

L. Matthew in Biblical Perspective  
The Kingdom of God and the Word of God  
“The Parable of the Sower, Part 4—The Rocky Ground Hearer”  
Matthew 13  
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We will start by looking at Matthew 13. This is the parable of the sower. This is our fourth study of six in this series. Let’s look at Matthew 13. It’s God’s Word and it’s the truth. Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 says [1] *That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. [2] And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. [3] And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. [4] And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. [5] 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, [6] but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. [7] Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. [8] Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. [9] He who has ears, let him hear.”*

[18] *“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 what was sown along the path. [20] As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, [21] 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. [22] 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, and it proves unfruitful. [23] 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.”* The grass withers, the flower fades, this is the Word of God, it abides forever and by His grace and mercy may this His Word be preached for you.

You can be assured that if you write a book on the inside story like “I was in the White House and this is what really happened...” or “I was in this corporate power world and this is what really happened...” then you’ve probably got a best seller on your hands because we always want to know the inside story. What is really going on? What is the inside story? That’s what Jesus is doing. He is giving you the inside story of this tell-all parable. Every time you sow the seed of the Gospel wherever you are, what is happening inside the person that is hearing? When the Gospel is being preached and the seed is being scattered across the entire field of the hearers, what is happening to the seed of the Word inside? Jesus pulls back the covers and says let Me tell you what happens inside the heart of men and women when the Gospel is sown and it falls upon their heart. That is what we’re looking at in this parable of the sower.

We are in this Kingdom sermon parable of Jesus and five of Jesus’ sermons are recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. We are looking at the third one recorded which is the sermon of the Kingdom using seven Kingdom parables. I’m taking the time to do six studies on this one parable – one to introduce it, one each to walk through the four soils,

and then one to wrap it all up. I am doing this because one, of the seven Kingdom parables this is the first one. Two, it's the one parable that Jesus not only interprets but the parable and the interpretation unlike any other parable, are found in all three of the synoptic Gospels – Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8. Clearly repetition is important. More than that, it is the parable that Jesus Himself says that if you can't understand this parable then you can't understand any of the parables.

This also marks the occasion where the disciples ask Jesus why He speaks to the crowds in parables. I think we can identify 32 parables that Jesus uses in His public ministry. Jesus does this for three reasons and He tells us why in Matthew 13. The parable ministry of Jesus not only (1) reveals that He is the Messiah (It fulfills prophecy made in Psalm 76:6) but also (2) reveals the spiritual disposition of the hearer and then (3) accelerates it (either life unto life or death unto death). For those who have a desire to know the truth of God's Word when they hear a parable it pushes them to greater learning, understanding and commitment. To those who have no interest the parable becomes an occasion for people to say 'let's move on to something that is meaningful.'

Now this is the first parable, the parable of the sower. Now when I was in high school English was a class that was naptime for me but one thing I know is that a simile is a word picture. A metaphor is like a word representation. You can spot a simile by the word 'like' or 'as.' An allegory is a collection of metaphors put into a story form like Jesus the Good Shepherd or Jesus the Vine that we abide in. This is a parable which is also a short story but it doesn't have multiple representations. It has one, singular, dominating purpose. It may have many implications and applications but it has one singular purpose.

The purpose of the parable of the sower is the fate of the seed is determined by the condition of the soil. The seed is the Word of God. The soil is the hearts of men. The fate of the seed when it comes to the heart is determined by the condition of the heart. To get the point across He uses four elements. He uses seed, sowing, sower and soils. The seed, sowing and the sower are all constant. It never changes. It is the assumption that the seed is good seed, the sowing is good sowing, and the sower is the Good Sower.

In real life that is not true. You can step into a church where the preaching takes place and they have adulterated the Word of God. They have embraced liberalism in theology and diluted the Word. So in real life it's not always the good seed and not always is it good sowing. Also not only is the person doing the sowing a good sower but we're assuming here that we have the Good Sower, Jesus, who is working through sowing.

What is sowing? It is when you go out and share the Gospel with people. It could be in your neighborhood, at work, at school and all kinds of places. So the assumption is that it is good sowing, a good seed and there is a good sower. The assumption is in place because He wants to look at hearts because the soils are not constant without variance.

There are four soils – hard ground, rocky ground, thorny ground and good ground. We'll be looking at the rocky ground in this study. The four soils are there to tell you about saving faith in Christ and those who don't have saving faith in Christ. The evidence in saving faith in Christ is fruit with perseverance and that is the good soil. This is the soil that someone has gone ahead and prepared. That soil receives the seed, puts

down a root, up comes the shoot and then comes the fruit. Now, there are multi-faceted dimensions of that fruit. Some give thirty fold, some sixty fold and some a hundred fold.

