THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER (or soils)

INTRODUCTION

JESUS SHARES THE PARABLE WITH THE CROWD

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear."
Matthew 13: 1-9

And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given . . . This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." **Matthew 13: 11-17**

Jesus makes the point that the parables go over the heads of those who stubbornly oppose his ministry, as well as the indifferent majority in the crowd. Because of their opposition and indifference the truth of Jesus' teaching remains hidden to them. This also aligns with Jesus' insistence on several occasions that the miracles not be publicly proclaimed. Both the hiding of truth and the revealing of truth accomplish God's purposes. (see Isaiah 55: 11)

JESUS INTERPRETS THE PARABLE FOR HIS DISCIPLES

*"**Hear then the parable of the sower:** 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 what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this 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. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word **(over time),** and **it PROVES unfruitful.** 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 13:18-23**

INTRODUCTION

The Parable of the Sower is sometimes referred to as the flagship of parables. In fact Jesus goes as far as to say to his disciples in **Mark 4: 13**. ***Do you not understand this parable, how then will you understand any parable?***

So what did Jesus mean by this and why is the Parable of the Sower so important? Who is present?

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER CONFOUNDED ISRAEL'S EXPECTATIONS AS TO HOW THE KINGDOM, WHICH WAS PROMISED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, WOULD BECOME A REALITY

JEWISH EXPECTATION

1. In Jesus' day, Jews expected that the Kingdom of God would arrive suddenly and result in both a political and military victory for Israel over its enemies.
2. The world would be renewed and the kingdom established in a single moment in time.
3. When the Messiah arrived he would be easily recognized and all Israel would rally to him.
4. Membership in the kingdom was guaranteed by ethnic heritage (Jewish children of Abraham) or and strict adherence to the Law.
5. The kingdom would not, and could not be established by human effort.

THE REALITY AS REVEALED BY JESUS IN THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

1. The kingdom arrives in the form of a farmer casually scattering seed in a seemingly wasteful and haphazard way.
2. The kingdom will be unknowingly rejected by many. The parable also tells us that the Kingdom will be established in the midst of outright rejection, apathy, and worldliness.
3. Kingdom citizenship is not merited or inherited but depends entirely on the condition of the individual's heart. Israel overwhelmingly hardened their heart to Jesus' preaching and teaching while "good soil" was found in the

most unexpected places (tax collectors, prostitutes, the demon possessed, common criminals, Roman soldiers and Samaritans).

4. Despite heavy losses (which seemingly does not concern the Sower – God is not concerned with numbers), the seed finds its intended target and over time produces a crop (some 30 fold, some 60 fold and some 100 fold).
5. The kingdom would indeed grow and expand through human effort (powered of course by the Holy Spirit).

THE PRIMARY MEANING OF THE PARABLE

How different people receive and hear God's truth (this also incorporates an ongoing response)

1. **The parable defines ones capability to firstly hear the truth, then to embrace it and act on it (fruit).**
2. The Parable of the Sower reveals to us three seemingly different responses to the sowing of the Word. There are **no other responses**, only these three: **1. outright rejection**, **2. a surface acceptance which doesn't last** and **3. acceptance that bears fruit over an extended period of time**.
3. **His disciples ask Jesus why he teaches in parables because even they find them difficult to understand. Matthew 13: 11-17** What the Parable of the Sower does is **bring to light the hearer's capacity to respond to spiritual truth.** This does not just mean a basic understanding of the facts. It also incorporates a person's desire to understand. We can see as we read through the gospels that Jesus' teaching shifts almost primarily to parables as opposition grows and crowds become larger. The telling of the parable itself is a true to life illustration of how the kingdom is embraced and rejected throughout history.
4. **Jesus interprets the parable for his disciples only (not the crowd). Matthew 13: 18-23**
   Because of their willingness to learn, Jesus gives his disciples insider information as to the meaning of the parable. **The fruit** (or lack of it) produced by hearing the truth and embracing it is what differentiates the true disciple from the false. The majority of the crowd was indifferent. **However, true disciples are not indifferent to truth.**
5. **The parable reveals the need for divine revelation.** Despite the fact that everyone heard the exact same message people's responses were very different. This raises the question: **Why is it that some have ears to hear and others don't.** Disciples of Jesus in their natural fallen state are just as dense as everyone else. The ability to truly hear and understand truth comes as an act of grace on God's part. God sows the seed **AND** cultivates the heart enabling the hearer to understand and respond. Ultimately ALL hearts are hard, so God must unharden them.

