bedrock, should be drilled out, blasted out, and more top soil brought in to give more depth.
      1. Although I sprang up immediately (Mark 4:5), I can develop depth.
      2. I do not have to wither; I can find some depth. Mark 4:23
   2. Some rocks need to be rejected, thrown away.
      1. Jesus rejected the insults of the scribes. Mark 3:20-30
      2. When somebody gives me something that I can’t use,
         1. I try to exchange it for something my size.
         2. If it stinks, I put it in the garbage.
         3. If doesn’t belong to me, I try to return it to the proper owner.
         4. I don’t need to keep harmful rocks (hurts) just because somebody gave them to me for a present.
   3. Some rocks need to be collected for fences, memorials, pathways.
      1. Paul lined up his rocks (tribulations, persecutions) as evidence of his discipleship. 2 Corinthians 11:22-33
      2. Jeremiah thought of his past hurts and had hope. Lamentations 3:21-24
   4. Some rocks need to be crushed and put back into our lives as lime to make us sweeter, better servants.
      1. Acid ground needs lime to neutralize the bitter acid.
      2. With the proper processing some rocks in our life can make us better, not bitter. Psalm 119:67, 71; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10
      3. Plaque in Lindsey and June Langford’s house:

LORD, HELP US TO SMILE AGAIN. BUT NEVER LET US FORGET WE CRIED

1. HOW DO I FIND THE VALUE OF THE ROCKS IN MY LIFE?
   1. Take time to evaluate the rocks—don’t throw away valuable gems along with worthless rocks. James 1:2-5
      1. Consider your emotional state before you make quick decisions.
      2. The most dangerous thing in the world is to make an irreversible negative decision during a brownout time. Don’t sell your real estate because there is no electricity in the building. It’s just a brownout, not a burnout. Never cut a dead tree down in the wintertime. I remember one winter my dad needed firewood, and he found a dead tree and sawed it down. In the spring to his dismay new shoots sprouted around the trunk. He said, “I though sure it was dead. The leaves had all dropped in the wintertime. It was so cold that twigs snapped as surely as if there were no life left in the old tree. But now I see that there was still life at the taproot.” He looked at me and said, “Bob, don’t forget this important lesson. Never cut a tree down in the wintertime.” Never make a negative decision in the low time. Never make your most important decisions when you are in your worst mood (Tough Times Never Last, But Tough People Do!, by Robert H. Schuller).
   2. Cultivate the attitude of gratitude—look for the blessing. 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Ephesians 5:20
   3. Get help with processing your rocks. Jeremiah 23:29; Matthew 11:28-30
   4. The difference between a stumbling block and a stepping stone may be my attitude, the way I view the rock. 1 Peter 2:6-8

Conclusion

1. Rocky ground is progress, growth from wayside soil.
   1. In the pathway, the seed does not enter.
   2. In the rocky ground, the seed sprouts.
2. When I find the rocks, I need to find the appropriate way to handle the rocks and find the blessing.
3. In the summer of 1989, I visited the town of Enterprise, Alabama, and saw the Boll Weevil Monument. It is the only memorial in the world that glorifies a pest. Such recognition came about as a consequence of the Boll Weevil ravaging 60% of the cotton crop in 1915 and with even greater destruction in 1916. This pest forced diversified farming and peanuts was the chosen crop in 1917 with more than a million bushels being harvested. On December 11, 1919 a monument was unveiled in Enterprise honoring an insect whose arrival resulted in an agricultural revolution and changed the character of the area. The Boll Weevil Monument, a symbol to man’s willingness and ability to adjust to adversity, stands over ten feet tall at the intersection of Main and College Streets.

R. O. (Bon) Fleming, an Enterprise merchant and member of the City Council, conceived the idea for the monument and citizens from the area contributed to the expense of erecting it.

The following inscription can be found on the base of the monument:

BOLL WEEVIL

MONUMENT

In profound appreciation

of the Boll Weevil

and what it has done

as the Herald of Prosperity

this monument was erected

by the Citizens of

Enterprise, Coffee County,

Alabama

(Greek definitions from Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon, Copyright 1992, Woodside Bible Fellowship.)