

Stories

The Seed, the Sower, and the Soil

Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23

August 27, 2023

HDBC

Open your Bibles to Matthew 13 as we wrap up the series on the **Stories** of Jesus. It had been a long few days for Jesus. On the previous Sabbath He had defended his disciples from the Pharisees who accused them of violating the law by **harvesting on the Sabbath**.

The same day they attacked Him for healing a man with a disabled hand. That day they began planning to kill Him. But the crowds kept growing and he kept teaching and healing. He healed a demonized man who was blind and mute. The Pharisees accused him of being in a partnership with Satan. In the midst of all this, His family showed up with the intention of taking Him home because they thought He had become mentally unstable. He must have been exhausted.

No wonder Matthew begins this chapter by telling us Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. He needed a retreat, but it would be short-lived. Once more the crowds found Him. They were hungry, but not primarily for food, primarily for spiritual direction. And so, once more He provided it for them.

As He looked over the vast crowd he was aware they were not all at the same place spiritually. Some were receptive to His message and others were not. So, he told a story designed to help them understand and embrace the Gospel, regardless of where they were on their spiritual journey.

Read text: Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23

There are three distinct elements in the story, illustrating three important things.

1. The Seed

The seed is the gospel. See verse 18. It is the source of life for all who believe it. The gospel is the information people need in order to be saved.

The good news is that people are saved through faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. That faith involves confession and repentance of sins and acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord. That leads to being saved.

Of the three elements in the story, **the seed is the one constant**. It is the one thing that is absolutely reliable. It never changes. It is always powerful enough to bring life where there is no life. You can trust it. The gospel has the power to change lives. **Don't weaken it**. Don't alter it. **Don't water it down**. Don't apologize for it. **Don't add to it**. Just share it. **Just plant it**.

2. The Sower

In those days farmers didn't plant grain in rows to accommodate harvesting machines. They first broke the ground and softened the soil. Then with leather bag tied around waist or slung over shoulder he would scatter handfuls of seed all over the ground. **Same way that I scatter grass seed over my yard to increase the amount of grass.**

As it was scattered it fell on different kinds of soil. Some fell on the cultivated soil. Others on the pathways through the field that were hardened by the constant foot traffic. Still others fell on the edges of the fields where thorns were still growing or where the soil had not been cultivated and was shallow and rocky. **The fruitfulness of the seed depended on which soil it fell upon.**

The seed is the gospel and **Jesus was the ultimate sower**, but you and I also have that task. We have the job of sowing the seed (gospel). Three ways.

A. We Must Sow Plentifully

2 Cor. 9:6 **He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly**. The more we share, the more we harvest. It's that simple.

B. We Must Sow Passionately

Psalms 126:6 **He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his harvest with him**. Watering the seeds with tears of sower. The passion of the sowing may be the key that prepares the soil for the seed.

C. We Must Sow Patiently

Gal. 6:9 **Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap, if we do not grow weary**.

We never know what God is going to do with the seeds which we plant. Sometimes the results are quick. At other times over months or years. Be patient. Keep sharing.

3. The Soils

The soil represents the different types of people who receive the gospel. Or more specifically the various responses to the gospel. Just as the type of soil will often determine the fruit of the seed, the condition of a person's heart will often determine the fruit of the gospel.

There is some honest debate over the meaning of the four types of soils. All would agree that the first type of soil is a picture of a lost person. All would agree that the last one is a picture of a saved person. The debate is over the two middle types of soil. Do they represent individuals who are truly saved, but who have little spiritual growth because of the reasons mention? Or are they pictures of people who initially responded favorably to the gospel but were never truly born again. My inclination is to take them as lost. Only the fourth one produces any fruit and I think that may indicate lack of salvation. So, let's take a closer look at the soils and what they represent.

A. The Hard Heart (4, 19)

Unresponsive heart. Footpath where people walked through field. This person has no inclination toward spiritual things. No openness to the gospel. They may hear the gospel but it makes no difference because it does not penetrate into the heart. I've observed two kinds of hard hearts.

