

Parable of the Sower – Matt. 13

How many of you have ever had some kind of really funny inside joke with one or two of your best friends? That's always fun, right? No matter what's going on, you can turn to your friend and say whatever it is and both of you die laughing. You are surrounded by people and you look at your friend and say, "Well, at least I'm not a squid!" or whatever it is, and it's hilarious because you and your friend know the background and nobody else around you does. But we all hate being in a group and we are the ones who don't know the inside joke. We don't know the background to the story and so it makes no sense to us and we feel left out. And the funnier it is to the people that know, the more irritating it is to those that don't know. If you really want to irritate the people around you, keep saying your little inside joke. Works every time.

Well, Jesus knew that. And He didn't have an inside joke. He had a bunch of inside stories. These were stories that He would tell that held great meaning and were prophetic and explained a lot about how we should live and what was going to happen in coming days and really were just full of valuable information. But He didn't always explain the stories and so a lot of people couldn't understand them. These stories are called parables. The word "parable" means to lay beside something else. Here is the truth about a situation. Now, I'm going to lay a story beside that truth that will help you to understand that truth. But you have to know the truth being described. Without that, the parable is just an inside story that most people won't understand.

As Jesus taught, He used different ways to get His point across and to help people understand. Sometimes He used stories or illustrations that were obvious about what He was talking about. Sometimes He might point out a building or a tree to help people get what He was trying to say. Most preachers and speakers today do the same thing. I can be talking up here about how the Holy Spirit is involved in your sanctification and how that process is required for spiritual growth... and I look around and I can just tell I've lost you. You want to listen but your mind has wandered. But then I say, "So, I took the dogs fishing the other day..." and your heads snap up and you are all ears. Stories and illustrations help us to hear and understand.

But sometimes the story – or parable – needs to be explained or it isn't understood if you just hear it out of context. And Jesus purposefully didn't always explain the parable to people. Why would He do that? Well, Jesus is well into His ministry and is teaching and preaching and healing as He goes around the country and He has developed quite a following as you can imagine. He has said some incredible things and done some incredible miracles including raising the dead to life and so lots of people are interested in Him, wondering what He is going to say or do next. It's life-changing for some and a pretty good show for others and Jesus sees that not all of them are going to accept His teaching and so He tells them a story - a parable - to illustrate that fact.

But He has done enough things and said enough things at this point that if your heart is hardened toward Him, you aren't going to believe in Him no matter what. So, Jesus basically says, "Okay, fine. If you don't want to believe that I am the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One who came to save your souls, then I just won't talk to you anymore. I won't waste my breath or throw my pearls to swine. You can stand there and listen if you want but you won't understand what I am going to say. But to those who will believe, they will be blessed."

Turn to the first Gospel, the Gospel of Matthew, and let's see what kind of story Jesus tells and let's see what kind of soil each of us are. *That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ²Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷Other seed*

fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear.” ¹⁰ The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?” ¹¹ He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹² Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. ¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. ¹⁵ For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ ¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. ¹⁷ For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it. ¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

So, did you find yourself in that story? Did you find out what kind of soil you are? The problem is, if you are like most people, you see yourself as the good soil and you didn’t think much else about yourself. But you saw some other people that you know as other types of soil. Right? *“Old Bob, he’s definitely that rocky ground. He can’t be a real Christian because I see him as rocky, rocky, rocky. In fact, that’s his new nickname. It’ll be my inside joke when I call him Rocky to his face.”* See, that’s a problem because this passage is not for you to be able to tell if somebody else is a Christian. This passage is so you will be able to tell if YOU are a Christian. Our job is not to judge somebody else’s salvation but it most definitely is our job to know for sure that WE are saved. So, as we look through this passage closer, try not to think of other people that you know who might fit into each soil type or heart type but, instead, see only where you fit. There are four types of soil listed here by Jesus and they represent the conditions of the heart that people have as the Gospel is presented to them. It is the same Gospel given to each one but each one has a different reaction.

