

Matthew 13:1-23

Section 1: 13:1-9 – Seed and Soil

On that day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. ²Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, while the whole crowd stood on the shore. ³Then he told them many things in parables, saying, “Consider the sower who went out to sow. ⁴As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵Other seed fell on rocky ground where it didn’t have much soil, and it grew up quickly since the soil wasn’t deep. ⁶But when the sun came up, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it. ⁸Still other seed fell on good ground and produced fruit: some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times what was sown. ⁹Let anyone who has ears listen.”
(CSB)

Four different types of soil: path, rocky, thorny and good.

Let’s take a moment and reflect on farming in the 1st century. They didn’t have tractors like we do today. So, you had people throwing out seed by hand from a bag that hung across their shoulder. And the farmer wanted to make sure that every square inch of the field was covered. When you came along the edge of the field you’d run into paths, thorns and rocks. As you spread along the edge, some of the seed would fall into these places. Why? Because time was important. The seeds you lost along was less valuable than the time it would take to make sure the seed only fall on the good soil. But the farmer had no expectation that those seeds that fell along the edge just outside the good soil would ever produce fruit.

Section 2: 13:10-17 - Why Jesus Used Parables

*¹⁰Then the disciples came up and asked him, “Why are you speaking to them in parables?” ¹¹He answered, “Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to them. ¹²For whoever has, more will be given to him, and he will have more than enough; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. ¹³That is why I speak to them in parables, because looking they do not see, and hearing they do not listen or understand. ¹⁴Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says: **You will listen and listen, but never understand; you will look and look, but never perceive.** ¹⁵**For this people’s heart has grown callous; their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn back— and I would heal them.** ¹⁶“Blessed are your eyes because they do see, and your ears because they do hear. ¹⁷For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see the things you see but didn’t see them, to hear the things you hear but didn’t hear them. (CSB)*

The disciples are wondering why Jesus is speaking in parables, so they ask Him. And His response may not be exactly what they expected. Jesus explains that the kingdom of God is only understood by the people of God. There is a difference between believers and unbelievers when it comes to understanding God. The difference? The Holy Spirit. Paul helps us understand this difference in 1 Corinthians 1:18:

¹⁸For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is the power of God to us who are being saved. (CSB)

Christians must come to the realization that the world just will not understand. We cannot reason the world into accepting the Christian worldview. They don’t see, hear or understand the gospel. Parables are reminders that believers have a different worldview than others: different priorities, passions, desires and ways of life.

Believers are given the ability to understand God and they will also be “given more”. What’s the more? Eternal life. Fellowship with God. Hope. Peace. Joy. Love. God gives His children more and more and more. But those without Christ, whatever they have gained in this world will be “taken away” from them. Money. Family. Fame. All will be taken away as they are cast into the lake of fire.

Application

Believers are extremely blessed to have the privilege to understand the Word of God. I fear that believers often take the Word of God for granted. For example, we have more access to the Bible than any other time in history, yet we hardly read it. At a normal public speaking pace, it only takes 71 hours to read the Bible all the way through. Which sounds like a lot of time at first. Until you compare it with our entertainment consumption. The average American consumes 5-10 hours of social media, TV and entertainment a day. If you are on the low end, 5 hours a day, and you replace your “screen time” with Bible reading time, you could read through the Bible 25.5 times every year. Or if you would like to read through the Bible in one year, you just need to read the Bible 15 minutes a day. FIFTEEN!

Discussion Questions

- ❖ Why is it important to remember that unbelievers can’t understand the things of God?
- ❖ How does God giving you hope, joy, peace, and love impact your faith?
- ❖ How does the promise of eternal life impact your hope as a believer?
- ❖ How important is the Bible to you?

Section 3: 13:18-23 - The Parable of the Sower Explained

¹⁸ “So listen to the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word about the kingdom and doesn’t understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the one sown along the path. ²⁰ And the one sown on rocky ground—this is one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. ²¹ But he has no root and is short-lived. When distress or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² Now the one sown among the thorns—this is one who hears the word, but the worries of this age and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²³ But the one sown on the good ground—this is one who hears and understands the word, who does produce fruit and yields: some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty times what was sown.” (CSB)

Jesus finally gets to explain the parable of the sower. We are going to break this down into four sections:

1. Path = hears but doesn’t understand. The evil one snatches away what is sown.
2. Rocky = hears and immediately receives but has no root and is short-lived. Distress or persecution due to the Word drives them away.
3. Thorny = hears but the concerns for the world and riches choke out the truth.
4. Good Soil = hears, understands and produces fruit.

