

Bible Passage**Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

Matthew 13:1-9 That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. (2) And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach. (3) And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; (4) and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. (5) "Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. (6) "But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. (7) "Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. (8) "And others fell on the good soil and *yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. (9) "He who has ears, let him hear."

Matthew 13:18-23 "Hear then the parable of the sower. (19) "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. (20) "The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; (21) yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. (22) "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. (23) "And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

Notes

One of the great fringe benefits to filling in the gaps in a preaching schedule is that I get to choose my favorite sections of scripture to speak, and today is no exception to this. Today I've chosen to speak on the parable of the sower, which is found in the Gospels of Matthew (chapter 13, verses 3-23), Mark (chapter 4, verses 1-20) and Luke (chapter 8, verses 4-15). This parable was incredibly helpful and meaningful to me when I was young Christian 20 odd years ago, and it still is today. The truths that are revealed are very profound and it really grabbed my attention early on as it answers some of the questions that I had when I was a young believer in Christ. To sum up, what the parable tells the reader is how individuals will react to hearing the gospel, how they will react to hearing the word of God. And as I get older, my own experiences can confirm these varied reactions, not that I expected anything else, it's just a privilege to witness God's word in action and demonstrating its truth. I've experienced these reactions throughout my Christian life, when sharing God's word with friends, with family members, with coworkers, neighbors, and strangers. And I remember when I was just starting to share my faith, the negative reactions caught me off guard, as I was sharing something that I personally felt was wonderful and eternal, and I naively thought others would react as I did, and as you all know, I was very wrong. And my experiences have taught me that, while it is uncommon to get an extreme reaction, there is usually some reaction, as God's word is powerful, and it doesn't return void (Isiah 55:11). On an individual level, I believe that God's word resonates within every individual that ever has lived, and I believe this is confirmed in ***Romans 1:19 through 1:20***. This section of scripture tells us that God's word, and more specifically His truth, is evident to all people. His invisible attributes, His eternal power, His divine nature, is evident to all, both those that are honestly and genuinely seeking truth and those that are trying to suppress the truth. And we're told that the Lord made this evident so that those who reject God are without excuse. There is a French Mathematician from the 17th century, Blaise Pascal, who has a quote that really captures this sentiment; ***There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus***. What this means is that every individual will have some reaction to God's word, and their reactions depends a lot on how they view their life and their sin; if they love their sin, they will reject God, and if they hate their sin, they will

turn to God. And the parable that we're going over today will explain more about this reality.

What appeals to me most about this parable is that our Lord is giving the disciples, and us, insight into how other individuals function, as all through my life growing, other people were an absolute mystery to me. Another thing that I like about the parable is that it's very appealing; it sets a very idyllic scene to modern eyes, and it's relatively easy to imagine the setting and process that is being described. A field has been plowed and is prepared to receive seed, and the Sower goes out and spreads the seed onto the field, onto the soil. The Sower would have a bag of gathered seed over his shoulder, and would spread the seed by grabbing a handful, some measured amount, and broadcast it onto the field by swinging his arm in a gesture that I'm sure he's done a thousand times before. From the parable, we can also infer that there are walking paths between the individual fields; paths that have seen significant traffic, and probably also function as property divisions as well. I believe it's a scene that we all can envision.

But as we move into its meaning, and please note that I'm very grateful that the Lord explained it to the disciples, there are a couple of other details of the parable that need defining; the Sower, who broadcasts the seed, represents anyone that spreads or shares the gospel, which is God's word. The seed is the word of God, which is a very simple concept. And the soil represents the individuals hearing or receiving the word, and it's my opinion that the soil represents the hearts of these individuals. The Sowers (us Christians) are to go into the world and spread the seed (which is God's word) by broadcasting it out with some skill and care, and it will land on various soils (individuals, or the hearts of individuals) and will be the catalyst for different reactions from the individuals receiving the word.

As seed is spread, the first soil that it falls onto or near is the road, or the traveler's road. And this gives the impression of a path that has been compacted greatly by a large number of travelers. This patch of land doesn't receive any irrigation or the plow and is compacted and compressed by constant travel. The seed that falls on or by this road is unable to penetrate this soil; it's too dense and compacted. And as the seed lies vulnerably on the road, it is either taken by the birds, or it is trampled underfoot. We've all met these poor individuals, they come in all shapes and sizes, however they all have one thing in common, they're hard hearted. These individuals are hardened by the lives they've led; they're hardened by circumstance, by situation, but mostly, if not entirely, their hearts are hardened by their sin. When I meet these individuals, it really

hurts my soul, I really feel sorrow for them as they're difficult to speak to and it's difficult to share God's word with them, as they've already made up their mind in regards to these things. When you speak to them, you can see them shutting down, it's really strange to see, there are subtle shifts in their body language, in their face and their eyes, and you know they are done listening. And as an FYI, I always take this as an indicator to wrap up, but they're still going to hear the name of Jesus and that He saves... Them being done listening doesn't mean that I'm done sharing, I just will shorten it a little bit. Two things came to mind when I was thinking about these hard-hearted individuals, the first is a natural observation, the other is a supernatural truth.

