

LII. Matthew in Biblical Perspective  
The Kingdom of God and the Word of God  
“The Parable of the Sower, Part 6—The Good Ground Hearer”  
Matthew 13  
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June 14, 2015 – Morning Sermon

We are in Matthew 13. This is our sixth and final study in the parable of the sower. Then we’ll move on to the other Kingdom parables from Jesus. This is the Word of God 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, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may this His Word be preached for you.

In a moment I will be referring to something I think is important in John 15 as we bring to a conclusion our study of the parable of the sower. We have taken some time to look at this parable for various reasons, not the least of which is the importance of it. When Jesus says if you can’t understand this one then you can’t understand any of the parables then that means I need to understand this parable, because there are 32 other parables that Jesus spoke. Perhaps that is why He took the time to interpret this one and even more, singularly this is the only parable He interprets and is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke, the synoptic Gospels. This parable is in the context of seven Kingdom parables as well that we are going to be studying. So this one we have taken more time with because of its importance and in understanding it. The rest of the parables will describe what the Kingdom of God is like in this world.

The parable of the sower tells you two things. One it tells you how to get into this Kingdom. Two it tells you how you know who is in the Kingdom. What are the marks of those who are in the Kingdom of God and how do you get into it? That is one of the reasons this parable is so crucial. The parable of the sower has four elements to it – the

seed, sowing, the sower and soils. The singular purpose of this parable is that the fate of the seed is determined by the condition of the soil. Parables have many supporting lessons but they have one singular point that is an extended simile where it says ‘the Kingdom of God is like...’

The four elements each represent something. The seed is the Word of God, the Gospel of the Kingdom. Sowing is the preaching of God’s Word and personal evangelism, where you share Christ with people. The Sower behind the sowing of the seed is Jesus. He is The Sower working through His sowers. Special sowers He has called to preach but all of us who know Christ are sowers who are sowing the seed of the Gospel when we share Christ with others. The fifth element in this parable that is implied is the field and that represents the whole world. We sow the seed everywhere and we even drop it on the hard ground we’re walking on. It is an indiscriminant, non-prejudicial, lavish sowing of the seed over the entire field, the world, that we are sowing in. The fourth element is the soils the seed falls on.

Why does a farmer sow seed? He wants a crop. Jesus is teaching when there is good seed, good sowing and good sower, the fate of the seed is determined by the condition of the soil, our hearts. So when you share the Gospel with people or it is being preached to them, it is the condition of their heart that will determine their response to what is being shared by you or the preacher. The seed is there to bear fruit for that is the purpose of it but it won’t bear fruit in all the hearts that receive the seed. Why? It is because not all the hearts are ready to receive it. So the unbeliever and the believer are demonstrated in this parable of the sower with four soils. There are four different kinds of hearts.

The unbelieving heart has three profiles – hard ground, rocky ground and thorny ground. These three soils have one thing in common – they bear no fruit and that’s why I know they are an unbelieving heart. I want to try and substantiate this for you by looking at the passage in John 15. In the last week of Jesus’ earthly ministry He gave us the sermon called the Upper Room Discourse and this was given when He instituted the Lord’s Supper. This sermon is covered in John 13 through John 17. In John 15 He uses an allegory with Jesus being the Vine, the Father being the Vinedresser, and His people being branches and how to distinguish those who are really in Him and those who just say they are in Him.

John 15:1-5 says [1] *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. [2] Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does **bear fruit** he prunes, that it may **bear more fruit**. [3] Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. [4] Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. [5] I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that **bears much fruit**, for apart from me you can do nothing.”* As you grow in Christ He prunes you to bear more fruit and as He prunes you growing deeper in Christ you’ll bear much fruit. Let’s look further at what He says. And apart from Him we can do nothing but if we’re in Him we’ll bear fruit, more fruit and much fruit.

