



The Kingdom of Heaven is Like...

Matthew 13

05-24-19

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Part 4, The Parable of the Sower and the Four Soils

Good day and welcome back to yet another Friday that God has graciously provided! Our theme for this month is “The Kingdom of Heaven is Like...”. We are taking a tour through what theologians call “The Kingdom Parables”.

In Part 1 we studied the purpose and beauty of parables. A parable is an allegory; it is a fictional story told to teach a spiritual principle. Jesus used parables as a kind of “secret code”, with the born-again believer’s indwelling Holy Spirit as the code “key”. The indwelling Holy Spirit is necessary because God’s Word is *spiritually discerned*, i.e., understood (1Corinthians 2:14). The *natural man*, i.e., the unbelieving mocker and scorner, would not understand. The things of the Spirit of God are foolishness unto them.

In Part 2 we studied more about the principles of interpretation, which, as just stated, requires both Divine Illumination from the Holy Spirit AND a fervent desire to understand. God promises that when we seek His truth with the passion of a treasure-hunter, we are guaranteed to “strike spiritual gold”!

In Part 3 we discovered that Jesus is even now a King (as He revealed to Pontius Pilate) and He governs a kingdom; He called it the Kingdom of Heaven, a.k.a., the Kingdom of God, or of Christ. Yes, Jesus is even now a King, but His present kingdom is spiritual. He explained this to Pilate as recorded in John 18:36, *My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but **now** is my kingdom not from hence*. But King Jesus’ Kingdom WILL one day be both spiritual and physical. At his Second Advent, King Jesus will return to this Earth and establish a literal 1000-year planetary government. He will rule with a rod of iron from David’s throne in Jerusalem.

And now, in this week’s installment, Part 4, we will explore our first parable, an allegory that many call the Parable of the Sower. However, a better title would be “The Parable of the Four Soils”.

The setting for these teachings is Galilee, along the shore of the large Lake Gennesaret, also called the “Sea of Galilee”. This is the lake fished professionally by James and John, the sons of Zebedee, by their partners Peter and Andrew, and probably by several other of the called-out disciples. When Jesus came out of a house—perhaps the house of one of His disciples, where he had stayed the night or had taken a meal—a crowd naturally formed and followed. Jesus walked to the shoreline and sat and He started teaching. But soon the crowd became so large that it likely became difficult for those in the back to hear. So Jesus entered into one of the fishing boats, and had the owner row him a few yards off shore. This created a natural amphitheater!

Since most everyone in that culture was involved in some sort of agricultural, or fishing, or housekeeping line of work, Jesus used these common topics so the people could relate. Jesus started his sermon that day with an agricultural allegory: the Parable of the Four Soils. It is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels: Matthew 13:3-9, Mark 4:1-20, and Luke 8:4-25. Let’s read Matthew’s account.

Behold, a sower went forth to sow; 4 And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: 5 Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: 6 And 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 sprung up, and choked them: 8 But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. 9 Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

A sower, i.e., a farmer, went out one morning to broadcast seeds into his field. In this particular field were four soil types. There was the “way side”, the “stony places”, there was the thorny and brushy soil, and finally, “the good ground”.

God chose to provide the interpretation of this parable (found later in Matthew 13:18-23) to his closest disciples, thereby giving them, and now all born-again believers, a template for parabolic interpretation.

And at this juncture I want to take a short aside and emphasize Peter’s warning found in 2Peter 1:20. He wrote, *...no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.* When men and women study the Holy Scriptures, whether it be prophecy, or theology, or church government, or moral principles, or principles of God’s Kingdom, their goal SHOULD BE to know the exact intention of the Author, Who is The Holy Spirit, also called The Spirit of Christ. When God the Holy Spirit inspired set-apart men to record His very words, He had one thought in mind, and it therefore behooves us to find THAT very thought or principle. Consequently, **Holy Scripture has only one correct interpretation!** As Peter warned, there can be no separate, private, or personal, interpretations. For example, if three people have **differing** personal interpretations of a scripture, then not all three can be correct. Either one is correct or all are incorrect; there can be no other outcome. So when our culture’s post-modern irrational relativists say something ludicrous like, “your truth vs. my truth”, they are denying reality! There is only One Truth; there can BE only One Truth! And regarding

scriptures, there is only one true interpretation. Yes, there can be many applications of God's Truth, but only one correct interpretation. By its very definition, Truth excludes all error. There is one Truth, but many, many falsehoods. Now back to the parable.

Since there is an obvious interim between the teaching of this first public parable and then a private interchange and explanation to only his called-out disciples (see Matthew 13:10-23), it is likely that his 12 were in the fishing boat with Jesus. During this pause in His teaching of the multitude on the shore, Jesus took the opportunity to privately interpret for his 12.