THE PARABLE ALSO ACTS AS A WARNING

At the end of the Parable in Matthew, Mark and Luke, the gospel writers use slightly different words, but they **all say the same thing:**

In **Matthew 13: 9** Jesus says: ***"He who HAS ears, let him hear."***

In **Mark 4: 24** He says: ***"Take heed WHAT you hear."*** In Mark's version he also begins the parable with the word "**LISTEN**".

In **Luke 8: 18** He says **"Take heed HOW you hear."** In other words, don't just hear but pay attention as if your life depended on it (which of course it does).

What is important in relation to **Matthew 13: 9, Mark 4: 24** and **Luke 8: 18** is that the interpretation is directed at those who have been **given ears to hear**. This is important because the interpretation which Jesus gives is aimed solely at those who want to understand what it means. **There will be those who truly take heed** and go on to be fruitful disciples, while there will be **others who fall away** for the various reasons which Jesus gives.

Truth, no matter how powerful, cannot penetrate a hardened heart

OPPOSITION TO THE SEED'S IMPACT

SATANIC INTERFERENCE – PERSECUTION AND THE CHALLENGES OF LIFE – APATHY AND WORLDLINESS

Truth must take root. Superficial belief will fade and eventually disappear when faced with difficulties and suffering in this life

The parable of the Sower when taught in line with the rest of the New Testament clearly states that only a "deeply rooted", God-given faith, can resist the devil and ultimately bear fruit.

The Parable then does not just relate to us how the various soils are impacted by the seed. It also acts as a warning to believers that there are Satanic forces at work in the world who will stop at nothing to try and impact the effectiveness of the seed.

FOR MANY APOSTASY TAKES PLACE OVER A PERIOD OF TIME

We should not ignore the fact that the parable teaches that **what has taken place on the inside will only show itself on the outside over a period of time**.

When we approach the parable WE tend to present it as a one-moment in time response

The seed's rejection and acceptance is **not divided into two strict categories** in that it is either accepted or rejected **AT THE POINT THE MESSAGE IS HEARD** (see the seed which is sown along the path). E.g. ***"As you hear the message today, which soil do you want to be?"*** The question asked by the parable is more pointed: ***"As you look at your life today in light of your profession of faith, what kind of soil do you see?"*** The parable does not call us to **look back to a single moment in time** when we made a profession of faith.

- **Some seed is lost immediately, and does not even get into the ground.**
- **Some is lost in that it gets into the ground but the root is weak and when persecution comes it does not endure.**
- **Some gets down deep enough that some kind of root begins to form, but the root is ultimately choked by the thorns and again we see that a falling away takes place over a period of time.**

Not just fruit, but fruit that endures – Jesus places the emphasis on the fruit that is manifested and accumulates in a person's life over the course of their lives – In reality the only proof of a person's salvation is the consistent outward evidence of the inward work of the Spirit – OVER A PERIOD OF TIME.

*Therefore, brothers, be all the more **diligent** to **confirm** your calling and election, for **IF** you **practice** these qualities **you will never fall**.* **2 Peter 1: 10**

*I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that **bears much fruit** . . . If you abide in me, and **my words abide in you**, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and **SO PROVE** to be my disciples.* **John 15: 1-11**

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us (me) *run with endurance the race that is set before us* (me) *looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith . . .* **Hebrews 12: 1-2**

*They went **out from us,** but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, **they would have continued with us.** But they went out, that it might become plain* (proof) *that they all are not of us.* **1 John 2: 19**

THREE RESPONSES

THE SEED WHICH FALLS ON THE PATH IS NOT REALLY A RESPONSE

Satan will do all that he can to **prevent the seed from taking root** before it can do too much damage (at least to his kingdom).

