

XLVII. Matthew in Biblical Perspective
The Kingdom of God and the Word of God
“An Introduction to the Parable of the Sower”
Matthew 13
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May 3, 2015 – Morning Sermon

On this series of the seven Kingdom parables I'd like to recommend a book to go along with this. It is called The Parables of Jesus written by my friend, Terry Johnson. These seven parables are not only included in this book but the 32 other parables Jesus used in His teaching. Let's now look at Matthew 13. This is God's Word. It's the truth. Matthew 13:1-23 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.”*

[10] Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” [11] 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. [12] For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. [13] 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. [14] 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.”*

*[15] For this people's heart has grown dull,
and with their ears they can barely hear,
and their eyes they have closed,*

*lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them.’*

[16] But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.

[17] For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

[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 His Word be preached for you.

This is our second study on Matthew 13 in our series on the seven Kingdom parables. This marks the bringing out of the parable ministry of Jesus. In the four Gospels there are six of Jesus’ sermons that are recorded to some degree. One of them is in the Gospel of John and the other five are in Matthew. We have already looked at two of those sermons when we covered Matthew 5 through 7, one being the Manifesto of the Kingdom where Jesus teaches what it means to live in the Kingdom of God and the Sermon on the Mount. Now we have come to the third sermon and this sermon tells you how to get into the Kingdom and how to understand the Kingdom.

Here in Matthew 13 Jesus uses seven parables to teach about the Kingdom of God. It is not a physical Kingdom that has spiritual implications but it is a spiritual Kingdom in the hearts of men by the King who died for us on the cross to save us and then that Kingdom has physical implications as the spread of His grace in our life begins to govern all that we do, say, live and how we do everything. So the Kingdom of God spreads.

You can go read about all the kingdoms of this world, even the most powerful. Their shelf life of all the kingdoms that have ever existed including the most powerful have been about a hundred to 250 years. You can stretch it out about another 50 to 100 for the Roman Empire but not the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God’s shelf life is forever and it is constantly expanding to kingdom to kingdom to kingdom in the hearts of men as men and women from the kingdoms of this world are brought into the Kingdom of God.

So what is that Kingdom? Jesus teaches that with seven parables here. Jesus used parables a lot. Sometimes we wrongly think why He did it. We think He did this to clarify, make things clear and keep people’s attention. For a group of people it would clarify and keep their attention but for a whole other group of people it does the exact opposite. Jesus taught in parables because it affirms that He is the Messiah. Psalm 78:2 says *[2] I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old.* This was prophesying that Jesus would teach in parables but that’s not all. When He taught in parables they also revealed the spiritual disposition hearer and then accelerated it. Those who had ears to hear and eyes to see would understand, would want to understand and would motivate them. Those that didn’t understand revealed they didn’t have any interest at all and used it to distort the Kingdom or distort the message of Christ or dismiss the message of Christ.

The very first parable Jesus uses from these seven to talk about the Kingdom of God is the parable of the sower which we just read. In this study I want to tell you three things about the parable of the sower and that is the importance of it, the ingredients of it and the implications of it. Out of the seven parables here I am going to spend five studies on this first one and then I’m going to cover the remaining six in two studies. In this study I will introduce this parable and then in the next four studies we will look at one of the soils talked about in this parable – hard ground, hearer – rocky ground, hearer –

thorny ground, hearer – good ground, hearer. The reason I’m doing it this way is because I believe this parable is important.

Here are four reasons why I believe this parable is important. Number one is because of its placement and its length. The other six parables are more like two sentences. The word parable actually means to throw along-side. It is to throw an earthly illustration to teach a heavenly truth. It is to take a physical presentation to teach something spiritual. It is a simile that is extended into a short narrative or story. That means it has one particular purpose. It may have many implications and insights but it has one singular purpose. In this study I’ll give you the singular purpose of this parable and then we’ll take a study each to drill down into one of the soils that reveal that purpose. So I know this parable is important because this is the first one Jesus uses and it’s the longest one.

Secondly, it is important because of its repetition. It is repeated in all three of the synoptic Gospels – Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8.

Thirdly, it is the only parable repeated with the interpretation also. That is a reason this is important because Jesus interpreted this parable for us. You have to get this one right. The fourth reason though to me is why this parable ought to get our attention and we ought to take some time with it.

Fourthly, Jesus says this parable is the key to all the other parables. In other words, if you miss this one you miss everything else. I want you to see this from the recording in Mark 4. The parable of the sower is found in Mark 4:1-20 but this is what Jesus says as He begins to explain this parable to them. Mark 4:13 says *[13] And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?”* So Jesus uses a rhetorical question to make a statement. So I believe it is important to take some time to understand this parable.

