

LI. Matthew in Biblical Perspective
The Kingdom of God and the Word of God
“The Parable of the Sower, Part 5—The Thorny Ground Hearer”
Matthew 13
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Let’s look at Matthew 13. This is our fifth study on the parable of the sower. 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.

I was just talking to a person in our church who had been out evangelizing in Jasper this past week and they stopped to talk with fifteen people and five of them committed their lives to Christ. What a glorious truth! Whenever that happens you know that the Lord went ahead of you to prepare the soil of the heart. When we look at the life of Jesus in evangelism there are a couple of things I’d like you to think about before we jump back into this parable and then I’ll tie it back together at the conclusion of this study.

One of the big challenges we have in evangelism is that after someone has received Christ as Lord we say the next step is discipleship and we want to get them in a small group. We have some success rate with this but Jesus doesn’t seem to do it the way we do it. He doesn’t say ‘come to Christ’ and then later on come to Me about being My disciple. He actually puts the whole thing together. Go check out His evangelistic encounters. He always says “Come and follow Me.” He doesn’t say “Come” and then later say “Follow Me.” He does it up front. The second thing is that He makes clear that the Gospel of saving grace is free because He pays the price but the cost of following Him is steep. The cost of following Him costs you everything.

Jesus' encounters will go something like this. "If any man will follow Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." "Birds have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then there is the rich young ruler who comes to Jesus and says "What must I do to be saved?" Jesus says "Sell all that you possess and come and follow Me." The man went away sorrowful and notice that Jesus didn't track him down and say "Wait let's negotiate." Then there is the Apostle Paul who picks up on the cues of Jesus. I Timothy 6:17-19 says [17] *As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. [18] They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, [19] thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.* We are instructed to avoid the deceitfulness of riches. He also says the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil.

Why would Jesus do that in evangelism? Why does He make sure they make an informed commitment of what it means to follow Christ and the cost? Why does He go after things like possessions, denying yourself or the cost of your life? I hope you will see why He does this when we get through this study on the thorny ground hearer. I'm going to take just a few minutes to review where we've been in this study of the parable of the sower.

We're in a summer series of looking at seven Kingdom parables and five of Jesus' six sermons recorded in the Scriptures are in the book of Matthew. Here Jesus defines the Kingdom with seven parables which are mixed into His parable ministry. He doesn't generally talk with His disciples the way He talks with the multitude and this so affects the disciples that they ask Him why He talks to the multitudes in parables. Why is the parabolic ministry of Jesus so prevalent in God's Word as He is among the multitudes? Our instinctive reaction to parables is that it is Jesus' way of illustrating things so people can see it easier, that parables are for clarification, illustration and instruments so that people could see heavenly truths in earthly pictures. Jesus dispels that though.

Here are the three reasons why Jesus' preaches to the multitudes in parables. The parable ministry of Jesus not only (1) reveals that He is the Messiah (Psalm 76:1-6), but also reveals (2) the spiritual disposition of the hearer and then (3) accelerates it. For those who have eyes to see and ears to hear the parables excites, encourages and instructs them. For those who don't have eyes to see and ears to hear it is utter foolishness and want nothing to with the parables or Him.

Having said that what about the seven Kingdom parables? I am using six studies on this one parable of the sower and this is the fifth study so we have one more to go. On the rest of the parables I'll take one study to cover but this on the sower is a very important parable. One, it is the first of the seven parables. Two, this is the only parable that Jesus interprets and the parable and His interpretation are found in all three of the synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Thirdly, which is the biggest reason, Jesus said if you don't understand this one then you can't understand any of them. So I believe we need to take the time to understand this parable with clarity. Remember that parables have a singular lesson but have attending truths you can explore.

The primary purpose of the parable of the sower is the fate of the seed is determined by the condition of the soil. The parable has four elements – the seed, the sower, sowing the seed, and the soil. The seed is the Gospel of the Kingdom, the Word

of God. The sowing is the proclamation of that Gospel. The preaching of the Word is an example of this. Personal evangelism, when you're sharing Christ with people is another example of sowing. You don't try and determine the soil, you just cast it everywhere. The Sower is Christ Himself and He works through those of us sowing the seed.

In order to get the lesson across in the parable it assumes good seed, good sowing and the good sower. We know in life that's not true. You can walk into professing churches and not hear good seed where God's Word has been polluted, undermined and adulterated. There is also not good sowing and Christ the Sower is not being honored. For the purpose of the teaching of this how do you get into the Kingdom of God? In order to get across a point to us He assumes good seed, good sowing and good sower but He does not assume the same thing about the soils, the hearts of men.

