

Parable of the Sower and the Seed

Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-25

Matthew 13:1-2

The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. ² And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

Mark 4:1-2

And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land. ² And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine,

He started out teaching by the sea side, but he relocates and changes position to sit in a ship. The multitude of people caused him to change location so he could be more easily seen and heard. Notice he didn't move until the multitude came. He is sitting because he is going to be there a while since he is teaching them on many things. Perhaps sitting because he wasn't in a hurry and intending to spend time on these lessons.

Application: start small, don't relocate until necessary. When it becomes necessary, be sure to relocate so the word can still be easily heard. Also, settle into the lesson and don't be in a hurry to get through it....as the Spirit leads.

Comment from the class: Roger pointed out, Jesus responds to those who seek Him!

Matthew

³ And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; ⁴ And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: ⁵ Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: ⁶ And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

Mark

³ Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: ⁴ And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. ⁵ And some

fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: ⁶But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. ⁷And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

Jesus is teaching them in the form of a parable. A **natural story that we can relate to which provides a spiritual understanding and application**. As we go through this story, let's recognize the players and what is happening in the natural.

A sower, someone who is planting seeds. Note, they are **planting with the expectation and hope** that what they invest in and plant will grow up to produce fruit.

When you plant and are scattering seeds, it will fall in various places. Some on the wayside or a well-travelled area. That kind of soil is hard packed and not the kind of soil ideal for planting, but some seed fell there anyway. This is important to note....that seed fell even in hard places.

- Birds we know will feed on seeds, especially seeds that are easily exposed and not covered up by the soil. This happens in the story.

Stony places are areas where rocks are taking up space so there is not as much soil available. The seeds will shoot up quickly because of the shallow soil, but they **don't have enough good soil to produce deep roots**. Deep roots are needed to reach moisture. We all know a good root system is a key foundation for healthy plant growth.

- Seeds in this soil have **early impressive results perhaps on the outside above ground, but underneath where you can't see, they are shallow**.
- You **can't really tell that there is a problem with the root system and foundation until the sun comes up**. When that sun hits them, these plants **can't last and can't produce what was expected**.

Thorns are the third soil type. You get **early results** as these plants start growing as well. The problem is they are growing along with the thorns. Eventually, the **thorns outgrow the good plants** and it chokes them out and these plant **don't produce what was expected**....no fruit. I've seen this in the natural in my yard where we had an apple tree and there grew up some vines which literally overran the tree and it stopped producing apples and just a short time later....it died. As a boy, my mom would always make me pull all the weeds out of her rock garden before she planted her flowers.

Matthew

⁸ But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. ⁹ Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Mark

⁸ And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred. ⁹ And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

The story continues with the fourth field where the seed fell on good ground. These seeds when planted in the right soil produced what was expected. There were varying degrees of success; some plants produced more than others but all in this soil were successful. Note this, there are no unsuccessful plants in this soil....all of them produce.

Let's pause for a minute and see in the story, the characteristics of good soil is:

- Not hard packed, broken up so the seeds can be covered.
- No stones in the way an enough soil and depth so roots can grow deep.
- No weeds or thorns to compete with the plants.

There are four different soils described, I hope that doesn't mean that only 25% of the seed produces fruit. The math is probably wrong so don't get caught up in that, but it should be a caution to us to be sure that we are always showing the character of the good ground because two of the soils (50%) will be fooled. They start out okay but will not last.

Jesus ends the parable with a call for those hearing this teaching, to fully understand and not just listen, but hear and apply. In other words, this is more than a story.

His words alone tell us the importance of this particular parable and part of the reason I'm starting the study on the parables with this one first.

Matthew

¹⁰ And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?

¹¹ He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. ¹² For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. ¹³ Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

¹⁴ And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: ¹⁵ For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed;

lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷ For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

¹⁸ Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

Mark

¹⁰ And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable.