If that is important then what are the ingredients of the parable of the sower? There are four ingredients to this parable. The seed is the first ingredient. Notice from the text that it is not “a” seed or any seed but the seed. What is the seed? It is the Word or Gospel of the Kingdom. How do you get into this Kingdom? You get into this Kingdom because the King came and died on a cross for you. He rose and is ascended. The King is interceding and coming again. The King has made a way for you into this Kingdom but you must come from your heart and the Kingdom begins in your heart. The Gospel message is saved by grace alone, through faith alone and in Christ alone. That is the seed.

The second ingredient is the sower. It is not “a” sower or any sower but there is a definitely article. Who is the sower? It is Jesus Himself. Jesus says, “My sheep know My voice and they follow Me.” Paul says, “Faith comes by hearing (the seed, the Word), and hearing the Word of Christ.” It is Christ speaking to the hearts of His people.

Thirdly, there is the sowing which is the casting of the seed over the field falling on hard ground, rocky ground, thorny ground and good ground. It is falling everything. It is the casting of the seed. I had never sowed a field in my life until when I got to Covenant College and I was hired as a part of their grounds crew and they wanted me to sow the soccer field and the baseball field. So Mr. Sims very patiently put this bag on me which was filled full of seed and taught me how to cast seed on the field. He wanted me to pace myself so as to not run out of seed and you get an even distribution of it on the field. That is called broad casting. So that is the casting of the seed.

What is the casting of the seed? It is the church of Christ, the special casting of the seed from a pulpit. The general casting of the seed is by you every day as you talk about Christ to anybody and everybody who will listen. You might think that if you're casting the seed then you're the sower. No, the Sower is working through you. So it's not you but Him through you that is casting the seed throughout the world. It is the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the field, broadcasting it throughout the world.

The fourth ingredients are the soils. There is the definite article of the soil but there is also a plural where there are four kinds of soils that represent the hearts of men. There is the hard ground where the seed just sits on it. There is the rocky ground meaning there is a layer of rock underneath where the seed falls into it and immediately shoots up but when the sun then begins to shine upon it, the sun withers it because there is no root. There was an emotional response to it but not a root response to it. Thirdly, there is the thorny ground where it grows up but also weeds are growing and everything else is growing. The weeds choke out the grass. So it gets choked out and bears no fruit. Then there is the good soil, the good heart that receives the seed, understands it and bears fruit with a root that yields, to varying degrees, some 30, some 60, and some 100.

If those are the ingredients what would be the implications? The first thing is there is no harvest without sowing or positively put, sowing precedes harvesting. We'd all love to have a harvest but you won't have a harvest unless you have seed. You won't have seed unless you have sowing for you have to sow first. Is there going to be a harvest for our Savior? We don't have to worry about a harvest for Jesus tells us we need to be praying for workers. Where are the sowers?

Secondly, without the Seed there is no Harvest from the soil. So it's not just sowing but you have to have the Seed. This is preaching this for yourself, isn't it? We can send evangelistic teams out everywhere but if they're not taking the Gospel of the Kingdom it's useless. It has to be the Seed before you can have the harvest. It's not just about telling others about religion or church or do better but we have a message. The message is that we're rightly under the judgment of God but this God who has every right to judge us did something that is absolutely astounding and that is He gave His Son to go to a cross to save us but the judgment we ought to have received He took upon Himself to give to you the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. When you come to Jesus this Gospel of the Kingdom declares that sin is your problem, grace is the answer and grace has a double cure – where you can be right with God and grow in the grace and knowledge of God – cleansed from its guilt and emancipated from its power. The shame of sin has been removed and the reign of sin has been broken in your life. That is the seed we're supposed to take into this world.

Thirdly, without sowing there is no Seed for the soil. In other words, it's one thing to have the Seed but it's another thing to get it out in the field. That means you need to sow and so right now God's means is for us to take the Gospel out. The great news is that as you go it's not you going but the Holy Spirit going through you and Christ Himself, His voice works through your sharing. It is glorious work throughout the world but the Seed can't stay in the barn. We are supposed to put it in the bag and cast it.

This brings me to the fourth thing where the Seed is sown indiscriminately. What I mean by indiscriminately is not just to people that I think might be interested but the seed was thrown on rocky ground, thorny ground, hard ground and good ground. As you are sowing you don't try to pick the soil but you throw it everywhere for it is a universal,

lavish distribution of seed. It is a broad cast, not a narrow cast. It goes to the ones I know, those I meet and everywhere I go I can spread this Seed thoughtfully and insightfully throughout the world. I can still remember Mr. Sims telling me not to put all the seed right down in front of me. He would tell me to cast it this way and that way, spread it out everywhere.

