

“The Miraculous Seed”

*As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it.
He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold,
in another sixty, and in another thirty (Matthew 13:23).*

Seeds are miraculous things. On the surface, a seed looks dry, dead, and completely worthless. And yet once it's sown, something amazing happens. From within that weak and withered shell, there is a spark of life and, without any help from the sower, that tiny seed slowly begins to sprout and, in time, it turns into a strong and vibrant plant.

We take this process from nature for granted and usually don't give this agricultural marvel a second thought, but today, the miracle of the seed is the focus of Jesus' teaching, and, in a fascinating feature of this parable, Jesus actually explains the meaning of this fable to His disciples. In a very straightforward fashion, Jesus says that the seed is “the word of the kingdom.” And, using the imagery of different types of soil, Jesus then illustrates the ways the word of the kingdom is received.

In this parable, the “soil” is broken into four distinct groups and, in His explanation, Jesus leaves little to our interpretation as he unpacks the meaning of each. The first type of soil mentioned in the story is the path. Here, the seed is exposed to the elements and ultimately devoured by the birds, a fate Jesus tells us is equivalent to someone who hears the word but does not understand what has been “sown in his heart.” The result is that the devil comes and removes the seed completely.

The second scenario pictured in the Parable of the Sower depicts the seed landing on rocky ground, which Jesus explains is, “the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away” (Matthew 13:20-21).

Next, we find the seed coming to rest among thorns that “grew up and choked them” (Matthew 13:7). Here, Jesus describes, “the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”

Finally, in verse 23, Jesus explains the seed sown on the good soil as “the one who hears the word and understands it.” And, in the climax of our text, Jesus concludes the lesson on the Parable of the Sower with the statement that, “He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty” (Matthew 13:23).

There it is...the Parable of the Sower explained! The language is plain. The images are clear. And Jesus even tells us what each soil sample means. But what is the application of this simple story? What are we supposed to take away from all this talk of seeds and soil? In answering these critical questions, we need to recognize that our first inclination is to focus on the soil; to try to analyze just what kind of soil we are, or what kind of soil our kids are, or our spouse is, or our neighbors are. We read Jesus' words and immediately begin to label ourselves and others as hard or rocky or thorny soil, and then quickly start making out plan for soil remediation.

But this is an impossible exercise, because the truth is, we don't fall into just one category. There are times in our lives when we don't understand or when we openly reject God's Word; when we close ourselves off from the Lord or hold onto the sin we know God condemns. And there are other times in our lives when we feel grounded in the Spirit and strong in our faith, and yet, as soon as trouble comes our way, we quickly fall back into self-destructive patterns of doubt and despair. And my friends, I don't have to tell you that there are also times in our lives when the deceitfulness of wealth and the worries of this life govern our every thought. The truth is, we are all kinds of soil: hardened, rocky, and thorny. And yet, in us, the saving seed has been sown.

The question, "What kind of soil am I?" is not a bad one to ask, and it is important for us to constantly examine our hearts before God, *but that is not the point of the parable*. Remember, parables are earthly stories used by Jesus to teach about the kingdom of heaven, and as hard as we might try to put ourselves at the center of this story, it's not about us. The temptation in examining this parable is to look at the soil, but the primary focus of this story is not on the soil; *it is on the seed*. It is the pure and perfect message that in Christ, the kingdom of Heaven has come; that in Christ, sin has been forgiven; and that in Christ, heaven has been promised and life has been restored! And every time we hear this message of the kingdom, the soil of our hearts is being transformed. This seed – this message of grace and reconciliation and hope – is precisely the message of the kingdom that Jesus was talking about, and this Gospel seed changes everything!

One of the most perplexing but amazing aspects of this story is that the Sower sows His seed with abandon. It is so easy to miss this. The Sower doesn't take soil samples, or cultivate the path, or clear the rocks, or cut out the thorns. Instead, against all reason, He sows freely, and He scatters His life-giving seed on all the land, knowing that it will indeed produce a harvest. My brothers and sisters in Christ, that's exactly how it is with the kingdom of God. The seed brings life. And it does this in ways we would never predict and could never engineer.

In this parable, Jesus encourages us with the promise that through the miraculous seed of the Gospel not only are we given life in the kingdom of God, but we are also given the power to bear fruit with our lives that will "yield a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown" (Matthew 13:23). This means that you too sow Gospel seeds, and whether it's in your family or with your friends, or with people you meet in passing or with those you've known for years; and regardless of how hard or rocky or thorny the soil may look to you, you can sow seeds of the Gospel with wild generosity and with complete confidence in the promises of God.

And what does this fruit-bearing mean? It means that you can forgive those who have wronged you, and that you can serve those who don't deserve it. It means that you can listen to those who are hurting, and you can speak for those who are marginalized. It means that you can sow the love and forgiveness of Jesus among the people He has placed into your life because God has promised us that just, "as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10-11). Go with the peace of this promise God has made to you today. Amen.

Pastor Thomas A. Eggold