

## **The Parables of Jesus**

### **Lesson 3: The Parable of the Sower Part 2**

In lesson 2 we explored the theme of the Kingdom of Heaven and began looking at the first Parable of the Kingdom, the Parable of the Sower. This parable is unique because Jesus himself gives the disciples the interpretation of the parable.

#### **The Interpretation of the Parable**

**Matthew 13:18-23** *"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> 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."*

Not all of Christ's parables are explained. In fact, most are not. But this one is (v. 18–23). The seed is the gospel of the kingdom, and the soil is the human heart (v. 19). The emphasis here is not necessarily on the sower (despite the name of the parable), but is on the various kinds of hearts and how they reject or receive Christ's message.

**Parable: <sup>3</sup> A farmer went out to sow his seed.**

The Farmer (or Sower) represents Jesus Himself (primarily) and, by extension, anyone who preaches or shares the message of the Gospel.

We're told in Mark and Luke's account of this parable that "the seed is the word of God. (Lk. 8:11, Mk. 4:14). Matthew specifies and says, "When anyone hears the message about the kingdom (13:19). So, the 'word' here is specifically the 'message' about God's Kingdom, God's reign/rule being manifested on earth and the proclamation of that message.

We're told in Mark 1:14-15 that, *"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup> "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

Furthermore we're told in Matthew 4:23 that *"Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people."* Matthew 9:35 says, *"Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people."*

This message (word) is the Gospel of the Kingdom, the good news that the Kingdom has come, and the proper response was to repent and believe the good news!

**Parable: <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed,**

Notice that the seed is 'scattered'. To be scattered is to disperse or spread widely, to throw or cast something in different directions, or to distribute something over a broad area rather than concentrating it in one place.

The fact that the seed is scattered widely carries several important theological and practical lessons for us today as the church:

1. **The Gospel is Meant for Everyone (Universal Offer of the Kingdom):** The sower does **not** discriminate where the seed falls—he scatters it **everywhere**. This represents the universal call of the Gospel (cf. Matthew 28:19 – “Go and make disciples of all nations”).
2. **The Power is in the Seed (God’s Word), Not the Sower:** The sower does not control the soil’s response—his job is to scatter the seed faithfully. This teaches us that spiritual growth is God’s work (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:6–7 – “Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God made it grow”). The church’s role is faithfully proclaiming the Gospel, not worrying about results.
3. **Not Everyone Will Respond to the Gospel:** Some seed falls on the path, rocky ground, thorns, and good soil, meaning people will respond differently. This reminds us that not everyone will accept the message, but we must continue sowing.
4. **We Must Sow Generously and Consistently:** The sower does not hold back—he scatters the seed liberally. As the church, we should be bold and consistent in sharing the Word, knowing that some will bear fruit (cf. Isaiah 55:10–11 – “My word... will not return to me empty”).

**Parable: Some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.**

*Interpretation: Matthew 13:19 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.*

Here we have the proclamation of the kingdom (the gospel) and those who do not ‘understand’ it. This does not merely refer to intellectual comprehension but a deeper, spiritual receptivity. The Greek word means to perceive or grasp the meaning fully. Those on the path are resistant or indifferent, failing to engage with the truth of the message, “*for unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them; but the Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it*” (Hebrews 4:2).

Next we see “The evil one comes and snatches away” – Satan actively opposes the gospel, preventing people from believing and being saved. The verb “snatches away” suggests forceful seizure, as if stealing or robbing. This word was ‘sown in their heart’ – The seed landed on them, meaning they were exposed to the gospel. However, since the path is hardened, the seed does not penetrate or grow.

The interpretation of the parable is both very specific to Jesus’ own context and very relevant to Christian preaching in our own day. Some allow the evil one to snatch the words away at once.

First, some are completely unreceptive to Christ. They hear the word without understanding it. This description can certainly apply to the Pharisees, who have so misunderstood Jesus that they have accused him of being in league with the devil (9:34; 12:24). Their hearts are hardened, their eyes are blinded, and they violently reject Jesus and his message. Jesus would indicate that their rejection of Him and His word was satanically based, “*you are of your father the Devil*” (John 8:44-45).

Then, it can speak of those in the towns of Israel that witnessed Christ and heard his message yet did not repent (Matt. 11:20-24). These failed to grasp the importance of Jesus’ message, they heard the word, but the word was ‘snatch away’ so that it would not take root in them. This seemingly misunderstanding of the word of the kingdom can also be satanically inspired, “*The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*” (2 Corinthians 4:4). In this context, Paul is specifically speaking of Jews who have a ‘veil’ over their face when the Old Testament is read, so that they cannot see Christ.