There are four profiles of soil – hard ground, rocky ground, thorny ground and good ground. Three of them bear no fruit which display a life of unbelief in Christ. Jesus has already given us a backstory on this and it's in John 15. John 15:8 says [8] *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.* Fruit bearing does not make you a Christian, it evidences you're a Christian. Fruit bearing is two things. One it is a lifestyle that intentionally, consistently, persistently, and growingly gives glory to God. God's glory is increasingly the desire of the believer's life. Before we were believers we were falling short of the glory of God. Two it proves a saving relationship with Christ. It doesn't create the saving relationship but bears evidence. There is one soil that bears fruit. Now there are different varieties for some bear sixty fold and some hundred but it bears fruit. Three soils do not bear fruit and do not have a saving relationship with Christ, even though the Gospel, the Word of the Kingdom has come to them.

We have already covered two of them. One of them is the hard ground hearer and that's the heart that we were all born with. We were all born dead in our sins. We were disinterested. There is none who seek God, no not one. We are born with that unbelieving, disconnected, disinterested, unable to understand and no desire to understand, heart. In this hard ground heart the birds of the air come and snatch the seed. Satan is snatching it away. They produce no plant and therefore no fruit because they have neither heart interest nor understanding. So there is no response to the Gospel of the Kingdom. There is no fruit because there is no shoot and there is no shoot because there is no root. There is no root because there is no seed.

The question is, why does Satan snatch it away if it's laying on hard ground and it won't produce a root, shoot and fruit? It is because Satan knows the same Word that is being rejected is also the Word that becomes a plowshare in the work of the hands of the Holy Spirit to break hard hearts so he wants to snatch it away as quickly as possible. Right now he wants you to think of something other than what you're reading to snatch away anything lest the Word comes to be planted in the heart but first breaks up the hard ground of the heart.

There is a second soil we covered. This is the rocky ground hearer. This isn't land that has rocks stuck in it but it's land that has a thin layer of soil and underneath it is a shelf of rock. When the seed falls on this ground it's like falling into a hot house because there is no moisture but a warm soil. The seed goes in, immediately germinates in this hot house, sends out the root but the root can't go to the moisture because there is rock there. So now all the energy that was going toward the root now sends up a shoot

and the farmer thinks ‘look at these plants already sprouting!’ What he doesn’t realize is that there is no root so when the sun comes, the very thing that ought to cause the plant to grow, actually becomes the occasion for the demise of the plant. Our Lord says “These are the ones that have no root in Me. They can’t draw upon Me and when adversity, persecution and tribulation comes because of the Word, they fall away.”

Persecution for the Christian causes us to grow and James says in James 1:2-4, *[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.* In other words, adversity is God’s sovereign use of a fallen world to make us grow and send the root deeper in Christ that we may draw upon Him in those days of difficulty. When there is no root there then there is nothing they can draw on so they fall away. These are people who heard the Gospel for the text says they immediately receive it joyfully but remember saving faith is a gift of God. Saving faith is not the emotional act of a moment. It is the acquisition of a lifestyle. It is a principle of life and not just a momentary emotional decision. They want the blessings of Christ but not the demands of the crown Christ. What ought to make them grow actually which is persecution and adversity becomes the occasion of their demise and they wither away.

Now we come to the third one in this study and that is the thorny ground hearer. This is the third profile of one who bears no fruit and therefore evidences that there is no saving relationship with Christ. Matthew 13:7 says *[7] Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.* So there is the condition of the soil and the fate of the seed and the fate of the seed is determined by the condition of the soil. Then there is the interpretation of Christ.

There are three things about the soil in Matthew 13:7. Number one is that the soil is cluttered. There is something already in it when the seed falls. According to the text, the seed falls *among* thorns so the soil is cluttered with weeds and thorns. Two it is cluttered specifically with thorns and weeds. According to Scripture thorns and weeds are a part of the curse. Thirdly, it is cluttered by growing thorns and weeds. In this soil is a root with a shoot but the thorns and weeds are occupying space around this with a vengeance. One thing I know is that weeds will take over and they are hardy. This is the survival of the strongest.

What then becomes the fate of the seed? The seed gets choked out by the weeds and thorns which were present, untouched and growing. The seed sends out a root, sends up a shoot but before it can get any fruit it is choked out by the present hardy weeds and thorns which were already there. Nobody has pulled them out so they are untouched. The definition of a weed and thorn is an unwanted plant that will destroy everything unless it is uprooted. The seed falls in and germinates but it’s just a matter of time until the thorns choke it out.