1) Passively Hardened Heart

They are just going through life enjoying what they can and trying to get by. Focus is on getting the most out of this life with little or no thought of the next life or of spiritual things. They are not aggressively anti-Christ, they just have no interest. Like the path that gets hardened slowly, over time, the heart also gets hardened slowly, over time simply because of a neglect for spiritual things.

2) Actively Hardened Heart

These people have taken a strong stand against Christ, the church and the Bible. They have determined to oppose God and all who represent Him. Too intellectual. Too self-sufficient. May have been hurt and are blaming God.

Until the hard heart is softened and receptive to the gospel this person will not be saved.

B. Shallow Heart (5-6, 20-21)

Thin layer of soil just above rock table. Seed quickly sprouts, but with no root structure it quickly dies. These are those who make quick decision (often emotional) and then turn back. Often it is persecution which reveals the lack of roots. May represent a saved person who does not grow in their faith. Or may represent a lost person who only made a surface decision that was not real. Did not count the cost and when the faith got hard they abandoned it.

By the way, we do people a disservice if we give them the impression that following Christ is easy or painless. That's not what Jesus said. He made it clear from the beginning that his followers were suffer hardship, pain and even persecution.

C. Crowded Heart (7, 18-19)

Person who makes an outward profession of faith, but is unwilling to give up the things of the world. Immoral relationships, lifestyles, hobbies, attitudes or actions. More in love with the world than with Jesus. Remember that Jesus spoke of the broad road and the narrow road. One is easy and fully populated. These people have hearts that are filled with all kinds of things that are more important than Jesus.

This person showed an interest in being right with God, but other things take priority. God is one among equals in terms of priorities. There are things this person is unwilling to give up to follow Christ.

Young man's proposal speech. Darling, I love you more than anything else in the world. I want you to marry me. I'm not rich. I don't have a yacht or a Rolls Royce like Johnny Brown, but I do love you with all my heart. She thought about it for a moment, then replied. I love you with all my heart, too, but tell me more about Johnny Brown.

Jesus will not share the throne of your life with anyone or anything.

D. Surrendered Heart (8, 20)

Good soil yielded great harvest. When the seed of the Gospel comes to this heart it does not bounce off, dry up or get choked out. It takes root and produces a changed life. Jesus is clearly indicating that this is the

picture He wants to see. This is the intent when the seed is scattered. The intent is for it to produce good fruit, abundant fruit, lasting fruit. Remember, the seed represents the gospel. It is the one constant. It never changes. Its power is never diminished. The difference is the soil.

Takeaways: Really, two challenges. First is for all of us. Second, is for some.

1. Examine your response to the gospel.

In other words, do an honest self-examination of your heart. What kind of soil are you? It's clear from the story that God wants us all to be like the 4th example. Anything short of that, you have a decision to make.

Is your heart hard? Soften it to the gospel. Trust Jesus. Allow the gospel to do its powerful and wonderful work in you.

Is your heart shallow? Meaning, is your faith weak? Do the challenges and hardships that come with following Jesus cause you to turn back? Ask the Lord to deepen your faith. Look to Jesus and follow His example.

Is your heart crowded? Do you have other things in your life that are more important to you than Jesus? Are other things crowding out your faith, your walk with Christ? Are other things more important than church? Knowing Christ? pleasing God? Recognize the danger of lesser gods and forsake them.

Is your heart surrendered? If so, you will see the fruit of the gospel in your life. Life may not be hard but it is joyful. It may involve pain and suffering, but the thought of pleasing Jesus makes it worth it. If this is you, move on to the next takeaway.

2. Examine your role as a sower.

Avoid the temptation to prejudge the soil. The best way to determine the nature of the soil is to just plant the seed, then see what happens. Sow the seed anywhere and everywhere and let it do its work. Don't worry about being too selective. You can't always know what's in a person's heart or who the Lord might be working in them.

The call to some is to respond to the gospel.

The call to others is to share the gospel.