The unbelieving heart actually has three ways it shows up and that is in hard ground, rocky ground and thorny ground. How do we know that is an unbelieving heart? There is no fruit. John 15:8 says [8] *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.* What is fruit? The fruit of a believer is a lifestyle that is the evidence of God's grace whereby God's glory is the purpose and whereby it becomes evident that this person is a follower of Christ. It is a lifestyle that whatsoever you eat or drink you do all to the glory of God. Will you do it perfectly on this side of eternity? No, but that is the desire to lift up praise to God with our life and lips where God is being exalted. When that happens it proves you're a disciple but it doesn't save you for your life doesn't save you. It just evidences God's saving grace at work in your life. It will be evidenced by progress and perseverance, not perfection. The only soil that bears fruit is the good soil.

So the unbelieving heart is manifested three ways for the fate of the seed is determined by the condition of the heart. In other words, in preparation for this study I have prayed and prepared asking the Lord to overrule my inadequacies but to do His work that the good seed would be sown well to the soil of your heart. The work of the seed in your heart right now was determined before you started reading this. Was the soil ready for the seed or was it hard with no seed and it doesn't receive it? Was it rocky having no root? Was it thorny having no room? What is it that is there? The good soil has a root that gives a shoot and will bear fruit. The unbelieving heart never gets the fruit because it doesn't have a vital root. It may have a shoot but not a root and therefore no fruit.

We have already looked at the hard ground hearer. Here is a summation of the hard ground hearer. Hard-ground hearers of the Gospel produce no plant and therefore no fruit, because they have neither heart interest nor heart understanding. Here is the picture. When you sow you sow lavishly. As believers you don't say 'I'm going to put the seed in the good ground' for it's a broadcast. You put the seed everywhere, indiscriminant, non-prejudice, rich, young, poor, old, for you throw the seed everywhere. Many times when you think it's hard, thorny or rocky ground it may be good ground and when you think it's good ground it may not be good ground.

Our job is just to throw the seed everywhere and as you do this some seed will fall on the hard ground for that is the heart we're born with. There is no interest and no understanding. So the seed is never received, it just sits on top, and then Satan comes and snatches it away. The sower comes and sows the seed and Satan comes particularly to the hard heart and snatches the seed with the birds of the air. It may be the bird of triviality or of joking or idolatry or the charade that sin is meaningful or of preoccupation. The text says they come to snatch it away lest they believe and understand and that's because Satan knows something. The fact that the seed is sitting on the hard ground shows that this is not a converted person but Satan knows the seed is also the plow share, the work of the Holy Spirit to break up hard hearts. So he wants to snatch it away before it digs deep into the furrow and starts breaking up the hard heart. It has no seed and therefore it has no root, no shoot and no fruit.

So let's look at the rocky ground. Matthew 13:5-6, 20-21 says [5] *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, [6] but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. [20] As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and **immediately** receives it with joy, [21] 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.* What immediately sprang up now immediately withers away. Now in Mark 4 this is repeated as you find it here in Matthew but Luke adds a little bit of information about the parable of the sower and the rocky soil.

Luke 8:6, 13 says *[6] And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. [13] And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they **believe for a while**, and in time of testing fall away.* We want to stay faithful to the singular purpose of the parable. The fate of the seed is determined by the condition of the soil. So now let's look at the condition of the rocky soil.

Number one's rocky. Number two there is no depth in the soil. Number three there is no moisture in the soil. Those are the three things we learn about the rocky soil. Here Jesus is describing an Israeli field where seed falls on the rock. As an American when I first read this I thought of the New England part of the US, particularly Maine. When you ride through Maine you see this lush green and these outcroppings of rocks in the field. Yet here think Palestine. In Palestine it is not an outcropping but a subterranean layer of rock. It is hard rock that is covered by an inch or two of soil. Because there is not much soil and so much rock there is not much moisture there and when it rains it tends to go away. So there is no depth or moisture and then the seed is thrown on it. This is the condition of the soil. Now what is the fate of the seed?

Here are three things about the fate of the seed. Number one, the seed is immediately received. It falls right into this powdery soil and it's immediately received. Secondly, it immediately sprouts. It sends up a shoot. Thirdly, when the sun rises it immediately withers away. Why does that happen? I have done some research on this so I'm going to try and explain to you what happens here. The seed goes into this soil that has this layer of rock and there is this immediate germination because that soil is like a hot house. There is no moisture but it's hot. In the evening with the little moisture it gets from the dew germinates the seed rapidly but because of the rock the root doesn't have anywhere to go.