Path: The Unresponsive Hearer (v. 19)

There is a person who hears the Word of God and it has absolutely zero impact on their lives. Their root issue is their hardness of heart. They have little to no guilt and shame when it comes to sin. The gospel is worthless to them. Because of their hardness of heart, it is easy for Satan to snatch away the truth of the Word. Satan does this through a variety of methods: false teachers, lies, pride, doubts, love of sin, lust, etc.

The unresponsive hearer probably never sets foot in a church. If they do it’s on Christmas and Easter because of family. Typically, they are either indifferent or hostile to the church.

Rocky: The Shallow Hearer (v. 20-21)

Shallow “belief” is common in the southeastern United States. Everyone seems to believe when asked about the gospel. But are they genuine? In this parable Jesus explains that a shallow belief is actually faithless. At the first sign of commitment or trials they walk away. This type of hearer is motivated by emotions. Not that all emotions are bad, but we can’t live life based upon our emotions. We are to live according to the truth revealed to us in Scripture.

This person is difficult to recognize because at first, they seem overly committed and excited. They may be baptized, serve in the church for years, lead Bible studies or even go on mission trips, but when the testing finally comes, they fall away quickly. Over time there are three characteristics that can reveal a shallow faith: the lack of (1) repentance, (2) dying to self or (3) turning from your old ways of living. Typically, the shallow hearer hops from church to church, overly excited but not overly committed and they walk away at the first sign of persecution. These people are spoken of in 1 John 2:19:

¹⁹They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us. (CSB)

Thorny: The Worldly-Minded Hearer (v. 22)

This person hears the Word but his first love will forever be the world. His profession is a token profession that will never replace his love for the things of the world. His love for the world blinds him to the truth and he sees the world as the source of his happiness and holding the answers to life. He doesn’t see the deceitfulness of the world because his attention is on his riches, possessions, prestige, position and other things of the world.

Paul reminds us that the love of riches and the world will blind us to the truth. 1 Timothy 6:10 says,

¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (CSB)

James reminds us that we are not to be friends with the world in James 4:4,

⁴You adulterous people! Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the friend of the world becomes the enemy of God. (CSB)

And to drive the point home, John speaks of this as well in 1 John 2:15-17,

¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one’s possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever. (CSB)

If one’s faith is genuine, he will forsake the world; if his faith is not genuine the world will choke out the Word.

Unlike the emotionally driven of the previous verses, this person probably never commits to the church. They speak of good intentions but are busy because they are preoccupied with sports, job, money, vacations, fashion and everything the world has to offer. Typically, the worldly-minded hearers are fringe church attenders. They show up but do very little ministry. They will miss church at the drop of a hat because church ultimately is a low priority.

Good Soil: The Receptive and Reactive Hearer (v. 23)

The good soil is different from all the other soils mentioned above. This soil has been prepared and cultivated so that it will produce fruit. This person is the person who fully embraces the gospel. He hears it, believes it and applies it. And how do we know that he has truly heard, believed and applied? He produces fruit. And this is a fruit that is produced consistently over time.

Our next question is, what is the fruit being produced? Paul explains the fruit of the Spirit to us in Galatians 5:22-23,

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things. (CSB)

Bearing fruit is a consistent reality for the believer. Bearing fruit is a result of salvation not a way to earn salvation. We could never be “good” enough to earn salvation. But once saved we are to produce fruit. Ephesians 2:10 says,

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do. (CSB)

Jesus says that believers will bear fruit at different rates. Why? We bear fruit at different rates because believers have different levels of commitment, abilities and gifts. We are not perfect but we are still producing fruit over time. So, perfection isn't the mark of a true believer, but a consistent bearing of fruit over time as described in Galatians 5:22-23. The truth of this parable is: true believers produce fruit.

Application

As we reflect upon this parable of the sower we have to come to the conclusion that actions prove your faith more than words. Just as James says,

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and they shudder. (CSB, James 2:18-19)

Our faith in Christ is proven over time throughout actions. We have to be diligent to share the gospel with people that claim Christ yet their lives bare no mark of Christ.

This is a good reminder to examine our lifestyle over time and see if our faith has impacted and changed us through the bearing of fruit.

Discussion Question

- ❖ How often do you share the gospel?
- ❖ How often do you not share the gospel with someone who says they are already a Christian?
- ❖ Do you truly believe there are people who say they are saved but they really are not?
- ❖ Does your life show that you are being changed by the Spirit over a course of time?