John 15:6-8 says [6] *If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. [7] If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. [8] By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to*

*be my disciples.* Those who are not really in Him will not bear fruit and are cast away. When God is working on your heart you'll also be amazed at what your new wish list is. It won't be a world-defined wish list but a Jesus-defined wish list. Those in Him will bear fruit and the Father works on them so that they will bear more fruit. As they are growing they will bear much fruit.

The way to know who is in Him is by their fruit and that's how we know that the first three soils are not savingly, believing hearts. The hard ground hearer, rocky ground hearer, and thorny ground hearer never bear fruit so they are not savingly joined to Christ. The hard ground depicts the heart that we're all born with. We don't seek the Lord. We don't understand. We have no interest in Him. We do not desire Him, no not one. We are all born with that hard heart so when that Gospel seed comes, unless something is done to the heart, it just lays on the hard ground. Then the birds of the air quickly come and snatch it away, as Satan snatches away the seed because that Word that they are not responding to is also a plowshare. The sower brought the seed and put it there but Satan comes to snatch it away as it lays on the hard heart, lest it start to soften that heart. Trivial things and even good things begin to give us a disinterest in God's Word. The hard heart doesn't bear fruit because there is no seed because it's been snatched away.

The rocky ground kind of looks good on the top. It has soil but underneath it is a layer of rock. So when the seed falls into the rocky soil there is an immediate response of joy, 'oh this is wonderful!' for there is forgiveness, new life, heaven and that's what Jesus did on the cross but we find out that this is a temporary believer. Notice it is not a temporary Christian for there is no such thing as a temporary Christian but a temporary believer. This one doesn't have saving faith but an emotional response to the faith that is conditioned to wanting the blessings of the cross but they don't want the demands of the crown. It is pictured this way where the rocky soil hearer takes the seed and starts to send down the root but the root hits the rock. Therefore the root can't go deep into the moisture bed that it needs to have so instead of having a root it shoots up a shoot and all the energy goes up. Then it seems like an early crop that is coming up that the farmer sees but what the farmer doesn't realize is that there is no root and so when the sun comes up which ought to cause the root to grow deeper into the moisture, actually becomes the occasion for its demise instead of the opportunity for its growth.

The rocky ground hearer is the one who responds to the benefits of the cross but says 'no' to the crown so when the Word of God causes persecution, marginalization, mockery, ridicule, or even intimidation they fall away, they wither away. James 1:2-4 says *[2] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* So what ought to cause the true believer to grow, shows that this one is not a true believer but a temporary believer. This is the one that said 'yes' to the act of a moment instead of 'yes' to an acquisition of a life. There is no fruit because there is no root.

The thorny ground hearer receives the seed, puts down a root and up comes the shoot but it doesn't bear fruit because it just simply added the seed to things that were already present. There are three thorn bushes that were already present given in the parable – the cares of this world, the riches of this age and the pleasures of this life. Those are already rooted and aggressive in this soil. Notice that none of those things are

evil in and of themselves. Money is not evil but it's just the love of it, the idolatry of it. We all have cares in this world – marriage, family, children, job etc. There are the pleasures of this life like eating, drinking, the gift of sex within marriage, the gift of knowledge and the hunger to know. All of those things choke out the Gospel work. Why? It is because they are not simply things that are in our life but they have become idols in our life and have become the reason for our life. Then what we are trying to do is just add a little Jesus here and there.

When you come to Christ savingly, it's not only the act of a moment but it's the acquisition of a life where you uproot the thorn bushes of this world. We die to ourselves and to our idols. For the rest of our life we'll more and more what that means but we not only believe we repent. We turn from our self and our sins to put our trust in Him and we uproot those idolatries of this life so that we don't live to eat and drink but we drink and eat to live for Christ. The marriage bed is undefiled because that's our desire in Christ. We learn not to puff ourselves up but to know how to serve and know Him in life. So there is this turn to a new life that takes place. Yet the thorny ground already has this idolatry rooted in there so it chokes the seed out and produces no fruit because there is no room.