¹¹ And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: ¹² That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time **they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.**

¹³ And he said unto them, **Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?**

The disciples in both Gospel accounts go to Jesus privately after the teaching to ask why he teaches in parables. Jesus' answer is:

- The parables are taught this way so that his disciples can fully understand the mystery of the Kingdom. This **confirms that this story about a natural occurrence reveals a deeper understanding of the Kingdom of God.**
- There are other hearers (perhaps soil types), who are without...or not part of the group of believers, the parables to them are things they can see in the natural, but they can't perceive the relation to the spiritual or use the parable to better understand the Kingdom of God.
 - These hearers who do not understand cannot be converted and are lost because they are still in their sins.
 - David Guzik states: **He used parables so that the hearts of those rejecting would not be hardened further.** The same sun that softens the wax hardens the clay; and so the very same gospel message that humbles the honest heart and leads to repentance may also harden the heart of the dishonest listener.
 - See 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

- This means the parables are important to understand because they not only open up your spiritual understanding of the Kingdom of God, but they can help to convert you to believe in Christ and be forgiven and redeem you from death to everlasting life....converted to new life.
 - I think converted means much more than being improved, it means being transplanted wholly into the good ground. To return or turn back to God.
 - This is good news if you have ever been planted into the wrong soil; you can use the parable to understand how to turn and be planted into the good ground where you can produce what you were never able to produce before.
 - **You can experience success even if you started out in the wrong soil** and were unsuccessful before.
- The other reason Jesus is teaching in this manner is to fulfill prophesy. The scriptures and prophets state the people are dull of hearing. Their hearing is not keen, they don't really want to hear it and they really don't want to see the truth.
 - But if they ever do humble themselves and really listen, God would heal them.
- He teaches this way because they are blessed to see and to hear and understand. What an awesome privilege. **Those of us who hear and understand this parable are also blessed.** We are experiencing things and revelation that many before us long desired. They would call us blessed.

Finally, Jesus starts to explain the meaning of this key parable. Notice in Mark why this parable is so important....if we don't understand this parable...we will have a hard time understanding any of the other parables in this study.

I was telling a Pastor friend who had previously taught extensively on the parables that I was beginning an in-depth study for the first time. I told him I was going to start in Matthew and then go through the rest of the Gospels. He kindly and quickly referred me to this passage in Mark 4 and suggested I start with the parable of the sower and the seed first. I understand why....and that's why we are starting here first.

Matthew

¹⁹ When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and **understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.**

²⁰ But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; ²¹ Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for **when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.**

²² He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the **care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.**

23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Jesus breaks down the parable using the natural example....referring to something they would be familiar with, and now shows how it reveals spiritual truths.

Application: when trying to teach others, you should meet them where they are, at their current level of understanding before taking them further. Students better ask questions if there is something important they don't understand.

Jimmy & Susan testimony – they (Jimmy) planted grass seed and the birds ate it up. Then they went back and did it the right way. The birds returned because they remembered they had eaten there before. But they didn't stay long because there was nothing to steal....it was hidden. **Thy Word have I hidden in my heart that I might not sin against thee (Psalm 119:11).**

Wayside – represents people who hear the word and good news of the Kingdom, but they don't understand what they heard. **When you lack understanding, the word you heard will not do you much good, and if that word is just sitting there doing nothing, the enemy will take it away.**

Stony places – represents people who get excited when they hear the word. They may be in the amen corner. But they **don't have a good foundation....they are just not that deep.** They try and apply the word and last for a while. Note, they have early success. But Christ states that they don't last due to tribulations or rough times that result because of the very word they received and after a while they are offended. It means when pressure or problems arise because of the word, they stumble.

- **What does this look like today?** Can I hear a good word, like Isaiah 26:3, and apply this immediately and get good results and experience God's peace? Yes, indeed. Is it then possible that I'm not skilled enough or truly understand how to work the word in tough times and I eventually fail and lose the peace and progress I experienced before? Yes.
- How can we prevent ourselves from falling into this soil? **How do we develop a good root system?** I think it requires the Holy Spirit, step #4.
- **Spurgeon** makes an important observation: **Some professing Christians have no root in themselves.** Their root is in their parents, or in their Christian friends, or in their pastor, or in enthusiastic surroundings. "Then there are many more, whose religion must be sustained by enthusiastic surroundings.unless the temperature around them is kept up to that point, they wither away....die when the excitement is over."