What is our Lord’s interpretation of this? His interpretation is found in Matthew 13:22 which says *[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.* The seed fell among the thorns. The thorny ground has a root and a shoot but we don’t get any fruit because before the fruit can come, the shoot and the root are choked out. In its process of germination it is among that which is already present and rooted and that overcomes the seed causing it to choke it out. I will commend to you

to go read the other interpretations of this parable in Mark 4 and Luke 8 and these passages add another thorn bush.

Matthew 13 gives us two thorn bushes and Mark 4 and Luke 8 gives us a third thorn bush. The three thorn bushes that choke out the seed in this cluttered soil are the cares of this life, the riches of this life and the pleasures of this life. Those are the three thorn bushes that choke out the Gospel seed that has been planted. These bushes are tangling all around the seed that has been planted and they destroy it as the seed tries to grow. Think about these thorn bushes the Lord has identified.

Do you care about your family, your marriage, your children, your parents, meeting your budget this month or your job? Sure you do. Those are all cares of this life. What about the riches of this life? It's amazing all we have available to us in our culture. Our church has about 15 or so mission trips a year and you ought to pick one, go and find out what other people in this world are dealing with in this life, what little they have and how they would be absolutely amazed at what we call recession, depression and poverty. Do you have any money, a house, a place to lay your head, technology, that phone, computer, and various other things that fall under the category of the riches of this life?

What about the pleasures of this life? Do you enjoy these good gifts of God? Recently as I went to Israel and watched the sunrise over the Sea of Galilee I was just struck by its beauty and God has so designed us for us to see all these colors. He has given us an appetite for it. What a glorious pleasure of life to see a sunset or a sunrise or to look upon femininity or masculinity or a baby or a man and woman maturing in the faith or marriages growing deeper in the Lord or the gift of sexuality in the context of marriage between one man and one woman or even in a time of singleness the Lord is with you, growing you and developing you or this appetite we have for food and drink with these taste buds we have or the appetite for knowledge to learn.

As I've gone through cares, riches and pleasures of this life are any of them sinful in and of themselves? Money is just amoral. It is not sinful. A computer is not sinful. None of these things are sinful so what is the Bible talking about? The same Paul that says to be anxious for nothing also says "I have concerns for the church." There is a place for cares and concerns. To have cares, riches and pleasures in this life are not sinful in and of themselves so how do they become weeds and thorns to choke out the Gospel? What makes these enemies of the Gospel?

Here is where we see why the Lord evangelizes the way He does. What was already present, rooted and growing in the lives and hearts of people? When the Gospel came in the midst of their lives, the cares, riches and pleasures that had already taken root in their life, became the instruments for the demise of the Gospel message. Those cares, riches and pleasures became their adoration and allegiance and not Christ. Their life became their children, their marriage, their spouse, their money, their house etc. and it's rooted within them. So those things that are not sinful in and of themselves become occasions for the idols of life. Instead of stepping in and uprooting them they just attempt to put Jesus in the middle of them and add one more idol. Jesus will have no part of being added to or an add-on in life. When we come to Him, He says count the cost for I am your life.

So here is your takeaway. The thorny ground hearer attempts to add Christ without repenting of the entrenched idols of life which inevitably choke out the

inauthentic commitment to Christ. Jesus added in is not an authentic commitment. When we come to Christ, we come not only by faith but also with repentance. We come with faith, trusting in Him alone, and we come with repentance, turning to Him alone. In other words, when we share the Gospel with people we need to learn to do it like Jesus. Jesus not only calls them to put their trust in Him alone but calls them to give their idols of this life to Him alone. God has given them good gifts in life that they have taken and made them their life. No longer can those be your life. You must repent, turn and trust in Me.

I want to show you this from the life of the Apostle Paul in Acts 26. Here, Paul is defending the faith. It is at Caesarea Philippi at Herod's palace in the receiving room where King Agrippa and Bernice arrive. Paul was called to defend his faith before them. This is what he tells them about his conversion on the road to Damascus. Acts 26:15-20 says *[15] And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. [16] But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, [17] delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you [18] to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'*

[19] "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, [20] but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance."