So these three soils show three manifestations that when the Gospel is preached the conditions of the heart determine the fate of the seed and no fruit is produced in any of them, therefore there is no relationship with Christ. How do you know someone in the Kingdom? The Word of the Kingdom has come and they've been born again. When they are born again they are new creations in Christ, not perfect, but they are changed because the heart is changed. What does the changed heart look like? This is where we come to the fourth soil.

The fourth soil is the good soil and it describes the one who is in the Kingdom of God and is a fruit bearer. The Word of God (seed) that comes to us is determined by the heart (soil) and the heart of the matter is the matters of the heart. So let's take a look at the condition of the good soil, the fate of the seed and how Jesus interprets that for this soil.

First of all, the condition of the soil is revealed by what it is not. Matthew 13:8 says *[8] Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.* The key to the good soil is there is not a lot of description about what it is except that it is good soil. You know what it is by what it is not. It's not hard, not a hard heart. It's not rocky for it doesn't have an obstacle to the root going down in Christ. It's not a thorny heart where there are rooted thorn bushes ahead of the game that are heartily in place where something has been above, beside or before the Lord. Those things have been rooted out by faith and repentance. It is a heart that is not hard, rocky or thorny but it's a good heart.

So what will happen to the seed in this good soil? Because the soil is not hard, rocky or infested with thorn bushes, it has a root, shoot and fruit. Many think gun when I say the word shoot, a verb, but I'm giving you the noun, shoot, which gave birth to the verb. This is a point without a point and I just wanted to share that with you. The seed sends out a shoot so when we invented guns and arrows we just made it into a verb where you're sending out something going forward. The whole purpose of the seed being sown here now comes to manifestation where it bears fruit. It is multi-dimensional fruit because some produce thirty, some sixty and some a hundred fold. The one thing you

know about a new heart that has been given by the grace of God is it bears fruit and it's different dimensions of fruit. John 15:8 says [8] *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.* The believer is a fruit bearer and those without fruit are cast away.

The fruit doesn't save you. The fruit shows there is a shoot and the shoot shows there is a root and the root shows you're in Christ. Christ is the Savior and when He is the Savior persecution can't stop the root from growing deeper for it just becomes the occasion for the root to grow deeper. Then comes a stronger shoot and fruit with some being thirty, some sixty and some a hundred fold but there is this multi-dimensional dynamic of fruit that evidences itself in the believer's life. So the Gospel of the Kingdom must come to the heart to get into the Kingdom and the heart must be prepared. Then the way to know someone is in the Kingdom is by their fruit. Some days may be a difficult season but ultimately the verdict is a new creation in Christ where the old is passed away and the new has come.

So how does Jesus deal with this? He interprets for us. Matthew 13:23 says [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.* When God has three authors to write about the same thing most of what they say is the same but every so often one author is impressed by what he heard to focus on one thing and another author upon another thing. So you put together a composite sketch of what each of them says about the same parable. Each one saw different features and they put it together. In Matthew he emphasizes the one who hears the word and understands it.

Now go to Mark 4:20 which says [20] *But those that were sown on the good soil are the **ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.*** Matthew said they understand it and bear fruit. Mark said they accept it and bear fruit. Now let's see what Luke adds to this. Luke 8:15 says [15] *As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, **hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience*** (or endurance or understanding or perseverance). Why did I bring this out? First, let's put them all together.

In Jesus' interpretation of the good heart hearer He brings out five marks. One is that they have a heart that understands. They have an interest in the Word of God and the message of the Gospel. This heart is teachable. Number two is that this heart accepts it. It surrenders to it and embraces it. It doesn't make God's Word submit to it but they submit to God's Word. They accept and receive all of it. They don't know it all yet but they don't negotiate the message. Number three it is a good heart. Number four is that it is a heart that bears fruit and that shows that something has happened to this heart. Number five is that it bears fruit with endurance. It is not temporary for it perseveres. It keeps on bearing fruit with patience.

