



## Parkway Fellowship

Livin' the Dream • In It for the Long Haul • Matthew 13:1-23 • 2/16/2020

### MAIN POINT

Followers of Jesus are in it for the long haul.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**When you start a home project and run into difficulty, are you more likely leave it unfinished for awhile or keep at it until it's complete?**

**When you were growing up, was there ever a situation where you wanted to quit but your parent(s) made you stick with it (i.e. the basketball team, a job, a class that was hard)?**

**When is it ok to quit? When is it not ok?**

In Matthew 13, Jesus told a parable that shows how different people will respond to gospel truth. Some will hear it and then give up somewhere along the way. But those who truly follow Jesus won't quit but will continue listening to Him and learning from Him throughout their lives.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 13:1-17.

**Look closely at verses 1 and 2. Why would Jesus choose this parable at this moment to these people?**

Because of the size of the crowd, there were many different kinds of hearts represented. Jesus wanted all His hearers to know that His truth wouldn't grow deeply in everyone's hearts. It would

fall in all kinds of places, but those who were ready to truly hear it would respond.

**Why do you think so many people heard the words of Jesus but then didn't understand them?**

**In what ways do you see people hearing the words of Jesus but not really listening to them?**

Too many people suffer from selective hearing. They either hear only what they want to hear or they refuse to understand what they do hear. Far worse are those who hear and understand but do not act on what they hear. Thus, Jesus said to His disciples in verse 10, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God," to make clear that God must open our eyes in order for us to fully understand spiritual truth (see 2 Corinthians 4:4-6).

**What do we learn about the sower?**

**What do we learn about the seed?**

**Is this a parable about the sower, the seeds, or the soil? Why?**

**What were the predominant characteristics of each kind of soil?**

In an agricultural society, everyone would have understood what happened when a sower went out into a field to sow his seed. At least one path ran through most fields, and much of the terrain in Israel was rocky under a thin layer of topsoil. Dropping seeds along such paths was futile. Many fields had thorn bushes along the perimeters. Seeds falling there had no chance to grow and survive until harvest time. Others, however, did fall on fertile soil and produced 100 times what was sown.

| Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 13:18-23.

**Based on Jesus' interpretation, what character traits would be representative of each kind of soil?**

**Which of the soils produce similar results? What do these results portray? Which soil is unique and how so?**

In His parable, Jesus described four types of soil, with soil representing people who hear the gospel. The first three refer to people who are not saved but who have varying responses to the seed of the Word of God. Then Jesus contrasted those types of people with people whose hearts are good ground. The same good seed fell on all four types of soil, but only this last example refers to a person who has been born again.

**Do you know people represented by each of these soils? What kind of “soil” best represents you now? Five years ago?**

**When we share our faith with others, we are the farmer spreading the seed. What help do you get from this parable about sharing your faith?**

**According to verse 15, what are the characteristics of a person who has been born again?**

First, the person hears the Word of God with an honest and good heart. The second characteristic of people whose hearts are good soil is that they hold on to Christ’s teaching. Finally, Jesus said the seed in the good soil would bear fruit with endurance. True believers make a faith commitment that endures to the end. Their lives are spiritually productive and they consistently live in obedience to Jesus Christ and His Word.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**In this week's message, we learned the following remedies we need to take when we see the warning signs in our relationship to Jesus: humility to u-turn, trust when I don't understand, give, and daily dependence. Which stands out to you the most personally right now? Why?**

**Why is it not enough to just hear the word of God? What does putting it into practice reveal about our commitment to Him?**

## PRAYER

Thank God for graciously giving us His Word. Pray that God would give us eyes to see and ears to hear the glorious truth of the gospel. Pray that God’s Word would take deep root in our hearts such that it produces faithful obedience and visible fruit.

## COMMENTARY

| Matthew 13:1-23

13:1-2. Jesus sat by the Sea of Galilee (lake, 13:1) and in a boat (13:2), because sitting was the posture a teacher assumed in that culture, reflecting the respect he received from his listeners. In

contrast, the crowd stood (13:2). In many cultures, this is a sign of honor to the teacher and the sacred Scriptures he is teaching, but in this instance it was also necessary because of the pressing crowd.

13:3-8. The many things Jesus spoke in parables certainly included what was written in 13:3-52. It is possible that there were other parables that Matthew did not record.

Note that the farmer sowed seed on several different kinds of soil. The soil along the path (13:4) would likely have been hard-packed from much traffic. There would be little or no vegetation or loose soil to hide or bury the seeds, so the birds could easily find them. The birds represent the devil, “the evil one” (13:19). Note also the variable quality of even the good soil (13:8); even among that which is conducive to fruit bearing, some soils do better than others.

13:9. Jesus repeated the challenge that Matthew first recorded in 11:15, after identifying John the Baptizer with “Elijah, who was to come.” He will repeat the same wording in 13:43, and the challenge is explained thoroughly in the following context (13:10-17).

13:10. The disciples noticed Jesus’ shift in teaching style. He was changing over to parables as his primary method of public teaching, so they inquired about his reasons. He took this opportunity to explain to the disciples, in plain language, the root problem of Israel’s disbelief.

13:11-12. Jesus’ answer implied that the secrets about the kingdom are unknowable apart from God’s determination to reveal them. Just as Jesus had complete authority about who would receive knowledge of the Father (11:27), he also had complete discretion as to who would receive the secrets about the kingdom of heaven.

Those who already had some knowledge—because they responded with humble faith to what had already been revealed—had been good stewards of this information. They would be entrusted with more (particularly through their understanding of the parables). These people, because of their faith, had received God’s gracious favor. However, those who had consciously rejected the Messiah would receive only judgment, beginning with Jesus’ withholding of insight by the use of parables. These outsiders had enough knowledge of the truth to be hostile against Jesus, but even that insight would be further clouded by their disbelief. Jesus’ teaching style was designed to give them little help as long as they persisted in their rebellion.