- The *sower* is not particularly defined but he could portray anyone who proclaims, teaches, and preaches God's Truths. It could refer to an individual born-again believer or a pastor. It could refer to the commissioned Local New Testament churches, since teaching and preaching the Truth is their job. Or the *sower* could even picture the Holy Spirit Himself, since His work is to reveal God's Truths to born-again believers and to convict the consciences of God-rejectors. In the parable of the wheat and tares the sower is identified as the Son of Man, Jesus!
- The *seed* is the Word of God (Mark 4:14; Luke 8:11), and most particularly in this case, the saving Gospel!
- The four soil types represent the "hearts", i.e., the minds or consciences, of four groups of hearers. Three remain lost and undone, enemies of the Cross. Only one becomes born-again. Now, it is very important to consent to the fact that soil is soil, i.e., all soil has the ability to host a seed and support the growth of crops. In like manner every human heart is capable of being redeemed! If a person is not saved, it's because he chooses NOT to be saved, and NOT because he is incapable of being saved! The differences in these four soils, and in the hearts to which they correspond, is not in "composition", but in "condition"!
- The *way side* soil pictures a roadway or foot path and corresponds to the **UNRESPONSIVE HEARER**. The heart-soil of this person is compacted, rock-hard, and seemingly impenetrable. This person gives the Gospel no consideration; he gives no quarter to the Holy Spirit, thinking spiritual things are utter foolishness. This person is the fool who hates wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7) and pompously declares, "There is no God!" (Psalm 14:1). One commentator writes,

"His lack of repentance or of any sense of guilt and shame insulates him from God's help and leaves him utterly exposed to Satan's attack. **His heart** has never been softened by remorse, never broken up by conviction of sin, never cultivated by the smallest desire for anything good, pure, and holy."

Because this person does not allow his proudly-hardened heart to be penetrated, the "seed" then lays exposed. This makes it easy for Satan, like a hungry bird, to snatch away the seed, using a variety of subterfuges.

- The *stony places* soil pictures a thin soil, underlain with rock, and it corresponds to the "hearts" of **SUPERFICIAL HEARERS**. Alas, our religious world is full of this type of hearer!

This hearer receives the teaching with excitement, sure that this is what he needs to turn his life around, to bring him better luck, to grease his pathway in life! These are the shallow accepters, the easy-believers, the people who repeat a prayer, raise a hand, sign a card... with no contrition and repentance, with no dying to self, with no turning from the old life. This person's euphoria is superficial; he got a religious high, but no salvation and as soon as tribulation or persecution comes—and it will to all—then he falls away. His new "Christianity" is as quickly renounced and forgotten as it was accepted. He has built a house of "Christianity" upon the sands of emotion, and when the costs of discipleship become too high, he becomes "scandalized", and falls away. It is comforting however to know that the persecution that causes the emotional religionist to fall away, will exercise the true believer unto righteousness!

- And then there is the soil that is growing thorny brush, briars, and noxious weeds. This corresponds to the **WORLDLY HEARER**. When this hearer receives the seed, he may make a shallow profession of faith, but his true love is not the Savior, but rather the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life. His focus is his income, his job or career, his possessions, and pleasure of all kinds. He may add "Jesus", and get his name on a church role in order to further his business contacts and his respectability in the community, but there is no sorrow over sin, no reborn spirit, and no forsaking of his carnal lifestyle. He is preoccupied with the World, and his preoccupation blinds him to the eternal importance of the Gospel. John warns, *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world (1John 2:15, 16).*
- And finally, there is the *good ground*, which corresponds to the **RECEPTIVE HEARER**, the born-again believer. This ground is "good" NOT because it has any particularly different composition than the other soils (for all have sinned!), but rather because it is in a different condition! This hearer willingly softens his heart; he understands, he comprehends... he BELIEVES! This hearer allows the Holy Spirit to penetrate his heart in contrition and conviction. He wants God's salvation more than anything else in this dying world. Consequently he is reborn spiritually and the Holy Spirit takes up residence. And because this person is now in-dwelt and empowered by the Spirit of God, he can cooperate in the production of Spiritual fruit! The ultimate mark of a truly born-again believer is fruit bearing, and in Galatians 5:22 and 23 Paul lists the fruits that the Holy Spirit produces in the lives of the redeemed.

And so, the overall teachings of this Parable of the Four Soils are these:

1) the *seed*, i.e., the Word of God, especially as it relates to salvation, is sown freely and without prejudice, throughout the entire "field". Truly WHOSOEVER WILL may come (be born-again)!

2) Soil is soil. Just like all soil is a substrate of mineral and organic materials, all hearts are dark and desperately wicked! There is none good, no not one. Why the *seed* will root and

flourish in one heart and not in another is not a function of composition, but rather of condition!

3) When we permit the seed to germinate and take root in our heart, i.e., when we through repentance and faith allow the Holy Spirit to rebirth our dead spirits and take up residence, then we will, through His power, produce spiritual fruit. A changed life, and fruit-bearing are the obvious evidences of the new birth.

God bless and consider!