Here we see that the same Gospel is given to everybody and yet there are different responses with most hearing and yet not being saved. Have you ever wondered why some people don’t accept the Gospel? Do you wonder why some people are saved and others are not? All of that is in these few verses so let’s look closer, starting where Jesus is explaining the parable in **verse 18**. And notice that He is only talking to His close disciples. *“This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. ¹² Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.”*

In **Luke 22:66-71**, Luke describes the trial of Jesus and says, *“At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. ⁶⁷ “If you are the Messiah,” they said, “tell us.” Jesus answered, “If I tell you, you will not believe me, ⁶⁸ and if I asked you, you would not answer. ⁶⁹ But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.” ⁷⁰ They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?” He replied, “You say that I am.” ⁷¹ Then they said, “Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.”* Yes, the chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there in front of Jesus, asking Him if He is the Messiah, the Christ and when He verifies it...they kill Him. They don’t want to hear the Gospel and when it is presented, as Jesus had been doing for three years in their presence, as it says, *“the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.”*

Jesus compares these men's hearts to the hard-packed ground like the paths that the farmer would walk on when he scattered his seed. In those days, the farmer would have a sack of seed on his shoulder and as he walked along the path between the fields he would just scatter it out with his hand. So, obviously, some of the seed would be wasted as it hit the hard-packed path. The birds would snatch it or it would just be trampled underfoot. When it comes to the Gospel and the fact that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life and no man gets to the Father except through Him, do you think the chief priests and the teachers would have listened if Jesus had just explained it better? Maybe He should have told them another parable or something. No, I think that's part of the reason Jesus didn't say much during His trials. No sense wasting His breath. Their hearts had never been softened and tilled up by the realization of their sin. They had never repented or asked forgiveness, not truly. **2 Corinthians 4:4** says, *"the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ."* There's no sense in pointing out the right direction to a blind man. That's what it's like telling the Gospel to a man with a hard heart.

In **verse 5** of our passage in **Matthew**, Jesus says that some of the seed fell on rocky soil. The person hears the Gospel and he receives it with joy but he has no root and it doesn't last. In **verse 21**, Jesus says that in time of testing they fall away. Sometimes you might see a flower grow in the crack of a sidewalk or somewhere strange and it will bloom faster and prettier than a flower planted in a nice flower bed but it doesn't last as long. When the sun beats down on it, it's lack of roots make it unstable and unable to handle stress. People can react to the Gospel in a similar way.

Would you say that Judas Iscariot was a true believer? Would you say he was a Christian? Of course not. But think about it. He walked with Jesus for three years. He ate with Him, ministered with Him, prayed with Him and even preached in His name. But when things got difficult, he betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, doing the devil's work and is now in the devil's hell. How is that possible? It's a superficial acceptance of the Gospel that changes a person outwardly and temporarily but not down to the roots. With that person there is no real repentance, no remorse over sin, no contrition, no brokenness and no humility. Oftentimes this person came to Christ for what he thought he could get in the way of personal benefit but when he sees the price it will cost him, he won't pay it. (John MacArthur) The man with a rocky heart might have the outward appearance of being saved but falls away in times of testing. Jesus said in **Matthew 24:13**, *"He who stands firm to the end will be saved."* That person won't be perfect but he will be changed. A true believer is a changed believer and continues to allow God to change him as the years go by. I'm afraid the 21st century church is full of Judases.

In **verse 22** of our parable, Jesus explains the third soil type and that the seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures. At the end of **2 Timothy**, Paul asks his friends to come help him quickly because his one-time friend and fellow missionary Demas has deserted him *"because he loved this world."* The rich, young ruler in **Luke 18** came to Jesus and asked what he had to do to be saved and Jesus told him to sell everything he had and give it to the poor. Why did Jesus tell him that? He never told anybody else that. I thought we were saved by grace and through faith. Jesus told him that because Jesus knew that man's heart was full of thorns, thorns like worries over riches and pleasures.

