

# Sermons on Matthew

## The Parable of the Sower

*Matthew 13:18-23*

*With Study Questions*

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## The Parable of the Sower

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—“Therefore hear the parable of the sower: <sup>-19-</sup> When anyone hears the word \_\_ of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. <sup>-20-</sup> But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately \_\_ receives it with joy; <sup>-21-</sup> yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when \_\_ tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately \_\_ he stumbles. <sup>-22-</sup> Now \_\_ he who received seed \_\_ among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. <sup>-23-</sup> But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears \_\_ fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty\_.” (Matthew 13:18-23)

## Introduction

### Follow, then Cease to Follow

Many people follow, and then cease to follow Jesus. This would happen during the course of His earthly ministry (John 6:66), it would happen during the time of the apostles (1 John 2:19), and it happens to this day. This parable explains why.

### The Word Planted

This is a parable of a sower: one who is planting seeds. The seeds are planted in the hearts of men. The seed itself is the word of the kingdom. And although much can be said of the kingdom, suffice it to say for now that the heart of the word of the kingdom is that Jesus, the King of the kingdom, came to ransom sinners from the due consequences of their thoughts and actions (Matthew 20:28). He suffered the death, wrath and condemnation that we deserved and grants the fullness of His righteousness and life (2 Corinthians 5:21) to those who by grace through faith, trust in Him.

### Not Every Scenario

It is worthy to remark that this parable does not address every possible scenario. It does not address those who have not heard the word. It does not address those who have an *a priori* hostility to God's word. It does not address those who have heard a mere caricature of God's word, which may be our biggest problem in western evangelicalism. The assumption in this parable is that the word of the kingdom (the seed) is the pure and unadulterated word of God. It would appear that at least one point Jesus is making here is that the gospel, even when accurately presented, will not be truly and permanently received by all men.

### **Culpable for our Hearts**

There must also be a point of application in this parable. Certainly this is not a parable to merely satisfy one's curiosity regarding why *others* fail to continue in the faith. We must recognize that even though it is God who, in the final analysis, causes the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6), we are each culpable for the disposition of our own hearts and the power we will allow our surroundings to have upon us.

**"Therefore hear the parable of the sower: <sup>-19-</sup> When anyone hears the word \_\_ of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside." (Matthew 13:18, 19)**

### **Doesn't Understand**

The first of the four in this parable is a person who hears the gospel and does not *understand* it. Is Jesus speaking of mere intellectual acuity? If so, how much do we have to understand? I would have to argue that there are things regarding the kingdom of God that the finest theological minds in history have not properly understood. It seems unreasonable to conclude that Jesus is speaking of mere intellect here.

Yet at the same time intellectual understanding cannot be completely ignored. The Greek verb \_\_\_\_\_ (*synientos*) means primarily "to bring together, perceive, comprehend, and have insight into." So understanding must include somehow working it out in our heads—getting it together. Some work it out and others don't. Jesus explains why.

### **Hardness of Heart**

**But Jesus, being aware of *it*, said to them, “\_Why do you reason because you have no bread? \_Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart \_\_still hardened?” (Mark 8:17)**

**-For \_they had not understood about the loaves, because their \_\_heart was hardened (Mark 6:52).**

Let us acknowledge that there is a great deal of confusion we all have about a great many things. But it would seem that *this type* of confusion is the result of a hardened heart.

### **“But I Like It”**

Perhaps you have experienced this at some level where a person is so committed or strapped in sin that they simply cannot see, or refuse to see, things clearly. In a conversation I had with an old friend, I was making an effort to enlighten him as to the destructive side-effects of frequenting certain types of “dance-clubs”. His final response was, “You can’t tell me that’s wrong, I really like those places.” Since his final court of appeal was what he “really likes,” he was incapable of understanding my assertion.

### **The Enemy Snatches It**

Jesus informs us that while all this is rattling around in this man’s head, the enemy (the devil—Luke 8:12) snatches away what was sown in his heart. The world and the flesh, as we shall soon see, may take a little time to perform their dissuasive actions. The devil, on the other hand, is quick to act.

While the gospel, in a sense, hangs in this man’s heart/ mind (Proverbs 23:7), appearing to be foolish (“**For the \_message of the cross is \_\_foolishness to \_\_those who are perishing” (1 Corinthians 1:18a)**), the devil snatches the message away and he is left in his sin and darkness.

The enemy does not want his victim to spend any more time pondering the gospel. He snatches it away and this first man just goes on about his business while the cancer of his sin continues to grow.

**“But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately \_\_receives it with joy; <sup>-21-</sup> yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when**

**\_\_tribulation or persecution arises because of the word,  
immediately \_\_he stumbles.” (Matthew 13:20, 21)**

## **The Seasonal Christian**

### **Receives It**

Next we have the seasonal Christian Jesus who only endures **“for a while”**—π\_\_\_\_\_ (*proskairos*), meaning literally “for a season.” Unlike the first person, there is a clear initial response. Jesus uses the word **“receive”**—\_\_\_\_\_ (*lambanon*), meaning to “take hold of.” It is the same verb as in John 1:12a: **“to as many as received Him, He gave right to become children of God”**. (This word is not in verse 19 although so indicated in the NKJV.)

### **Quick Enthusiasm**

This person has excitedly received the word of God. It’s not merely rattling around in his skull, it’s embraced. We see an immediate transition from pagan to the front row of church shouting his ‘Amens’. He goes to four Bible studies a week, has long quiet times, and wears out his Family Christian Center discount card. But as quickly as he went from pagan to Christian, he goes back from Christian to pagan.