13:13-15. Because of God’s determination to bless those who believe and to judge those who disbelieve, Jesus changed his public teaching style to parables—teaching tools that would further polarize believers and skeptics. To further explain his use of parables, Jesus described the condition of the skeptics. The paradox of seeing, but not seeing, and hearing, but not hearing,

is resolved when we realize that the first reference to each sense has to do with their physical senses. The second reference to each sense is figurative, referring to the eyes and ears of their hearts—their capacity to accept or reject the truth laid before them.

The prophecy of Isaiah 6:9-10 comes from Isaiah's vision of Yahweh in his throne room. In Isaiah 6, in the face of Yahweh's glorious perfection, Isaiah fell on his face and proclaimed his uncleanness. An angel cleansed Isaiah's lips, qualifying him for his task as messenger to rebellious Israel. Isaiah then volunteered for the job of messenger, in response to Yahweh's invitation.

Isaiah was instructed to go to Judah with the truth. But because of Judah's rebellious disbelief, Isaiah's teaching would serve as God's instrument of judgment, causing the people to galvanize their hearts even more against the truth. Judah had gone beyond the point of being able to avoid judgment. So Yahweh sealed his case against them by taking them even farther from any possibility of restoration.

In the Isaiah context after Jesus' quote, Yahweh described the results of his judgment—the devastation of the land and the exile of the population— but left Judah with the hope of the faithful remnant, the “stumps” of the tree of Judah, from which the “holy seed” would grow back (Isa. 6:13). The period of judgment would purge and purify Judah, restoring the nation to its original purpose and ultimately producing the Messiah, who would be the final solution to Israel's rebellion.

13:16-17. In contrast with calloused Israel (the emphatic placement of your heightens the contrast), the disciples' eyes and ears were open, accepting God's message and his Messenger. They were therefore blessed (*makarios*, “happy”; cf. 5:3-12). The disciples' eyes and ears were also blessed because of the privilege they enjoyed, which many prophets and righteous men of past ages longed for. Those past heroes remained faithful, even though they never saw the ultimate fulfillment of the promises they claimed. The disciples claimed these promises and were eyewitnesses to their fulfillment in Jesus. I tell you the truth adds emphasis to the greatness of the disciples' privilege (13:17).

13:18-19. These verses connect Jesus' explanation of the parable of the sower and the soils (13:18-23) with the disciples' privilege as hearers of the truth. Jesus was saying to them, “Because you have responded to what you have already seen with eyes, ears, and hearts of faith and humble obedience, I will show you even more. You have proven faithful with little, so I will trust you with much.”

The soils were the issue. Throughout the parable's explanation, Jesus compared the four kinds of soil with various kinds of people who had been exposed to his teaching. The first soil, that "along the path" (13:4), was packed and hardened by traffic. It represented the person who does not understand the word he had heard. The person represented by the hardened soil is one who chooses not to understand rather than a person who wants to understand but cannot. Such a person may actually understand Jesus' teaching in a literal sense but refuse to accept its truth. The biblical concept of "understanding" goes beyond the idea of mental comprehension. It sometimes includes volitional acceptance. In 21:45, the chief priests and Pharisees knew the meaning of Jesus' parable concerning them, but they refused to accept its truth.

13:20-21. The rocky soil (13:5-6) receives extra attention in both the parable and its explanation because this person's response to the truth follows a two-stage pattern. His initial response is unreserved and emotional—joyful acceptance—but only because the circumstances are favorable. The cost of commitment is not yet obvious. This person's commitment is not deeply rooted. We might say that the truly committed "pay their dues up front," but the marginally committed cancel their membership when payment comes due. The cost of commitment to the Messiah comes in the form of trouble (thlipsis, "tribulation") or persecution (diogmos) that come because of the word. As quickly as this individual had committed, just as quickly he defected, distancing himself from the word or message.

13:22. The soil with thorns (13:7) is also assumed to produce some initial growth, as did the rocky places (13:20). But the influence which draws this person away from a sustained interest is not persecution but competing "gods"—the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth. Rather than being driven from the truth by hardship, this person is lured away from the truth by promises of something better. Of course, these promises will never be fulfilled, because these competing gods or masters are deceitful.

Is this kind of person saved? The language may lean somewhat toward believing that this person had responded initially with sincere faith, for the seedling is not said to die (as we can presume with the rocky soil, 13:21), but rather to become choked and unfruitful. Still, without perseverance, there is no final evidence of salvation.

We have already seen in Matthew an example of a person who started following Jesus, but then began giving excuses for why he needed to postpone his commitment (8:21-22). But even more prominent in this category would be Judas Iscariot, who sold out Jesus for thirty coins (26:14-16, 20-25, 48-50; 27:1-10).

13:23. All three of the preceding "soils" had heard the word. So also the fourth good soil hears the word, but this one also understands. This person chooses to understand and accept the

truth, also accepting the One who is truth (John 14:6). None of the other soils bore any fruit, but this soil yielded much fruit. Jesus did not clarify what caused the variability between the fruitfulness of various faithful followers. One factor may be the degrees of faith. Perhaps another factor has to do with the variety of tasks given to different believers by God. Some may have greater potential for bearing fruit than others (cf. the different number of talents and different levels of return in 25:14-30). Crop represents the tangible results of a life of faith, including godly character (Gal. 5:22-23) and other souls brought into the kingdom (Matt. 9:37-38; cf. John 15:1-17).