Finally, it can speak to people today who are either hard hearted, immediately reject the message, or only hear it superficially. This part of the parable warns of the danger of spiritual hardness. It emphasizes the necessity of not just hearing the word but truly understanding and receiving it. The passage reminds us of the spiritual battle for hearts and minds and the need for prayer, patience, and perseverance in evangelism.

***Parable: <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.***

*Interpretation: Matthew 13:20-21 The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. <sup>21</sup> 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.*

Here Jesus explains the second type of soil: the rocky ground. This represents people who initially respond with enthusiasm to the gospel but lack deep roots, causing them to fall away when faced with hardship.

The first key phrase here is ‘at once receives it with joy’. There is an initial response to hearing the word with some enthusiasm, but not deep conviction. This is a surface-level hearing of the word where there is excitement but no depth or true connection with God through the word.

The next phrase emphasizes that ‘when trouble or persecution comes because of the word’, meaning that there was an expectation of things going well from following Christ, but when the opposite happened, they ‘quickly’ fell away. This could come because following Christ would have been too hard, or too much, for people. For example, John 6 says, “on hearing it, many of his disciples said, ‘this is a hard teaching, who can accept it?’... from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him” (John 6:60, 66).

Many in Jesus’ day expected a Messiah who would bring **military victory and national restoration**. Some followed Jesus with excitement, thinking He was fulfilling their expectations. However, when Jesus spoke of **suffering, humility, and the cross**, many turned away.

The same can happen today. The rocky soil represents those who respond enthusiastically to a **partial gospel** (perhaps only the promise of blessings or joy) but are unprepared for trials or the ‘cost’ that can come with following Christ. Faith is not just about an emotional experience (of a church service, conference, camp, revival, etc.) but about being deeply rooted in the person and way of Christ everyday.

***Parable: <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.***

*Interpretation: Matthew 13:22 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.*

Here is the third type of soil: the thorny ground. Unlike the previous two responses, this soil allows the seed to grow, but the plant is eventually choked by competing forces. The issue here is not outright rejection (v.19) or shallow enthusiasm (v.20-21) but distraction and divided loyalty.

These soil seems to hear the word and receives it but two things harm this word: ‘the worries of life’ and the ‘deceitfulness of wealth’. These things ‘choke’ the word, suggesting a slow, suffocating process, and then ultimately makes the word ‘unfruitful’ or showing a lack of spiritual fruit in the form of a kingdom-centered life. Instead of peace, there’s worries, and instead of contentment, there’s the pursuit of wealth.

When speaking of the kingdom, Jesus' message challenged Israel and called people to a new way of life under His rule. The thorny soil represents those who want the kingdom but refuse to abandon competing allegiances—whether personal, societal, or economic. An example of this would be the rich young ruler who would not leave behind his earthly possessions to follow Christ.

The kingdom of God calls us to live 'upside down' and trust God in a different way.

As believers we are called to:

- Not worry about our life and trust God for provision
- 'Give and it shall be given' instead of hoarding and prioritizing material possessions
- Love our enemies, not seek revenge
- Seek first the Kingdom of God, not power, money and personal success
- Serve in order to be the greatest in the kingdom
- Forgive others and turn the other cheek
- Lose our life in order to find it

Many in Jesus' time were concerned about Rome, politics, or their own personal security—just as today, people can be more focused on career, safety, or material success than the kingdom of God. However, Jesus called for us to seek a higher kingdom and for our loyalty, devotion and allegiance to be toward God and His kingdom, but thorny-soil people take their eyes off of God and allow the worries of the world to ultimately make them ineffective in the Kingdom.

***Parable: <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.***

*Interpretation: Matthew 13:23 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."*

The last soil that we will see today is the good soil, those who hear and understand and bear fruit. Unlike the previous soils (those who reject, fall away, or get choked by distractions), this person fully receives the message of the Kingdom and embraces its reality.

They 'bear fruit' which reflects genuine transformation that leads to a life of obedience, faithfulness, and impact for God's kingdom. This fruit reflects in a 'hundredfold, sixty, thirty' return. The fruitfulness varies, but the key is that growth happens. This aligns with Jesus' teaching in John 15:5: *"Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit."*

The fruit that Jesus was seeking from Israel was repentance: Matthew 3:8-10 *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup> produce fruit in keeping with repentance. <sup>9</sup> And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. <sup>10</sup> The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.*

The key takeaway is that **true discipleship is marked by understanding, perseverance, and fruitfulness**. We see this in the life of the disciples. They left everything to follow Jesus in faith, to be a part of God's kingdom on earth, and to be a witness for Christ. Not everyone received the word of the kingdom, so this parable is both a warning and an invitation - The Kingdom is here—will we let it take root and transform our lives?