Sometimes when you think it's good ground, it's not good ground. Sometimes when you think it's hard ground it's actually good ground and the Word you're sharing God is using to make it good ground to receive the seed. Sometimes when you think it's good ground it's actually rocky ground or thorny ground. Sometimes you think it's hard ground and it's good ground for God is always amazing us. We are just supposed to spread it everywhere.

Fifthly, there are four elements in the parable where three have no variance and only one varies. The three things that are unvaried are the seed, the sower and the sowing. So what we have in the parable is the assumption that the pure Word of God is being proclaimed and sowed. Christ is at work through those who are casting it. What is the one thing that is variable? It is the hearts of men and women. The soil is the thing that varies. One is hard, one is rocky, one is thorny and one is good but it really only comes down to two things. The hard, rocky and thorny grounds have one thing in common and that is they have no harvest so no fruit. The good soil has a harvest. Sometimes the harvest is 30 fold, 60 fold or even 100 fold. Paul puts it this way, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation and the old has passed away and the new has come."

Jesus said in John 15:6, "that whoever abides in Him bears much fruit." What is fruit? Jesus says in John 15:8 says [8] *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.* Notice it doesn't say that you earn or merit to be His disciples. Fruit is a lifestyle that does two things. One is that it is evidence that Christ is in you and you are in Christ. Something has changed in you. There will be evidence that you are pursuing God rightly in your life. The pursuit doesn't save them but it's the evidence that they are right with God. They bear much fruit and so prove to be His disciples.

The second thing the fruit evidences is that increasingly in your life your desires in life are done to the glory of God. Whatsoever you do, whether you eat or drink, you do all to the glory of God. By this is My Father glorified that you bear much fruit. Fruit is a lifestyle that exalts the Triune God and evidences that God is at work in your heart and life. The good soil even though there are 30, 60 or even 100 fold still have fruit.

The unbelieving soil comes in different varieties. When someone says I don't have room for this Gospel it just lays on the top – hard soil. Some of it is that they like the benefits but not the commands. They want the benefits of the cross but not the expectations of Christ's crown. That's the rocky soil. The persecution comes. It wasn't that they were saved and lost but it just shows there wasn't a root to begin with. The thorny soil is someone who likes what they see so they use Jesus as a co-pilot but they have other co-pilots too and the weeds of idolatry will choke out the Word without the spade of repentance pulling them out by their roots. You don't see an indifferent heart or a heart that won't take the challenges but you see a crowded heart. Let's just put Jesus in with everything else I want in there. Here with these three soils you see more

unbelieving hearts than believing hearts. In other words you ought to be amazed that your heart is good. That was grace.

That is why Jesus warned us in that first sermon He did in Matthew 7. Matthew 7:22-23 says [22] *On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'* [23] *And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'* There was no vital saving faith, personal relationship. You may have been mentioning Me in your religion but I was not in your heart and your heart was not rooted in Me. How do I know where my heart is? The evidence is the fruit. There are four soils and four responses to this seed sowed but only one soil produces a harvest and that's the good soil.

So what is the lesson of this parable? The lesson is the fate of the Seed is determined by the condition of the soil. You had the good Seed, the good sowing and the good sower, so why were there different responses? It was because of the condition of the soil. So where does that leave us? I want to give you two questions in closing as my takeaway.

The first question is am I engaged in a non-discriminating sower of the Gospel Seed? Is Christ sowing through me? This is the privilege that God has given to me. He says I've given you the Seed now here's the Gospel of the Kingdom. I have given you the Sower where Christ works through you. I have given you the privilege to sow the seed now do we everyday leave the seed in the barn of our life or do we take it out and sow it in the field. All these people we come into contact with are headed to a Christ-less eternity unless the Gospel finds root in their hearts. That is why we long for all of us to fulfill this mission statement here at Briarwood which says for God's glory Briarwood is committed to equipping Christians to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. We are to cast the seed not only by sending missionaries out there with it but right here where we live – my neighborhood, my home, my friends, my co-workers. We learn how to conversationally sow the seed of the Gospel.

The second question is what does my life reveal about the soil of my heart as the Gospel seed has been sown upon it? In other words, I know all four soils are here today. I'm hoping and praying that there is nothing but good soil here but I know that all four soils are here. I'm fully aware of the inadequacies of this sower that is sowing but I also know that Jesus takes His Word and sows it for through the foolishness of message preached that you're being saved. I also know it's falling on hearts. Perhaps there are many reasons why some reading this have decided to be indifferent but it is a heart issue. There are some who want to know the benefits but not the call because they don't want the persecution or tribulation that comes with it in this world. Therefore it doesn't find root. Then there are some who just put Jesus in their life with everything else they want but everything else chokes it up.