This person has no root in himself. There is no depth of understanding, thought or conviction. He changes his mind at the drop of a hat. It always makes me a bit nervous when a person comes to one church service or Bible study and makes an immediate declaration of their massive conversion. Have they truly thought about it? Have they, as Jesus taught, **“counted the cost?”** (cf. Luke 14:28)

### **Quick Abandonment—Promise of Serenity**

This shallow convert will turn tail as soon as tribulation or persecution arises because of their faith. It should not be thought that pain and discomfort somehow disappears when a person comes to faith in Christ. I am, quite frankly, left scratching my head when a professing Christian abandons their faith because of a severe hardship. Did they think that their faith meant that pain and death would not touch them?

Perhaps you get this, but there is a subtle promise given in many gospel presentations which must be addressed: emotional serenity.

The gospel is often presented with the warning of potential tribulation, and well it should be, but that the Christian will have an experience of peace through this. When the stones are cast we, like Stephen, will be gazing into heaven and seeing the glory of God (Acts 7:55). But alas, the stones come and the serenity evades us: "I am not feeling good about this!"

If you want to feel good, think diet, exercise, walks on the beach, etc. And I am certainly not suggesting that the truth of the gospel will not, over time, begin to permeate our souls in such a way as to grant us an experience of peace. But that experience is fleeting and unpredictable—and it is not to be depended upon.

## **The Spiritual Man**

Your roots must go deeper than how you feel. By definition, the spiritual man, does not depend on how he feels. Spirit is immaterial, feelings are material. There is much in Christendom today with the label of *spirit* which is quite the opposite.

By the way, this is the person who experiences tribulation and persecution *because of his faith*. To greater and lesser degrees throughout history the world has weighed heavy upon Christians. The truly faithful are called to endure to the end (Matthew 10:22).

**"Now \_\_he who received seed \_\_among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful." (Matthew 13:22)**

## **Mixed Roots**

### **Surrounded by Thorns**

The third participant in this parable is not said to have shallow soil. He may have deep roots indeed. But he has many roots moving in many directions. He may have thought long and hard and deep about his love for God, but he also has an unhealthy love for the world. He is surrounded by the thorns of the age. He hasn't sufficiently removed them from his heart.

Then it dawns on him that his faith is keeping him from acquiring those things necessary for his peace of mind. Life, for this man, is not the enjoyment of God and what God has in store on any given day. This man

needs his barns to be stocked and overstocked (Luke 12:18) in order to be at peace. This man needs to read Psalm 73 and 37 over and over.

<sup>1</sup> [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Truly God *is* good to Israel,  
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] To such as are pure in heart.  
<sup>2</sup> [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;  
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] My steps had nearly \_\_slipped.  
<sup>3</sup> [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] For I *was* envious of the boastful,  
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] When I saw the prosperity of the \_\_wicked. (Psalm 73:1-3)

<sup>1</sup> [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Do \_not fret because of evildoers,  
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.  
<sup>2</sup> [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] For they shall soon be cut down \_like the grass,  
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] And wither as the green herb.  
<sup>3</sup> [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Trust in the Lord, and do good;  
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.

<sup>4</sup> [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] \_Delight yourself also in the Lord,  
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] And He shall give you the desires of your \_<sup>d</sup>\_heart.  
<sup>5</sup> [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] \_Commit \_your way to the Lord,  
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Trust also in Him,  
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] And He shall bring *it* to pass.  
<sup>6</sup> [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] \_He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light,  
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] And your justice as the noonday.  
<sup>7</sup> [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Rest in the Lord, \_\_and wait patiently for Him;  
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Do not fret because of him who \_\_prosper in his way,  
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.  
(Psalm 37:1-7)

This man is having a love affair with the world. He is trying to serve two masters. Jesus has earlier taught,

**\_No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. \_\_You cannot serve God and \_\_mammon.  
(Matthew 6:24)**

God is a God of truth. Riches can be very deceitful. Ambivalence between the two can prove fatal. He is just too in love with the world and its false promises.

**“But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears \_\_fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” (Matthew 13:23)**

## **The Fruitful**

Does anyone doubt that this is the only true convert? Has not John emphatically explained the genuine nature of the first three (or at least numbers two and three)?

**- *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for \_\_if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* \_\_that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.* (1 John 2:19)**

The true convert hears the word, understands it, and bears fruit. The understanding may not be thorough but it is genuine and humble.

**Therefore \_\_lay aside all filthiness and \_\_overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, \_\_which is able to save your souls (James 1:21).**

The fruit (the true effort to obey the law of God) may be abundant or scant, but there is fruit. And apart from fruit one should not delude themselves into thinking their faith is a saving faith (James 2:18). And although we should all endeavor to produce much fruit, this teaching seems to indicate that genuine faith is not determined by the amount of fruit but by the endurance and perseverance in the faith. The true convert, in all his weakness and failures, never stops seeking to please God, and the true convert ever trusts in Jesus and Jesus alone to rescue him from the due penalty of his sins.

## **The Real Difference**



And what is the real difference between these four? The Apostle Paul seizes the agricultural metaphor and gives an explanation beyond question.

**\_I planted, \_Apollos watered, \_\_but God gave the increase.  
(1 Corinthians 3:6)**

### Questions for Study

1. What is the “word of the kingdom” (Pages 2, 3)?
2. What is the variable in the four individuals in this parable (page 3)?
3. What is the fault of the first person (page 3)? Explain.
4. Why does this person not understand (page 4)?
5. What does the enemy do (pages 4, 5)?
6. What is the problem with the “seasonal Christian” (pages 5, 6)?
7. What makes the spiritual man (page 6)?
8. What is the danger of mixed roots (page 7)?
9. Discuss Psalm 73 and 37 (pages 7, 8).
10. Why do certain professing Christians persevere (page 8)?

11. Is fruit important (page 9)? What is it?