So all the energy that should be going down further with the root now gets reversed and it starts going up prematurely to the shoot. Because the root never gets fixed, all that photosynthesis cause the shoot to go up and the farmer thinks the next day that he already has a crop. Then comes the sun and the immediate springing up now becomes the immediate withering away. Why? It is because there is no root. The sun ought to be causing more growth but because the plant doesn't have a root, the sun causes the demise of the plant drying up the little moisture it has so it can't live. So the immediate reaction of joy is now replaced with the ultimate reaction of disappointment. That is what is taking place in the planting of this seed. This one has the seed but it doesn't have the root.

So what does Jesus tell us about this? The interpretation from Jesus is that rocky ground hearers are temporary believers (not Christians) who joyfully embrace the Gospel blessings, but then wither when they encounter the Gospel adversity revealing no root in Christ. There is no such thing as a temporary Christian for He who began a good work

in you will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. Romans 8:29-30 says [29] *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* [30] *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.* There's an unbreakable chain of God's work of grace but there are people who hear the Gospel with an outward call and have some response that give you an idea that they might be called but it soon becomes evident that they are not.

The sun that rises that ought to cause the plant to grow actually becomes the reason for its demise. Why? There is no fruit because there is no root. It has no root of the matter in Christ. They hear the Gospel blessings – about heaven, gift, salvation, love, new record, new heart, new home, new family, and a new destination. Hey this is great! What they didn't hear is when Jesus said "If they hated Me then they'll hate you. In Me you'll have peace but in the world you'll have tribulation." They do not want that mocking, that sarcasm, or that this might cost them their job or friends or family. They don't want the cost but remember salvation is a free gift that cost you everything because you get more than everything when you get Jesus and He is enough.

Therefore when the world comes with its intimidation and infiltration believers will falter and fall down but what they don't do if they have a root is fall away. And even when they might turn away God's grace will take hold of them and they persevere. They are not perfect but they persevere to the end. Jesus is telling us there is this category of people who are not hard hearted but on the contrary they come to meetings where people are singing, they hear the great hymns and hear the Gospel message but hear all of that through a filter only hearing the Gospel blessings. Then they want the blessings but when they own the blessings, start telling others they are Christian and start sharing the Gospel then comes the adversity. What is then revealed is that there was an emotional, temporary driven faith but not a Spirit filled, rooted faith in Christ and they fall away. They are not temporary Christians but they are temporary believers.

So I want to give you some walk-aways from the takeaways. The first one is temporary faith is not saving faith. The Bible talks about a faith that saves and a faith that doesn't save. There is a counterfeit faith that Satan loves to produce out there in the religious world. You have to savingly believe not just believe. What does that saving belief look like in Christ? It's rational, emotional, volitional, and it takes the whole person that comes to the person of Christ who rests fully in Christ and surrenders to Christ. We don't know all the implications of it yet but we do know we've come to Christ without negotiating. Christ, I am Yours and You are mine.

I'll never forget in that hallway when I gave my life to Christ and thought "Ok Lord, this is the real deal and You don't have much but You have me. I'm here. Now tell me what You want me to do." I had no idea where that was leading but that is what happened at the moment I surrender my life to Christ. It is not a temporary, negotiated relationship. In the book of James it tells us that the demons believe. The devil also believes and they are not saved.

There are all kinds of counterfeits to saving faith. You can have an intellectual faith where you know the Bible, the catechism, the Apostle's Creed and all that where you know about Christianity but you don't know Christ. You can have a religious faith where I'm convinced I'm going to heaven just because I was baptized. Some think Church membership will get them there. You can have a self-reliant faith in the name of

religion. Jesus is my co-pilot but of course I have my hands on the wheel. Jesus is not a co-pilot. Jesus is your life. Without Him I can do nothing. He's not just there to coach me for He's my Savior, Lord and Redeemer.

When people say I needed to be a Christian for a crutch I say "No, I did not need Jesus as a crutch. He is my entire life support system because I can't do anything without Him." He is my all in all and I'm learning the rest of my life what that means. So realize that temporary faith is not saving faith. Time reveals what your true object of your faith is. Time reveals the content of our faith. Time reveals the intention of our faith. So one of the counterfeit faiths that is not saving faith is temporary faith.