Stop and think for a moment. Notice how the good soil is in contrast to the other three soils. The hard heart does not understand nor does it want to understand. It has no interest. The good heart has an interest, wants to understand and is teachable. In fact it's hungry for it. The rocky soil accepts part of it but not all of it and has no root in the matter. They are glad to get the blessings when they immediately receive it with joy but they fall away and there is no endurance. The thorny ground tries to put Jesus into the

mix of all the idols of life and they choke it out so they don't bear fruit or have any endurance but are dismissed. The good soil is a good heart that bears fruit and endures.

That word good ought to send off bells to you because we're all born with a hard heart and may morph into another soil but that is all due to Romans 3, for there is none who seek God. Romans 3:10-12 says *[10] as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; [11] no one understands; no one seeks for God. [12] All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."* This good soil is different. It understands, seeks, accepts, is good, bears fruit and perseveres but not with perfection. The persevering grace of God is manifested by its perseverance, some days thirty, some days sixty and some days a hundred fold. In other words, Jesus is telling us this heart is ready, receptive and responsive.

The question is who was the one who got it ready? How did they get this good heart? Where does it come from? Go ask any farmer who wants good seed. You have to get your hands dirty to monkey in the soil. You have to clean it out, cultivate it and work on it. Now you see that the Sower, Jesus is not just the sower but a cultivator. He has prepared the heart and made it ready so that it is receptive and responsive to bear fruit. So here are the three takeaways.

Number one is it is a new heart because of two facts. If you have a good heart then you have a new heart. You were born with a hard heart that could morph into a rocky soil or a thorny ground heart but you didn't have a good heart when you came into this world. Where do you get the good heart? You get the good heart by the grace of God alone for God gave you that heart. My favorite quote from J. Vernon McGee is when he said "I'm tired of hearing preachers say 'give your heart to Jesus' for where does the Bible tell you to give your heart to Jesus? The Gospel is not you give God your heart but it is that God gives you a new heart." He not only gives you a new record where He wipes away your sins with the righteousness of Christ because of Christ paying for our sins on the cross but when He goes to the cross He nails our heart to the cross. He cuts out of us that stony heart and puts within us a soft heart that is pliable in His hands.

You have a new heart because of God's grace through the Spirit of God and the Word of God. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You cannot see or enter the Kingdom of God until you're born again." He gave you that new heart that was ready, receptive and to be responsive to the work of the Gospel so that you could believe. Ephesians 2:8-9 says *[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* So God has worked in your heart to give you eyes to see and ears to hear because He gave you a heart that was ready and receptive. That is one of the reasons we come to worship on the Lord's Day to praise God for giving us a new record, a new heart and a new life. He took away the old heart and gave me a new heart and He did that by the Word of God and the Spirit of God. You have been born again of the imperishable seed, the living and abiding Word of God. You were born again by the Spirit of God.

So factor one is that the Holy Spirit came with the Word of God and gave you a new heart. Jesus fixed the soil for the seed He sowed in your heart. It's not that you're just a little bit better in the hard ground, rocky ground, and thorny ground. You are a trophy of grace. You are a heart prepared by the grace of God.

The second factor of God's grace is that His Holy Spirit and His Word came through instruments, through somebody. Somebody shared the Gospel with you. God

willing it was your father and your mother. If not, praise God for whoever He brought but you be a father and mother who bring it. The most important thing for your children is not what college they go to or job they get but that they know Jesus Christ as their Savior, Lord and King. God can only do it through a changed heart and God does it through people that bring that Word and go on their knees to pray for those people.

Somehow God's sovereign grace is intertwined with the intentionality of His people in prayer and proclamation. I don't know how it works but when God's people pray, evangelize, disciple and proclaim God's sovereign grace is entwined with what they do. My job is not to change people but my job is to plant, water, cultivate and share with all my heart and the first field where I want to do this is in the work of my children, then my grandchildren, my friends, my neighbors etc. That's what I long to do and need to do. When I don't long to do that I need God to work in my heart so that I get back on track and He does too.