Thorns – represents people who hear the word, and they produce fruit. You can see their accomplishments and success in the Kingdom. But Jesus explains that the cares of this life and this world competes for their attention. The word that they had applied previously now gets choked out and instead of producing fruit for the Kingdom, they **start focusing on the world and riches....they become unfruitful.**

- This is a **dangerous place for Christians to be in my opinion.** Because there is understanding here and success, but they become deceived. **What are some of the things today in the world**

which can cause the word to be choked out in believers causing them to be unfruitful? Money, power, influence, pride, culture, politics, government, etc.

- Notice they are fruitful and successful at one point because they become later, unfruitful.
- Your earlier success doesn't guarantee you remain fruitful. There is a difference between faith and faithfulness.
 - Just because you say amen on Sunday, doesn't mean you are still in the right ground/soil by Thursday. Why is that?
 - Why is it that some kids do well in school early, but somewhere along the way, they rebel and are no longer good students? Some remain strong students, but some do not. Why? I think they either fail because subjects get harder with more pressure and they fail because of the earlier expectations, can't handle it, are offended, and fail (stony). Perhaps they shift their focus from grades and being successful, to chasing different priorities that the world uses to deceive them (thorns).

Good Ground – this ground represents those Christians who do three key things.

1. They hear the word. Faith comes by hearing the word.
2. They understand the word. They understand the truth, purpose and meaning of what has been taught.
3. They apply the word by faith, and it produces results and success. They accomplish what the word was designed to do. They don't fail.
4. Let me add a fourth key thing...they don't stop at just one successful moment. They keep producing. I wonder how they keep producing. They must keep repeating the same steps over and over. I wonder how often they have to complete these steps in order to be continuously producing fruit and success. Daily!

Mark

¹⁴ **The sower soweth the word.** ¹⁵ **And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.**

¹⁶ **And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness;** ¹⁷ **And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.**

¹⁸ **And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,** ¹⁹ **And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.**

²⁰ And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

²¹ And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick? ²² For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad.

²³ If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

²⁴ And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. ²⁵ For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.

Now Mark's account of this parable is pretty much the same. There is perhaps a bit more clarity and emphasis on some things.

Look at verse 17 and it appears the pressure or persecution that comes is for the sake of the gospel. That could mean we need to be prepared when we are "persecuted for righteousness" so that we can further understand how to work the word in tough situations. It is the trying of our faith. Otherwise, we are only successful when we are on the mountain top but fail when we are in the valley. This affliction often comes to prune or refine us because we still have some growing to do. Look at the plants and trees, they know how to withstand a storm when they are deeply rooted.

Jesus uses a section in Mark to reemphasize the importance of both understanding and applying the word.

- The word is the light, and it is used to reveal. This light needs to be seen and shared because it will come to pass. What was hidden and hard to grasp before is now being revealed so it can be shared to all.
- Take heed and consider closely with understanding what you hear. The more you hear, understand, and apply, the greater God will supply and give you Kingdom assignments (parable of the talents). The secret of increase and overflow is to do well with what you receive....work the right now word, and God will provide new and deeper revelations. But if you don't hear and understand, even what little you have will be lost. Can't just hold it and not do something with the seed; God is expecting a return from you and me.

Summary Points:

- Nowhere is it stated that the seed is at fault; it is the ground and the receiver where the problem and differences lie.
- While some sad points, it should be an encouragement to believers that **our work in spreading the seed is not in vain. Not all will get it; but some will.** Are you a Sower? Where do you get your seed?

- This parable is essential to understanding all parables. I'm glad I was humble enough to hear when this was suggested to me in starting here first. You can do the right thing, the wrong way.
- Don't just hear the word, get an understanding, and know how to apply it.
- Just because you start out on the wrong ground, doesn't mean you have to stay there.
- Just because you start out on good ground, doesn't mean you will stay there.
- What does the ground in this parable represent today? Remember the ground in this parable represents the seed of the word being sown or planted in your heart. We are not talking about a physical heart here; we are instead talking about the soulish realm or your mind.
 - Therefore, the ground represents a state of mind in my opinion.

My prayer daily now is "Lord keep my feet planted in the good ground".

Lord plant my feet on higher ground -- hymn