

## *Sower, Seed, Soils*

### #1 in Series: *Stories from The Master*

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (NASB) (Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:4-15)

<sup>1</sup> That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. <sup>2</sup> And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach.

<sup>3</sup> And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, “Behold, the sower went out to sow; <sup>4</sup> and as he sowed, some *seeds* fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. <sup>5</sup> Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. <sup>7</sup> Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. <sup>8</sup> And others fell on the good soil and \*yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. <sup>9</sup> He who has ears, let him hear.”

<sup>10</sup> And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” <sup>11</sup> Jesus answered them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. <sup>12</sup> For whoever has, to him *more* shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. <sup>13</sup> Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. <sup>14</sup> In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,

‘You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; <sup>15</sup> For the heart of this people has become dull, With their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes, Otherwise they would see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I would heal them.’ <sup>16</sup> But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. <sup>17</sup> For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*.

<sup>18</sup> “Hear then the parable of the sower. <sup>19</sup> 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 the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. <sup>20</sup> The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup> yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. <sup>22</sup> And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world

and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.<sup>23</sup> And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”

Jesus told short stories – very brief stories designed to make people think. They are known as the parables. What is a **parable**? The classic definition is “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning”.

Sometimes people become bored with straight talk... A story can hold their attention and be long remembered... Jesus was a storyteller and made-up fiction for people to see themselves inside the story. So, for the next month or so, we’ll pick one of Jesus’ stories and examine what it means for us 2000 years later.

Let’s begin today, by studying the word *parable*. Parable: is a compound word in the Greek, made up of two smaller words: *ballo* (to lay or place) and *para* (alongside of).

The purpose of a parable is to lay two objects side-by-side, for comparison – to consider how one is like the other. Jesus would take something that was unfamiliar like “The Kingdom of heaven” and lay it alongside of something familiar and say see how they are the same... Jesus was often saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like....” And then he would compare it – in order to make it tangible.

For example, later in our chapter, Jesus said “**The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls,<sup>46</sup> and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.**” (Matt. 13:45-46)

When a man saw that pearl on the shelf at the shop, he went and sold everything he had to have it as his own. The minute he saw it, he knew it was worth everything to him.

What was Jesus saying in this shopping story? By laying a super-pricey pearl next to the kingdom of heaven, He asked: Do you see how they are the same? When a passerby grasps the message of Jesus, they do not say, “*someday*”... They say “*today*”... Today I must act. I must move. I must decide. The wise person shifts his priorities the moment he sees it.

Listen – A relationship with God is worth anything you have to lose. Your relationship with God is the most important thing on earth.

Jesus could have said just that: “I have come to announce that your relationship with God is the supreme treasure on Earth.” People would not have listened like they did when he put it in a parable, a story. That’s the power of the parable.

Today, I want you to take you to one of the most famous stories Jesus ever told – the Parable of the Sower. When Jesus explains the meaning of this parable to His disciples – Matthew tells us that Jesus referred to the story as “the parable of the sower” (:18). I think many people fail to realize that there are two other major components to the story. There is not only the sower – there is seed and various types of soil mentioned in the parable. So, the title to this message is *Sower, Seed, and Soils*...

Let’s begin our examination of this parable:

Matthew 13:3-9

<sup>3</sup> And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, “Behold, the sower went out to sow; <sup>4</sup> and as he sowed, some *seeds* fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. <sup>5</sup> Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. <sup>7</sup> Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. <sup>8</sup> And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. <sup>9</sup> He who has ears, let him hear.”

## **1. The Sower of the Seed / Word**

Jesus does not tell us who the Sower is. Perhaps the Sower is Himself... After all, as Jesus traveled from city to city, He was sowing / scattering God’s Word everywhere...

In our text, Jesus refers to the seed as “the word of the kingdom”. Luke tells us that Jesus said “... the seed is the word of God”. (Luke 4:11b). – There is NO contradiction...

The Scriptures say that Jesus came preaching. He was announcing something new, and watching the way different people responded to the same story or message. The Sower may be Jesus.

Yet, I think the identity of the Sower can be much wider in scope... Jesus could be describing any person that spreads the good news of God. He could be talking about Sunday morning children's ministry leaders that sing about Zacchaeus being a wee little man... He could be talking about those who teach in our Equipping Time, or Community Group leaders that read Scripture and make it real... Jesus may have in mind, preachers behind pulpits or standing on a street corner proclaiming God's Word...

The Sower could be any human being broadcasting the seed.

This key figure in Jesus' story is spreading the seed – in all directions!... In random order. With giant handfuls. The seeds are going everywhere. He has no idea which ones will germinate, and which ones will die. He is counting on the fact that a small portion of these seeds will stick.

But the emphasis of the story is not on this man. The spotlight is not on the Sower. The real life-changer is the receptivity of the soil...

## **2. The State of the Soil / Heart**

Jesus describes the dirt, and how it reacts to the seed when it lands... There are four dirt locations, and only 1 out of 4 will be high-performing. 75% of these seeds will disappoint...