The natural observation has to do with human nature, and I'm referring to a form of cognitive bias known as the Dunning-Kruger Effect. This effect describes the reality that people with limited competence in a particular domain overestimate their abilities in that domain. Essentially, these individuals don't know enough to recognize how little they actually know. And the reality is that the individuals that know nothing about the bible or the God of the bible, but assume they know enough to make an eternal decision and cut off any external discourse on this subject.

The supernatural truth that comes to mind is in Romans, specifically Romans 1:24-25 ***Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. (25) For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*** And whenever there is a "Therefore", we need to take a look at what came just prior to it, and in this case, we can sum up Romans 1:18-23 by stating that the existence of God is evident and apparent to all, however some have still chosen to dishonor God and to worship the creation rather than the creator. Therefore, God gave them over to the sinful lusts in their hearts. And that is why some are so hard hearted towards the creator God and the gospel; they wanted their sin over God, so He gave them what they wanted.

The fact is that these individuals have heard the truth of the gospel, but their response was wrong; they didn't value it, they didn't covet it or appreciate the beauty of it, or seek to understand it, or seek to possess it. The bible describes what our response to obtaining salvation should be.

- Mat 13:44 "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.
- Mat 13:45-46 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, (46) and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Those are the responses of a Christian to the Gospel, we seek to possess it, to obtain it, to protect it. We hunger and thirst for the righteousness of our Lord and will go to great lengths to protect it. Those that are hard hearted leave it alone, don't desire it, don't protect it, and it is snatched away by the enemy, or trampled under foot, both of which are terrible.

And a final note on the hard hearted, the purpose of the parable is to describe a response to God's Word, not to discourage us from sharing the gospel with these individuals. We're still to love them, we're still to pursue relationship with them, and we're to do this out of loving obedience to our Lord and Savior and out of sorrow and empathy for the lost, as we were once lost.

The soil we're going to discuss next is the rocky, more specifically known as the shallow soil. The idea is that there is soil, but it's very shallow, there is enough soil for a seed grow into a plant, but not enough soil to retain adequate moisture to sustain the life of a plant. I wrestled with this one, not with the reality of the Words that Jesus shared, but with the implications of this truth. Our own Pastor Mark used to tell me that he wasn't worried at all about any persecution coming to the United States, and in fact, to some degree he welcomed it. And his reasoning was that this persecution would purify the American church. I know this soil type; I know these individuals; they are exactly who and what he was talking about. They want what God has to offer, but they want their sin as well. They lack commitment, and they don't value God's word enough to put Christ on the throne of their lives. When persecution comes they will walk away from God, as they haven't built their lives on the foundation that is Jesus Christ, a terrible reality.

I get the privilege of speaking individually to a lot of men from ERCC and from other local churches, and from time to time, religious persecution gets brought up. And we always end this topic by acknowledging that religious persecution in the United States really isn't that bad. I mean, we're in the Pacific Northwest, what's really going to happen? You publicly proclaim your faith in Christ and some virtue signaling Pagen is

going to give you a short honk of disapproval from their lilac-colored Prius? You read your bible in a Starbucks and the barista/social justice warrior isn't going to give you the proper amount of foam in your pumpkin spice latte? This isn't persecution, this is the Pacific Northwest and a fallen, sinful society, but this isn't persecution. I would imagine that there are some places that are more difficult than others on faithful believers, but generally speaking, I don't believe we've really had true persecution yet.

If or when the United States comes under real persecution, we will all know it, and my guess is there will be a substantial departure from the church. Presently, there isn't any significant penalty or cost to be associated with the church. When you attend, the people are kind, welcoming and accepting. We practice hospitality and loving each other, *and we'll continue to get better at this*, but there isn't really a cost for being here. However, when real affliction, persecution and temptation arrives, there will be those that renounce their faith, just as Jesus explained to the disciples. And this isn't the only place in the bible that makes this claim, **John 8:31** reiterates this claim, and it reads ***So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;*** Does this make sense? To put it another way, The Lord is saying, if you remain, abide, or stay rooted in my teachings, mandates, or sayings, you are my disciple. Later in life, the Apostle John reiterates this point in **1 John 2:19** ***They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.*** Those that are born again, those that are in genuine relationship with Jesus Christ remain in their faith, they abide in their faith regardless of the circumstance.