In other words, to come to Christ there is two sides to one coin – faith and repentance. You cannot trust in Christ until you turn from what you're trusting in, to Christ. That is repentance. Every time I think of this I think of the first time I preached on repentance as a student pastor and I got so overwhelmed with it that I said "Jesus calls you to faith and repentance. Repentance is radical. God is calling you to make a 360 degree turn." You listened a lot closer in geometry than I did. If you made a 360 degree turn you are right back where you started from so I have great news for it is radical but it's only a 180 degree turn. You turn from sin, self and all that you put your trust in and not just the evil but the good things in your life that you've put your trust in and make Him your life. Go to the soil and pull the roots up with repentance.

Lord, I know I don't know all the implications of this but I'm turning from anyone and everything that I have put my trust in other than You. I know You're going to show this to me more and more as I grow but this day I turn from my sin, myself, the idols of this world and even the good things that You have given to me that I have put in front of You, over You or in the place of You. Pull the roots up.

Nothing and no one is to come between you and the Lord. The problem with the hard ground hearer is there is no seed. The problem with the rocky ground hearer is there is no root. The problem with the thorny ground hearer is there is no room. Jesus is not an add-in, add-on or an add more. Jesus is our life and when you come to Him you turn from yourself and sin. That is why Jesus keeps saying to count the cost. It is not because what you do saves you but when you come to your Savior it's the free gift of salvation that costs you everything to come to the Savior, but when you come to that Savior now you have everything because He is your life. Everything in this world including

relationship will fail. They are good gifts to use for the Lord but they are poor substitutes for the Lord.

I do not care how much money you have or how big your house is. I wished there was a way to know how much money you had was too much and or how much house was too much but I don't care what you have. I do care how you got it and how much your money has you. I know people with big houses that use them for the Lord and small houses that worship them. I know people with small houses who use them for the Lord and people with big houses that worship them. I wish I could legalistically give you the definition of money and square footage but I can't do it. I can tell you that anyone or anything that is in front of Jesus, over Jesus or beside Jesus is an idol of this life and eventually it will choke Him out.

Judas Iscariot kept the purse, argued about the cost of oil/perfume and he finally sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. The Bible says the *love* of money is the root of all evil but not money itself. It is the love of money that will choke out the root of the Gospel. So we learn that Godly gift of repentance. Faith is a gift and repentance is a gift from our sovereign God. We apply it to clear out the soil. I do know this that even though I can get rid of weeds but in a certain amount of time they will get right back in. I know when you are converted and repent of the cares, idols and pleasures of this life that have taken root, somehow the old man wants those to take root again. You don't pull them out again to get saved all over again but it is because you love your Savior.

So, Lord, I love my children but they can't be my god. I love my wife but she can't be my savior. I love my job but it's not my life. I love Jesus who is my life and now I want to do my job for Him. I want to love my wife with Him. I want to love my children with Him. I want to eat and drink for Him. The food is not evil but does it have you? I'm so grateful that homemade peach ice cream is not evil but my life can't revolve around it, not even around moon pies. My life must be Christ's.

That is why the good soldier is not distracted by the affairs of everyday life. When you are a soldier they put you in basic training and you forget about eating, drinking and sleeping for they will take care of all of that for you. Your job is just to serve and take orders. That's the way a believer is. Those necessities, cares and riches of life are to be enjoyed and employed for the Lord but they are not our life and they do not grab hold of us. That is why we are called by the Lord to know how to serve Him so that anything and anyone that is ahead of Him, beside Him or in front of Him has to be uprooted. Then use the cares, riches and pleasures of this life to glorify Him instead of substituting for Him.

This is how you do that. Hebrews 12:1-2 says [1] *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,* [2] *looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.* Let us fix our eyes on Jesus. When Christ is your life the things of life become for Him instead of in the place of Him. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Has Satan been successful in rerooting pleasures, riches and cares of this life so that they are before, above or alongside of your relationship with the Lord? This is the moment to

do inventory. By God's grace pull the roots out so that the root of the Gospel has an unfettered growth in the soil of your heart. Lord, I don't want the seed of the Gospel among the idols of this age. I want to pull them out, up root them and help me to always walk in a manner that I don't open a door for them to be rerooted in my heart. Today you have heard that Jesus loves you and He went to the cross to die for your sins. If you by faith receive Him, turn to Him alone, trust Him alone and follow Him alone then now you can have life evermore, if you would just simply begin by saying "Jesus I come to You. Here is my life. Everything I thought was life I set it aside. You are my life. Now add those things as I seek first Your Kingdom and Your righteousness. You add the things that I will use for You and not in place of You." Jesus, do Your work in our hearts. We give You praise and we do so because Christ is our life, Amen.