You might not be where you want to be but thank the Lord that Jesus is producing some fruit in your life. At one time you had a hard heart, a thorny heart or a rocky heart but God got a hold of your heart. Praise His Holy Name! He didn't do it because He needed you. He did it because He loved you. In other words, if the fate of the seed is disposed upon the condition of the heart and we start with a bad heart that tells you before the seed was cast somebody worked in your heart. The first thing our evangelism

team does before they go out is they pray because they want the Holy Spirit to go ahead of them. If the Spirit doesn't go ahead of them it doesn't accomplish anything.

I love the hymn that says 'All is vain, unless the Holy Spirit comes down.' So today if fruit is coming out of your life, an interest in God's Word, and a love for Christ that is growing in your life that is because God has come and opened your heart. Then praise His Holy Name but if today your heart is not there I have great news for you too. The same Word that falls into the good soil that produces fruit in a good heart that Word is a plow share in the hands of the Holy Spirit to start changing our hearts. That Word is the plow share to break up the hard heart, to break down the rocky soil and to weed out the weeds that are there. So the Word is not only that which brings you into the Kingdom and bears fruit, but it's that in the hands of the Holy Spirit that plows up the heart to make it a good heart. So when we go sharing the Gospel we pray, "Holy Spirit, go plow up hearts" and when we love Christ and come to His Word, we give God praise for our heart, a new heart. Now God, let not my heart be a dismissal of Your Word but do Your work in my heart.

One time I went to share the Gospel with a couple and I remember saying to them, "If you were to die tonight do you know where you would spend eternity?" The man said "I'm going to heaven." Then I said "Ok so if you're standing before God and God says 'why should I let you into heaven?' what would be your answer?" He said, "I've been pretty good. I know I haven't done all that I should have done but I've done more good than bad." I said "So you think God kind of grades on a curve and your curve is better so in other words it's what you've done that outweighs what you've done bad and that is what will get you into heaven. Can I share something with you?" I had the privilege to read Romans 6:23 which says [23] *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* We then walked through this wonderful gift of God's grace and that it is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone that we're saved.

I gave as many illustrations as I could and then I said "Do you understand what is being said here?" He said "yes." Then I said "Would you like to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior?" The couple said they would. Then I said "Do you want to pray or do you want me to pray?" He said "You pray and then we'll pray with you." I said "Ok let's do that." So we prayed and then I said "Now, if you're standing before God and God says 'why should I let you into heaven' what would you say?" They said "Now that I've prayed I think I can do better." I thought what have I been doing for the last hour and so we went back through it all but after a while I just had to go home. I had to come back but I just could not get through to them at that moment. We don't want to give up. It is scandalous that we are saved by grace unless God changes the heart.

I always like to say this because my sister went to Clemson and I visited a guy that went to Clemson. I walked in and he said "Oh is it you? Well come on in." His name was Al. While I was there I went through the same presentation I did with the couple but during that time his iron burned a hole in his ironing board for bachelor's don't iron very well, the phone rang three times, I couldn't get him to turn down the volume on the TV and I was shouting over the TV the entire time we were talking. It seemed like everything was happening during our conversation. I finally got to the end and I said "Al, is there any reason why you shouldn't receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior?" He said "No, I've been waiting to talk with you about this and I'm ready." I

said “Would you like to pray or do you want me to?” He said “I’ll pray.” So he prayed, “Alright Jesus I’m a sinner. I heard that You save sinners and I have no idea why You would save someone like me but I know You saved me and by the way Jesus this is the big one because I mean it!” and then I prayed.

I wished I could tell about Al’s life after that. There were so many distractions going on while I was visiting with him but the Holy Spirit brought him home. We plant. We water and God gives the increase. Praise the Lord for a good heart! Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together. Thank You for Your saving work in our life. Some of you reading this today need to confess that your heart has been hard or occupied or preoccupied but today I think the plow share has started to work and you want to receive the good seed of the Word. I want to come to Christ. Come to Jesus this day. Say, ‘Jesus I’m a sinner. I know You died for me. I give myself to You. Take me, mold me, make me, and use me after Your will.’ If you prayed that prayer we’d love to hear from you at Briarwood and you can contact us at (205) 776-5200 because we’d like to give you something to help you get started in your walk with Christ. Father, many of us just need to thank You that You have given us good hearts but we also thank You that you put the seed in the barn and You give us the privilege to sow it so that Christ speaks through our sowing. So we pray You would give us the ability to present this glorious Truth everywhere we go and follow the leading and opening of the Holy Spirit so we can spread it throughout the field. We also want to ask You to go ahead of us and give hearts receptive to the Seed that a great harvest will be brought forth for our Savior. Bless His Holy Name, for Christ’s sake, Amen.