One final point on this soil that I would like to address is salvation. The bible is very clear that once someone has given their life fully to the Lord, this individual can never lose their salvation. And Jesus will never lose or cast out any that come to Him, read John 6:37-39. What's happening to those whose hearts are shallow soil isn't that they're losing their salvation, it's not that they're saved for a while, and then they're no longer saved. The reality is that they were never saved to begin with, upon hearing the gospel, God's word could not, and did not take root in their hearts. That's sometimes the reality, men and women. There is a cost to discipleship, we're told this in the Gospel of Luke 14:25-33, and we're to count the cost to determine whether or not we qualify to be a disciple.

The final bad soil that we're going to discuss is one that I find very disturbing, and that is soil that has thorns. The idea is that the seed that is sown amongst the thorns will be

choked out and bear no fruit. Jesus tells us that this soil is referring to the world, and what the world has to offer. What the world has to offer usually isn't very good for us, it's a fallen world for a reason. The world has natural beauty, the beauty of creation is definitely something to behold, but that isn't what Christ is referring to. This world, that chokes out God's word and impact on your life is the world system, not creation.

A major component of why the world is not good for us is because of who runs the world. ***1 John 5:19 We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*** With this in mind, I'm going to hazard a guess that the enemy of the God we worship might not have our best interests in mind when controlling the world with his power. And I'm going to further suggest that the evil one could be using his power to create a world that is very deceptive to those seeking truth, to those that are seeking or responding to the gospel. ***2 Corinthians 4:4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*** To those that claim Christ, we're to separate from the world, we're not to walk in life as the world does, we're not to value what the world values, we're not to lift up what the world lifts up. As Christians, we're to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, we're to be the light of the world, A city set on a hill that can't be hidden. We're to realize that friendship with the world is hostility towards God, and if we wish to be friends with the world, we're identifying ourselves as enemies of God.

The point is that the dangers of the world are real and they're not obvious, they're sneaky and pleasurable, and they can take someone's attention from the gospel, from God's word. Did you know that your cell phone is modeled using the same psychological strategies that are used by Casinos? Interacting with your cell phone is just like interacting with a slot machine, we receive feedback from our interactions via vibration, sound and light, and this reward makes us want to interact with our phone again; expecting the reward triggers the obsessive repetition. The goal is to maximize our time on the device, and this occurs by causing gradual entry into a trance state. All of this is from the April 2021 issue of Psychology Today, and I also would like to read a quote about the trance state. And I quote ***"One of the amazing stories in this regard is that gamblers who suffer from severe pain stop feeling pain as soon as they start playing, and the pain returns immediately with the loss of the last penny. If we were under the impression that the reward of gambling is the thrill or opportunity to earn big, it is clear that the real attraction may be the ability to exist in the nothingness zone."***

1 John 2:16 tells us what is in the world, essentially the enemies playbook, and it reads ***For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.*** The soil with thorns confirms these dangers by stating if you're engage with the world, God's word can be choked out by the worry of this world, by the deceitfulness of wealth, by the pleasures of this life, and by the desires of other things. These things are subtle, but exercise caution...those that love Christ place nothing above Him in their lives.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/behind-online-behavior/202104/how-principles-the-casino-were-applied-your-cell-phone>

The final soil, the good soil is the one that I'm excited to talk about. When the seed, meaning the word of God, lands on the good soil, each of the gospels describes how the word is received a little bit differently, and when you put them together, it just paints an incredible picture. Matthew tells us ***this is the man who hears the word and understands it.*** Mark tells us that ***they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit.*** Luke tells us that ***these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.*** Men and women, this is who we are, this is who those that bear the distinction of being call Christian are, this is how they, we became Christians. We hear God's word and we understand it, and bear fruit. We hear God's word and we accept it, and bear fruit. We hear God's word with an honest and good heart, and we hold fast to it, and we bear fruit, with perseverance.

In addition to how we became, we must all discuss what we're to do. Ephesians 4:1 tells us the we're to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, referring to Ephesians chapters 1 thru 3 that describe our calling, as adopted into the family of God, and given the Holy Spirit as a promise of inheritance of God's great wealth. This parable alone tells us that those who are of the good soil, those that claim Jesus Christ as Lord and savior will have incredible crop yields of thirty, sixty or one hundred fold. If heard John Macarthur state that a 7.5 fold crop was a good one, and a 10 fold crop was an excellent one, but I was unable to confirm this data. ***Gen 26:12-14 Now Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. And the LORD blessed him, (13) and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy; (14) for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him.*** I'm not saying this is the case, but a hundred fold crop is the beginning of God's blessing Isaac. Personally, I do believe these crop number are hyperbolic, essentially along the lines of God stating that with faith the size of a mustard seed we can move

mountains. Jesus said we'll do greater things than Him Joh 14:12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.

- Conclusion
 - It can be scary to live your faith, I understand that fully.
 - The fear of rejection.
 - The fear of a friendship or relationship lost.
 - The fear of being cast out.
 - The fear of physical abuse.
 - The fear of mental abuse.
 - We have to act with courage. Courage doesn't mean the absence of fear, courage is proper action in the presence of fear.