

The Sower

Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:1-18

Matthew 13:1-23

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 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: ¹⁹When 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. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹yet 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. ²²As 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. ²³As 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."

Mark 4:1-20

Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. ²And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³"Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. ⁵Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶And when the sun rose it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." ⁹And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

¹⁰And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. ¹¹And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, ¹²so that

"they may indeed see but not perceive,
and may indeed hear but not understand,
lest they should turn and be forgiven."

¹³And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴The sower sows the word. ¹⁵And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. ¹⁶And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, ⁹but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²⁰But 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."

Luke 8:1-18

Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, ² and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities:^q Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³ and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them* out of their means.

⁴ ^t And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: ⁵ "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. ⁶ And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. ⁷ And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. ⁸ And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

⁹ And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, ¹⁰ he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.' ¹¹ Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹² The ones along the path are those who have heard. Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³ And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. ¹⁴ And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the^j cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. 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.

¹⁶ "No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. ¹⁷ For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. ¹⁸ Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."

Matthew 13 contains seven parables, all apparently spoken on the same occasion, each to give some special aspect of the "kingdom of heaven." This kingdom is not some glorified state of eternal life, but a life now in which Jesus the Christ is the Head, i.e. Lord.

This discourse of **seven parables** is an appendix to the Sermon on the Mount. There, Jesus contrasted the Law - and how it had been twisted - to the spiritual meaning of holiness - that springs from the heart. These seven parables set forth the origin, hindrances, progress, preciousness, and consummation of the kingdom of God among men.

Notice that the parables of the sower {soils}, the tares, the mustard-seed, and leaven were given to crowds; the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price, and the drag-net to disciples while alone. It may be that the first four deal with the **public aspects** of the kingdom, while the latter three deal with things only appreciated by **subjects** of the kingdom.

The sower {four kinds of soil} illustrates the general call and effects of preaching the gospel.

The parables of the tares and the dragnet illustrate the same principle. One tells how we have a mixture of good and evil in the kingdom, while the other shows how this state of affairs will be brought to an end.

The hidden treasure and the pearl... illustrate the acceptance of the Gospel by an individual believer. But one shows a man finding something he was not expecting while the other has a man seeking earnestly.

The mustard-seed and leaven both show the progress of the Gospel in the world: One shows its outward manifestation, the other shows its mysterious hidden operation.

The Parable of the Sower

Previously I have said that a better name for this parable is the "Four Kinds of Soil" rather than the "Parable of the Sower." However, I have been convicted that when the Lord Jesus called it the Sower I should not presume to rename it.

Because of the press of the crowd Jesus gets into a boat. From this eager multitude, many would "go back and walk with Him no more," which is the theme of the parable. Some may hear and be constrained not to go away, and those who stay will understand, to a degree, why the others do fall away.

The "wayside" is not the edge of the road, but a pathway through a field made hard by constantly walking over it. "Stony ground" is not soil mixed with rocks, but thin earth over a layer of underlying rock. "Thorny ground" did not already have thorns, but ground that has not been properly cleaned so that thorns keep sprouting. "Good soil" is not trodden into hardness, or shallow over rock, or full of roots of weeds, but ground well prepared for seed.

The results in each case correspond to the **character** of the soil. That which fell on the footpath never grew at all, indeed the birds ate it. That which fell on the rocky ground grew quickly and then withered. That which fell among thorns grew, but with difficulty was choked out. Even the good soil produced in varying degrees.

MAIN THOUGHT:

The growth of the seed depends upon the **quality** of the soil. The story does not stress the quality of the sower, nor the seed-though they are excellent-but the soil. The Saviour interpreted this parable for us. The seed is the Word of God, or the Word of the Kingdom. The soil is human hearts. The teaching is that the results of hearing depend on the condition of the heart to whom it is addressed.

This is the **one lesson** of the parable and it is illustrated by four examples.

What Exposition Is:

Exposition is the restatement of a Scripture – whether a word, a verse, a chapter or a book – so that its message emerges with clarity...The power of an expository ministry arises from bringing out what is there. The seed is the Word of God (Luke 8: 11); the fertility is in the seed. The preacher's task is to get the seed out of the packet and into the good soil of instructed, understanding minds (Matt. 13: 23).—Alec Motyer, *Preaching?*

APPLICATION:

1. What can make the heart hard like the pathway?
Too much hearing of the truth with a bad attitude.
A person may become "gospel-hardened."
An evil habit.
Continuing in known sin.
Each occurrence hardens the conscience.
2. Shallow impulsiveness is like the stony ground. "That's the best sermon I ever heard!"
Much energy spent quickly, all emotion, no depth. The shallow hearer, when faced with difficulty, will back away from his profession and deny Jesus Christ.
3. A preoccupation of the heart with things other than the Word of God will allow the thorns to overtake it. Many start out well, but cares, ambition, riches, pleasures gradually take more of the time that was once used for private meditation and prayer until they choke out the good.
4. The good heart pays attention to what they hear. They don't read the bulletin; whisper, pass notes, and practice woolgather during teaching and preaching. They meditate on the Word and bring forth its fruit with patience.

How does one get a good heart? Ask God for one! Cf Acts 16:14

Acts 16:11-15

¹¹ So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the* district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. ¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

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