Saving faith is not the emotional act of a moment for saving faith is the transformational acquisition of a life by the grace of God to the glory of God. Jesus Himself calls it temporary faith. There are several examples of this in Scripture. There is Demas who was with Paul and then Paul said he left them due to him loving this present world more. There is Judas Iscariot who followed Jesus for three years and then fell away. Peter at the same time fell down but didn't fall away. Now I'd like to show you another one in Acts 8. This is a case study about temporary faith. The Gospel goes to Judea and then Samaria and then we pick up the case.

Acts 8:9-24 says [9] *But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. [10] They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." [11] And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. [12] But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. [13] Even **Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.***

[14] *Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, [15] who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, [16] for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. [17] Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. [18] Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, [19] saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." [20] But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! [21] You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. [22] Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. [23] For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." [24] And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."*

In other words, Simon did not have a Spirit-filled, Spirit-given root faith in Christ but what he had was a temporary faith that had led him to a religious ritual. So every time I preach and share I often wonder 'hard ground?' or 'rocky ground?' where I want the blessings of the Gospel but not the call. Jesus always affirmed the cost of discipleship and the bigger the crowd the more He drove it down. He said "If you want to come after Me, count the cost. You may not have a place to lay your head because of

tribulation, affliction or persecution. Count the cost. Salvation is free. Follow Me. It will cost you everything because the root is in Me and you know that I am your sustenance. I am your Everything. I am your Life.”

The second one is that not all joyful responses to the Gospel are saving responses to the Gospel. I’m like the farmer who thinks that when someone responds to the Gospel then they must really be believers. You need to remember that not all emotional responses to the Gospel result in saving faith. The Gospel does require an emotional response but not all are saving responses. I want to give you this antidote from Charles Spurgeon.

Spurgeon had a deacon who worked and worked with this alcoholic who lived on the street and finally this alcoholic came one Sunday to church. At the conclusion of the service he said to his friend, the deacon, “I’m going to the mourner’s bench” and he gets on his knees to ask Christ to save him from his sins. The deacon goes up to Spurgeon afterwards and tells him everything that took place and then says “Pastor Spurgeon, do you think he was really saved?” Spurgeon responded, “Do not ask me to ascertain in a moment what it will take a lifetime to reveal.” He is not saying that you have to live good enough to be saved but he is saying that it’s not an act of a moment that indicates saving faith but it is the acquisition of a life that is the evidence of saving faith. Time will reveal whether he has the root or not.

Thirdly, is that we must avoid evangelistic methods/messages which cater to rocky soil hearers. There are some people who are driven by their emotions and don’t manipulate them, whereby we create meetings that emotionally move people for the blessings of the Gospel without communicating to them the full message of the Gospel. Christ always made clear to the crowds to count the cost and the bigger the crowd the more He made sure they heard that. He didn’t manipulate people with their emotions, although it is an emotional thing to come to Christ of both mourning and joy.

Fourthly, adversity which causes growth in true believers is the occasion for the demise of a rootless rocky soil hearer. Adversity in the life of a true believer, according to James, should count it all joy my brothers, when, not if, you encounter various trials knowing that the trying of your faith produces endurance, endurance character and character hope. In other words, the sun of affliction, persecution, intimidation, and temptation actually drives the true believer to Christ, for even when they fall down they don’t fall away.

Brothers and sisters, when you come to Christ you are still in a broken world, you have a broken body, you have broken people in your family and you’re broken but God is working on you and growing you. You are in a broken nation and a broken culture. Believers get sick and so do family members. When affliction comes does that drive us to Christ or do we wither away? You will be persecuted and we who live in a bubble, I think, will eventually experience that. So you are seeing churches and nominal Christians shrivel away in the latest pew research pole but those with a root, that becomes an occasion for growth, not demise. This affliction drives the believer to Christ and then the shoot gets stronger and the fruit gets more glorious – more fruit and much fruit. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

As you are praying we have covered two soils in this study. Is there in your heart an interest and a desire to understand or is it hard? If it is hard, I ask that you would call upon the Lord that the Word would find a use in the hands of the Holy Spirit to plow up your heart that you might come to Christ. You might be saying you like the blessings of the Gospel and the cross but you're not sure if you committed to the call of the crown of Christ and you're willing to follow Him no matter the cost because He is with you. Lord, make me a good ground hearer and not just an emotionally, joyful hearer of the blessings but a transformed hearer of the Gospel blessings and promises with a willing heart to embrace adversity that I might grow closer to Him and not wither away from Him. Kind Father, many reading this today are good soil hearers. I give You praise for we did not come into this world with that heart for You gave us that heart. Now give us a root that is deep. Give us a plant that is strong and help us bear fruit, more fruit and much fruit for Your glory and that people will be drawn to our Savior and behold our King for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.