But how about that soft soil that receives the seed?... The seed will reproduce exponentially, far more than any farmer back then would expect.

The rule of thumb for a seed in those days was 8 to 1... An average yield ratio for grain crops in Palestine was 8 to 1. Jesus mentions 100 to 1, 60 to 1, 30 to 1. The lowest number He gives is 30 – and that is nearly four times the average of the day... These were super-seeds on steroids. If a farmer could see that ratio in that day – he would be extremely rich.

And many of the people in Jesus' audience were farmers. This story was relevant, and fascinating. The skeptics would have crossed their arms and said: *"This carpenter is crazy. He doesn't know seeds. 30, 60, 100-fold. No way."* Jesus said, *"Way."* Believe it!

But Jesus wasn't actually talking about seeds and soils. He was talking about souls and salvations. The kingdom of heaven multiplies quickly when people open their hearts to receive.

Have you ever read a book, perhaps in high school or college, and it made

little to no impact on you? But, later in life, you went back and read it again, but this time the message was captivating and challenging? What happened? Did the content change? No. What changed was you.

Jesus is describing the radically different responses to the Christian message, and the variable of the experiment is the receiver, not the sender.

Let's examine Jesus' description of the soils:

- **The Unresponsive Heart:**

<sup>3</sup> ... "Behold, the sower went out to sow; <sup>4</sup> and as he sowed, some *seeds* fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up.

Here Jesus' explanation:

<sup>19</sup> 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 the one on whom seed was sown beside the road.

The seed on the cart path is a waste. This person immediately rejects the Gospel, giving it ZERO consideration. He will not stand for this kind of religious talk.

I doubt that there is anyone in this room who falls in the "closed-off" category. Perhaps on a holiday a person will sit in a church building ONLY to please his parent or grandparent, but this is the middle of June. Why would you be here today, if you think Jesus was a crazy and the church is a host of hypocrites? For a person – who fits this category to sit in a church service is a violation of their "core principles". They would not want to be perceived as supporting what is being said. In their minds, Christians have their heads buried in the sand. They need to wake up and smell the science!

**Ernest Hemingway** – "All thinking men are atheists."

One of the most famous writers of the short story was proud to wave his atheism and would have been offended to be called a religious person... Sadly, Hemingway took his own life at the age of 61, in his home in Idaho. A person's view of God radically affects the outcome of their life.

Now, to be fair, I can understand why some skeptics refuse the Christian sales pitch, offered at their front door... When a representative of one of the cults

comes to my house, I don't even want to hear what they've got again... I'm closed off to their message.

That's how many unbelievers feel when we try to force them to consider the claims of Jesus. They simply aren't open to it, and if you try to force something on a person, this only makes them more resistant, doesn't it? Jesus teaches us to pray for our enemies, and look for opportunities to share – not to beat them up with information... After all, the Bible is a “sword” (surgical scalpel), not a club... Pray for the opportunities the Holy Spirit opens...

The first soil outright rejects the message of Jesus. It is snatched up by the birds before it can ever sink in.

But there's a second soil:

- **The Superficial Heart:**

<sup>5</sup> Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

Again – hear Jesus' explanation:

<sup>20</sup> The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup> yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.

This is the fair-weather fan... In the sports world, we know this him well. You may admittedly be this person. Will you watch the game today when “your team” is at the bottom of their division? When they're 3-6? Will you support your team then?... Many “fans” quit even watching at that point.

Jesus says this person responds to the message immediately. They like the sound of it... It resonates with them some... But they have not considered the cost of it. As soon as it causes them discomfort, or to suffer – they're “out of here”!... So long as Jesus is meeting their “felt needs” – they're “all in”... But when He rubs them wrong – they run to find another guru and shop for new worldview.

Superficial faith will not stick, and this is why so many young people desert the faith in their college years. They were around Jesus a lot, but never really

took His words to heart – and they end up disappearing from the church.

This is one of the reasons your pastors are passionate about biblical preaching in the local church. If we are not helping people connect with God through the Scriptures, then their lives go unchanged... The likelihood of falling away becomes very high. This means that our personal engagement with Scripture is vital if we hope to pass on to others a love for the Word.

A famous old preacher Alexander Maclaren once said:

**Alexander MacLaren** – “The preacher who has buried himself in the Bible will have a clearness of outlook which will illuminate many dark things, and a firmness of touch which will create confidence in him among his hearers. He will have the secret of perpetual freshness, for he cannot exhaust the Bible.”

That last line is gold. A genuine walk with Jesus will produce a perpetual freshness. It will hold in times of trouble.

The second soil warns the person who keeps Christianity on so long as it feels comfortable. It won't work... You must grow roots.

- **The Worldly Heart:**

<sup>7</sup> Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out.

Then Jesus' explanation:

<sup>22</sup> And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth (Mark adds 4:19b "... and the desires for other things enter in and") choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

You have heard, I'm sure, how some dogs are easily distracted... They seem fully engaged in something and all of a sudden – “squirrel”!... We've even adopted that statement when referring to some people...