I have told some of you before that when I was a kid, my dad bought this little camper trailer. With three kids, he needed a place to get away and study or maybe just get away and I don't blame him. It wasn't very big but he was proud of it, as he should have been. There's nothing shameful about having stuff. The problem was, some neighbor kids got into it and messed up some stuff and he was afraid somebody might steal it so he had to put an extra lock on it. Then it needed insurance and tags and then the lights didn't work and then it was just one thing after another and it just got to be too distracting for what it was worth.

It's easy to do that with anything, isn't it? That's the problem with having stuff. It doesn't fulfill us but only brings worry and greed and distraction and when that is in our life, Jesus goes from first in our life to well on down the list until the Gospel just gets choked out. Someone that professes to be a believer and a follower of Jesus but doesn't come to church

and is not broken by the sin in their life and is not bearing fruit like a believer should obviously has a “weedy” heart. Where Jesus should be, they have the weeds of stuff, sports, entertainment, money or career and that is eternally tragic.

But Jesus wraps it up on a positive note as He explains the one good soil. Make sure you fall into this category. He says in **verse 23** that the good soil *refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.*”

As I said, I hope you don’t try to think of people you know who fit into these categories because we can’t really know someone’s heart but we can know our own heart. When it comes to good soil, free from rocks and weeds, I think of the **Apostle Peter**. I know Peter wasn’t perfect. Even after expressing to Jesus that he knew Jesus was the Messiah, Peter still denied Him three times. He was impetuous, violent, confused and just flat wrong at times but he had a good heart, tender to the Lord and for His ministry. The good soil that Jesus is talking about doesn’t mean it was perfect, it just means that it had been prepared; tilled up by trials and temptations but not distracted by worldly things. He was all of that before he met Jesus but the heart of Peter - and therefore how he acted - was changed by his relationship with the Lord.

God talks about changing our stony hearts in **Ezekiel 36:26**. I like how the New Living Version puts it. *“And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.”* That’s what happened to Peter. That’s what happens to everyone who hears the Word, retains it...and then what happens? They produce a crop, according to Jesus in **verse 23**. Now, what does that crop look like? What does it mean to be fruitful? Obviously, He is talking about spiritual fruit and spiritual fruit is the inevitable product of a spiritual life (MacArthur) and the fruit of the Spirit is described by Paul in **Galatians 5** where he says, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”* I bet some of us ought to run through those again and see how well our lives match up.

A tender, responsive heart is also obedient to God. Jesus said, *“If you love me, keep my commands.”* (John 14:15) Obedience is fruitfulness. What was the last thing Jesus told us to do before He ascended back to Heaven? In **Matthew 28**, Jesus said, *“Go and make disciples and teach them to obey me.”* (My version.) Good fruit makes more fruit. Everywhere it goes, as it goes, it plants seeds. That’s the Gospel. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life and in Him and through Him we have eternal life with God the Father in Heaven. We have lasting joy and peace in this life even in the difficult times but we have to be faithful and fruitful. We have to tell others. If we don’t, who will? We have to be obedient to everything the Bible says. No, none of us are perfect but when we mess up; when we sin, it should pain us. We should hate that more than anything and we should immediately ask God for forgiveness and to help us never do that again.

Don’t be thinking about anybody else right now. If that’s not how you are living your life, then maybe the soil of your heart has never really been tilled and prepared. Maybe the weeds of materialism and stuff and the worries of this world have kept you from really putting all your faith and hope and trust in Jesus. If that is true of you today, then I would love to pray with you right now as the music plays.

Some of you may think you would be too embarrassed to come down and pray because you are just now realizing that you are not a true believer and you have said you were or assumed you were or thought you were for all these years. But there is nothing more joyful in this world than for a person to realize that and then have their lives changed. Do that today.