

The Parable of the Sower and its Interpretation

Matthew 13:1-23

Matthew 13:1-23 - *“On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. ² And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.*

³ Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: “Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ⁶ But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. ⁷ And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. ⁸ But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

¹⁰ And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?”

¹¹ He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. ¹³ Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; ¹⁵ For the hearts of this people have grown dull, their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; ¹⁷ for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

¹⁸ “Therefore hear the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. ²⁰ But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. ²² Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. ²³ But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

Background Notes

A turning point took place in our Lord's ministry in Matthew 12. Up to that point, the Lord had made a *bona fides* offer of the Kingdom to the nation of Israel.

Look back at Matthew 3:1-2, and the theme of John the Baptist's ministry: *"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'"* Look also at Matthew 4:17, at the beginning of our Lord's public ministry: *"From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"*

This "kingdom of heaven" was the Kingdom that was promised and prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures. Now the King had arrived, and the offer of the Kingdom was presented: *"...Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* Would Israel receive their King and His Kingdom? Sadly, they did not. The nation of Israel rejected the offer. They refused to recognize and accept their Messiah and King.

The turning point came when the religious leaders of the nation attributed the power behind the Lord's miracles to the power of Satan! *"Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?'"* Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, *"This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons"* (Matthew 12:22-24).

Because of this unpardonable sin and their rejection of the King, the offer of the Kingdom was withdrawn. **The predicted earthly Kingdom that was promised in the Old Testament prophecy was postponed until the King's second coming.** It is important to realize and understand this point: the earthly Kingdom of our Lord has been **postponed** until His second coming. The prophecies about the Messiah's earthly Kingdom **will be fulfilled literally** at that time.

Some Bible teachers believe that these prophecies should now be transferred from Israel and applied "spiritually" to the Church. Are they now to be fulfilled in some kind of "spiritual" way in the Church today? No! All of these prophecies **will be fulfilled literally in Israel** when the Lord returns.

In the meantime, the Kingdom is in "mystery" or "secret" form. *"It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given"* (v11). The word "mystery" here doesn't mean something that is mysterious, but rather something that is **concealed**. The present form of the Kingdom was not revealed in the Old Testament promises and prophecies. The Lord did not begin to reveal the present form of the Kingdom until the people of Israel rejected the King and His Kingdom. The present form of the Kingdom is what the parables of Matthew 13 are all about. They reveal the present form of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Doctrinal Points

1. There are different responses to the Word of God in the human heart.

We don't have to try to figure out the meaning of the Parable of the Sower because the Lord Himself gave us the interpretation. The seed that was sown is the Word of God (the word of the kingdom). The four different soils represent four different conditions and responses of the human heart to the Word of God.

The hard ground by the wayside represents the hard-hearted person in whom there is no response to the Word of God. The birds that snatch the seed away represent the evil one, or Satan. If you're a "hard ground hearer," it won't be long before you will have forgotten all about this message from the Word of God. Satan will have fulfilled His goal in your life. I trust that you're not a "hard ground hearer."

The rocky or stony ground represents the human heart that responds to the Word of God. This type of person appreciates biblical values and moral standards, and enjoys hearing the Bible stories, but to them it's just a pleasant weekly habit. This person is shallow and superficial, and has no depth. The Word of God never takes root in this person's heart. When trouble or persecution comes their way, this type of person disappears. Their absence is an indication that they never had true faith. Do you know anyone like that? Are **you** like that? You go to church and enjoy the music and listening to the message - but where will you be when life gets difficult? Will your true faith be evident by standing firm in your faith? Or will you become discouraged and drop out, indicating that you're not really a true believer?

The thorny ground represents a human heart that is so taken up with this world and its materialistic desires that the Word of God never has a chance to take root in the soul. The Word is choked off before the person comes to true faith, because they're involved in so many activities, interests, and cares. If you're not a Christian, you may be this type of hearer. You hear the Word of God on Sunday morning, but the message is quickly forgotten - crowded out by other interests, or the desire for money or success or possessions, or the pleasures and activities of the "good life."

The good soil represents the person whose heart is prepared by the Holy Spirit to receive the Word in true faith. The Word of God takes root and brings forth fruit – some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, some one hundred-fold. So we see that there are various kinds of hearers in the audience when the Word of God is proclaimed. Everyone who hears the Word is in one of the four categories of soil. There are different responses to the Word of God in the human heart.

2. There are different results from the Word of God in the believer's heart.

I remember preaching on this parable some years ago, and I mistakenly used the word "**percent**" rather than "**fold**"! I said that the "good ground hearer" brings forth fruit - some thirty **percent**, some sixty **percent**, and some one hundred percent. But **thirty fold** is more than **thirty percent**, isn't it? Thirty **fold** is thirty times, or actually **three thousand**

percent! Sixty fold is sixty times or six thousand percent, and one hundred fold is one hundred times or ten thousand percent return! Now that's a good investment, isn't it?

If you're a believer, let me ask you: Are you a good investment for the Lord? Is the Lord getting at least thirty fold (or three thousand percent!) return in fruit from your life? Or is His return much less? Something to think about, isn't it?

Why do some Christians produce less spiritual fruit than other Christians? After all - some thirty, some sixty, some one hundred! Answer: The same thorns that crowd out and choke off the Word in the unbeliever's life also hinder and limit and choke fruit production in the believer's life. The cares and anxieties of this world - the desire for pleasure and material possessions - the love of money - these are the things that keep most of us from really getting into God's Word. The fruit of the Spirit - love and joy and peace and patience - is not evident in our lives. The "thorns of this world" hold us back from full commitment and being "one hundred fold fruit-producers." There are different results from the Word of God in the believer's heart.

Practical Application

Believing is seeing!

We often use the expression "seeing is believing," meaning that we won't believe something unless we see it with our own eyes. Well, in spiritual matters it's just the opposite. Believing is seeing! That's why the Lord Jesus taught the people in parables. "*Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand*" (v13). And, "*But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear...*" (v16). In other words, unbelievers would not see and understand the truth, but believers would see and understand the truth.

This is still true today! Let me ask you: Is the Bible like a closed book to you? Do you have a hard time understanding spiritual truth? You need to be born again! You need to believe and trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior. Then your eyes will be opened, and you will be able to see and understand. Believing is seeing!