Jesus says that some people act like distracted dogs, just as soon as they see the glitz of money... They get out of the gates with gusto, they appear to have a fire for God, but something on the side takes their eyes from God. They get distracted by the dollar, by the alluring power of people's praise... Something

other than God gets first place, and that is called idolatry.

The Bible has so much to say about the lure of money, asking how many more will take the bait?

Hebrews 13:5 (NASB) “*Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.’*”

Making money is not a sin, but allowing it to become one’s master is... The Bible does not condemn the making of money or the making of large sums of money. The Bible condemns the love of money. It condemns “greed”. The more you have, the more you want it – and before you know it, it becomes how you even see people...

Jesus is saying that there are many people who show an interest in the word but overtime, they lose interest because of money.

There is not a single person in this room who is not constantly tempted to hit the pause button on trusting God and start putting their trust in money...

So there you have them – the three bad soils... But like I said before, these three are not the main focus of the story. The focus is on the fourth, the exponential seed.

- **The Receptive Heart:**

<sup>8</sup> And others fell on the good soil and \*yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. <sup>9</sup> He who has ears, let him hear.”

<sup>23</sup> And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”

Now I want you to notice something extremely important here. What I’m about to say is central to understanding Jesus, because He says this same thing in many places. Here it is:

**According to Jesus, the ultimate mark of a genuine believer is fruit bearing.**

If you miss this, you miss the whole point of the story. It’s a parable. He is laying the genuine Christian beside something that bears fruit, and he steps back and says, “Do you see the similarity?” Listen – a person who calls

themselves a Christian but has no fruit falling from them, is a faker. They are putting on a show. They do not belong to Jesus, because this principle is true – if you have the Holy Spirit, you will start growing fruit. Overtime, it becomes increasingly obvious...

What kind of fruit was Jesus talking about here? The N.T. describes spiritual fruit in two main ways: in terms of *quality* of your life and the *quantity* of lives changed.

Let me speak to quality. The followers of Jesus in the first century were first called Christians at Antioch – and the name stuck. The word *Christian* means “little Christ.” Those who follow Jesus are imitators of Him.

Paul writes in Galatians that our lives should bear the fruit of: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Galatians 5:22-23 (NASB)

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

These words describe exactly the life Jesus lived as he walked the earth. When we sincerely accept Christ, we become little Christ's, showing those things. It's not all at once, of course, but those who watch the way we live would say that something very good has happened here. You are not the same person you were before.

The quality of our lives is changed through Christ. But there's also a *quantity* side to this story. Because Jesus lives in me, I am called to outreach.

Outreach means to reach out. The question that all of us have to answer: Whose life is being changed because I am here?

This is the exponential piece of the seed. It produces many others.

<sup>23</sup> And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”

Let's go back to the 4<sup>th</sup> soil again... <sup>23</sup> ... the one ... on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it

Not everybody who attends a Christian service has truly understood Christ's

message. That's what Jesus is pointing out here. Many people are misguided. They misunderstand. They think Jesus will enter their kingdom, enhance their lives. But they must enter His kingdom, and get on His agenda!

Many people who hang around Christianity have not allowed it to penetrate their heart. It's still intellectual and theoretical. It has not led to life-change and repentance. Because when it does, it will work itself out. It will bear fruit.

Let me explain how the Gospel works in our lives, according to Scripture. As a Christian walking this Earth, I will never reach the point of perfection, where have stopped failing. God's love for me, and His relationship with me, is founded on the perfection of Jesus Christ, not on my own. I want to grow spiritually and I want to bear fruit, but my battle with sin is ongoing. That's why it's hard to be a preach, because I'm still a work in progress as well.

Keep repenting. Keep giving your failures to God. Keep seeking forgiveness. Keep striving for growth.

That's what this faith is all about – what God can do in you and through you. Not what you can do for yourself.

Paul said: where sin increases, grace increases all the more. What makes our lives attractive to outsiders is not the perfection we display, but the peace we have in knowing that God forgives, and that God is at work within us.

Rom. 5:20b-21 (NASB)

<sup>20</sup> ... where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, <sup>21</sup> so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Questions to consider in Community Group:

- What is a parable? What are they designed to do? What is your favorite parable told by Jesus?
- There are three major parts to today's parable; Sower, Seed, and Soils. Who is the sower in this parable? How important is the role of the

sower? Why?

- How does God's Word function like a seed?
- There are four different types of soil mentioned in the parable to depict the heart of a person. What are the first three? Do any of these first three represent a Christian? (One who has been saved, not just who claim to be a Christian.) Is there any reason to think that one could "lose their salvation" according to this parable?
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> type of soil had something to say regarding the love of money. Why is one's attitude toward money so important as to necessitate a warning? Hebrews 13:5 (NASB) "*Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,'*"
- What makes the fourth example of soil/heart receptive to the seed/word? What should we understand about the "hundred, sixty, thirty" fold yield?
- What else from this parable should we understand?