If you know Jesus today it's because the Holy Spirit came with the Word of God and gave you a new heart and He used others as instruments for you hear as well. I've never talked to someone about the Gospel who hadn't heard something about it from someone else already. Somebody planted, somebody watered and somebody cultivated. God's grace uses people and God's grace will use you in people's lives as well as you pray and proclaim.

The second takeaway is, keep your heart by God's grace. When you get converted you get a new heart but within you is an old man and that old man remembers those days of a hard heart, a rocky ground heart and a thorny ground heart. The old man wants to get that heart hard again. He wants you to focus on other things besides Jesus. The old man doesn't want the root to get deep and he wants to re-root those thorn bushes.

Some of you might be like me where you just give up on the weeds in your yard and you just call someone in and pay them to do that. Those guys are out there smiling as they are killing those weeds and do you know why they're smiling? They are smiling because they know how to kill those weeds but they also know you'll be calling them back when the weeds come back and they are making money every time you do that. So when you get converted through a general repentance those things get up rooted but then the old man keeps wanting to re-root in your life the thorn bushes to choke out your walk with Christ. So keep your heart by God's grace.

The third and final takeaway is keep bearing fruit which is living a life to the glory of God's grace. I grew up in a wonderful church that preached the Gospel. It was a Christian Missionary Alliance Church. We had some amazing preachers that would come in. I remember the Sunday night evangelistic service where we would sing the hymns 'Have Thine Own Way' or 'Just As I Am' at the end of the service inviting people to come to Christ. You have no idea how many verses there are to the hymn 'Just As I Am' and we'd sing it until someone came forward. I heard all that and had a life of ungodliness, immorality, violence and blasphemy and it was even worse than people thought because I had a secret life that was even worse.

Then at 21 years of age I went to this church where the preacher preached the Word, nothing greatly powerful but he'd just preach the Bible. God brought me from death unto life. I heard good seed with even better sowers and sowing but He changed my heart sitting under this preacher. I hope you have that changed heart today. I'm not sure why you're reading this today but I do know that you wouldn't have read this if God

wasn't doing something to draw you to this. So I want to tell you about Jesus. Jesus loves you. He will save you. He will give you a new record and a new heart from which will come a new life that bears fruit for the glory of God and evidences that you know Him.

For those of you who do know Him, you give Him glory. In this congregation we have some thirty fold, some sixty fold and some a hundred fold and some of you who may be thirty fold this week may be sixty fold next week and you may go back to thirty fold for this is an uneven path that we're on but there is a path. I find it interesting that Jesus says fruit, more fruit and much fruit and when you put this with the analogy of the parable of the sower you get thirty, sixty and a hundred fold. A congregation has it all – thirty, sixty and a hundred. Your life has it all. You're on the road of thirty, sixty and a hundred but it's an uneven road. God will grow you by His grace because if any man be in Christ he is a new creation. You have a new record, a new heart and the old is passed away, behold the new has come. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Those of you who know Jesus take a moment and give Him thanks and declare your love to Him who first loved you. He not only provided a new record at the cross but He provided a new heart to receive the Gospel message to bring you into His Kingdom. If you're reading this and God's working in your life and you heard that Jesus went to the cross to nail your old record and old heart to give you a new record and a new heart and you find that rising of ears to hear and eyes to see then just come to Christ. Jesus, thank You for the new heart where You reign and not the idols of this world for where You root me I put my trust in You. I come just as I am. Father, I thank You so much that we could be together and work our way through this parable and all the excitement of understanding Your Kingdom but it is this one that tells us who is in the Kingdom and how we're in the Kingdom so with those here we join together to give You praise for You brought us from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of Light. You gave us a new heart with eyes to see and ears to hear, a heart that was ready, receptive and responded. Now Father, by Your grace keep that heart through the preaching of the Word, fellowshiping with God's people, time in the Word and as we do ministry may all of that keep the heart soft in Your hands to bear fruit, more fruit and much fruit, in Jesus' Name, Amen.