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. **(1 Corinthians 4: 3)**

The ability to conceal truth – The veil mentioned in verse 3 is that which Satan has used to blind the **minds** of unbelievers. It is interesting that **nowhere** does it say that in the case of the Gospel, Satan has any influence over the **hearts of men,** which is first and foremost the place at which the gospel is aimed. Instead he causes them not to see the truth so that they are unable to respond. The issue is one of comprehension. God is the one who hardens hearts and unhardens them.

THE SEED WHICH FALLS ON THE ROCK

*But he who received the seed on the stony places, this is he who hears the word and **immediately receives it with joy;** 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.*

Despite the initial joy displayed in the lives of some who profess faith in Christ, Jesus says that the true test comes with time.

Jesus and the New Testament writers clearly tell us that times of testing will come. **It is put in two ways:** the man has ***"no root in himself"*** and he is ***"temporary"*** (i.e. "no staying power"). We might say that the natural man (or the truly unregenerate man) lacks the ability in and of himself to persevere in the faith.

False expectations – Most translations use the expression ***"falling away"*** but it is something more than falling. It means that he ***"takes offense"***. **He sees Christianity as a trap he was not prepared for.** Persecution has always been an effective tool of Satan's, especially in the case of a response to the gospel which is based purely on emotion or ideas of Christianity which are not biblical (the key to a successful life, material blessings, freedom from trouble).

THE SEED WHICH FALLS AMONG THORNS

Greed and secular concerns are other effective tools which Satan uses to draw people away from the faith, especially when the demands of discipleship come in the midst of a materialistic culture like our own.

(See Matthew 13: 22; 6: 19-34; 16: 24-26; 19: 23)

Jesus specifies two things which causes this person to stumble:

1. **Worry –** ***"the cares of the world"***
2. **Deception –** ***"the deceitfulness of riches"***
3. **Result – These concerns overpower the word in a practical way.** He hears the word, may even acknowledge that it is true, but **his attention is continually drawn to the world,** and that becomes the truth by which he lives. As a result the word is literally choked out to the extent that **it is no longer a reality.**

*Therefore we must **PAY MUCH CLOSER ATTENTION** to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.* **Hebrews 2: 1**

*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that **some have wandered away from the faith** and pierced themselves with many pangs.* **1 Timothy 6: 10**

*They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are **again entangled in them and overcome,** the last state has become worse for them than the first.* **2 Peter 2:19-20**

IN SUMMARY

A heart which is open to superficial, emotional influences but closed up to deeper understanding of Kingdom truth will find it all too easy to turn from God when trouble arises.

A heart that is easily attracted to worldly status and wealth is a heart which is easily distracted from the business and message of the Kingdom.

A heart which is susceptible to either one is also susceptible to false teaching (e.g. prosperity gospel).

THE SEED WHICH FALLS ON THE GOOD GROUND

The Parable of the Sower is not teaching that there are degrees of Christianity. I.E. there are those who are **actively pursuing** a fruit bearing life in Christ and there are those who are not. The truth that is sometimes overlooked in the parable is that in three cases the seed was **sown in bad soil and never stood a chance**. If we are looking for any kind of comparison we have to go to **verse 9** where Jesus says that those who truly follow him produce fruit in various quantities, some **30 fold**, some **60 fold** and some **100 fold**.

The point of course is that only soil that is prepared beforehand by God is capable of producing fruit – in the context of the parable the amount is not important.

The whole purpose of sowing and planting is fruitbearing. If there is no fruit then there is no good reason to believe that the seed landed in "good" soil

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit (let me add: some 30, some 60 and some 100 fold), for apart from me you can do nothing. **John 15: 5**

We may put it like this:

To what extent has your life impacted the world

To what extent has the world impacted your life

KEEP LISTENING – KEEP PURSUING TRUTH