

Jesus' Parables in Chronological Order

Parable #11 ~ Matthew 13:3-23 ~ Four types of soil ~ Scripture

³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other 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 He who has ears, let him hear.”

¹⁰ The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”

¹¹ He replied, “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 he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 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 I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men 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 his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. ²² The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

Parable #11 ~ Matthew 13:3-23 ~ Four types of soil ~ Discussion Questions

1. When was the last time you “tuned out” a speaker?
2. Why would a farmer allow precious seed to land on the path, or rocks, or among thorns? Is he an irresponsible farmer scattering seeds at random?
3. What happened to each group of seeds?
4. How did Jesus conclude his parable? What did he mean by that? (13:9)
5. How much of the parable did the people understand? How much did the disciples understand? (13:9-10)
6. Why didn't the people or the disciples understand this parable?
7. Did Jesus design his parables to have trick meanings, hidden meanings, or more than one basic interpretation? Why do some listeners discover the truth in a parable and others do not?
8. Why do you suppose that this was among the first parables that Jesus told?
9. What kind of people today might be represented by the seed that fell on the path? (13:19)
10. Why couldn't those who received the word with joy stay faithful? (13:20-21)
11. What choked those who were represented by the seed that fell among the thorns? What other things (or people) might the thorns represent? (13:22)
12. Why is perseverance necessary for all who receive the Word? (Luke 8:15)
How long did it take for you to understand the gospel of Christ?
13. What kind of soil do you most resemble right now? What worries or temptations have hindered your growth as a Christian recently?
14. How could you listen more faithfully and intently to the voice of God? What will most help you be responsive to God in your study of the Bible?

Parable #11 ~ Matthew 13:3-23 ~ Four types of soil ~ Leader's Guide

I am not providing “answers” or discussion points for the questions with this familiar parable, so you're on your own. This parable is so well known and Jesus even provides an explanation of it, so you won't have any trouble

I've borrowed some of the discussion below from the web site, christianpf.com. The parable is simple: the sower (Christ) scatters his seed generously and it ends up on four different types of terrain. Some lands on the side of the road, some on rocks, others in thorny soil, and some in good soil. The first three groups of seed don't survive and the seed planted in the good soil flourishes.

And we immediately say, “I want to be the good soil.” Or we say, “I know some people who are like the rocky soil,” or maybe “Let's pray for the folks who are stuck in the thorny soil.”

So this parable about a sower quickly becomes the parable of the types of soil.

This parable appears in all three synoptic gospels (Matthew 13:3-9, Mark 4:1-9, and Luke 8:4-8). In the earliest Bibles in which translators added chapter summaries, commentaries, or sidenotes, this parable was generally called the parable of the sower. It still is in the NSRV, REB, KJV, and Catholic Bibles, but most modern Bibles such as the NIV, NLT, etc now call it the parable of the soil. Why is this?

Think About the Sower

If we reread the parable from the perspective of the sower, we get a better understanding of it and why Jesus himself emphasized the idea of sowing the seed.

Jesus tells us that the farmer scattered seed (the Word of God) on all types of ground. He didn't say that the farmer was meticulously planting the seeds in designated ‘good soil’ areas in nice neat rows – Jesus says he was scattering the seed everywhere.

Doesn't that seem wasteful though? I mean, if I were planting a field, why would I throw seed on rocks, thorns, and the side of the road? Wouldn't you want to be careful and put the seed in only the good soil right from the beginning?

Actually, this method of planting wasn't so strange back in Biblical times because the custom of planting was to first scatter the seed and then plow it into the soil.

But to help us understand the parable, we should remember what Jesus said earlier in Luke 5:31 –“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.” In this statement Christ makes it clear that he came to rescue sinners. His purpose was to bring salvation to everyone.

If we keep this in mind, we can see that the parable actually has three meanings:

1) To show that Christ came to share the Word of God with *everyone*. We don't serve a stingy God who picks and chooses who is good enough to hear the word. He graciously sows into everyone who is willing to accept his word.

2) To show us how the different soils in our life can encourage us—or stop us from receiving the Word of God, the “Good News.”

3) To encourage us to share the Word of God with others. And like Jesus, we should spread the Good News with everyone, not just those who are receptive.

The Soils

We can't ignore the soil types completely, but it is important that we first recognize the message of the generous sower.

Jesus knew that most of the people in the crowd would say, "Wow, great story," and move along with their lives. When he ended the parable with, 'he who has ears to hear, let him hear,' Jesus was challenging them to think about the meaning of the parable.

That's the message for us too. Think about these different types of soil not only with respect to other people, but with respect to yourself as well. It's tempting to say, "oh, well, he's like the rocky soil or he's like the soil with all the thorns and brambles." But Jesus is suggesting that you think about it with respect to your own life and the several types of soil that you personally might have experienced.

'Some fell along the path'

This is the 'in one ear, out the other' crowd. Picture a middle-eastern road hardened by years of travel by men and animals. What happens to the seed when it falls here? It sits out in the open for the birds to come and eat it. Have you ever been like that? Sat in a sermon or Bible study yawning, nodding off, thinking about something else, not caring enough to pay attention? If you don't take God's Word seriously, you don't even represent soil at all – you're like a concrete sidewalk. The devil is happy to take God's word away and plant all kinds of new thoughts in your mind. And what's the end result? I like how it's phrased in the New Living Testament: "the devil takes the message from their hearts, prevents them from believing and from being saved." Not a pretty outcome.

'Some fell on rock'

These people stayed awake. They were happy to receive the Word of God and even understand it to some extent, but when they're tested, they collapse. They give in to temptation. They have no real roots. They're just not planted deep enough in the soil. They know God's word, but it hasn't truly become their foundation.

It's a superficial faith that springs up when times are good. But when the heat comes, just like the sun on a hot day, the small seedling that shot up on the rock will wither and die for lack of soil and water.

We're all faced with temptations: women, lust, money, gossip, hateful thoughts and not just a temptations to do the wrong thing, but to not obey God's commands and to not do the right thing, to ignore a person who could use your help. This is what Jesus is talking about here – a superficial faith for Sundays, for Bible studies, for when things are going well, but that all too easily gives in to temptation and fails when the going gets rough.

'Other seed fell among thorns'

They hear the word, but do nothing with it.

They know the word, but don't truly accept it.

They teach it, but don't practice it.

They let themselves get overwhelmed by the worries and problems of life.

They don't grow in maturity.

If we're not earnestly seeking the Word of God, it leads to indifference about

devotions, about the church, about the Bible, and our relationship with Jesus.

So what happens then? The source for our satisfaction comes from external things (the thorns): riches, pleasures, good times with the old crowd, getting a buzz, whooping it up. Even though the seed was planted in good soil, the thorns choked it, just like these things can choke us from depending on God.

Again, you're not alone if you've ever felt like this or fallen into this trap. It's all around us. It's the real world. Who doesn't like a good party? Who doesn't want a piece of eye candy clinging to them?

And conversely, who doesn't occasionally get overwhelmed by the worries of life? What's one of the major problems in today's society? Yep, depression. Feelings of guilt and worthlessness. Feelings of hopelessness. Always feeling sad or anxious. Restlessness. Being irritable. Let these things grab you and they can easily overwhelm those seeds of God's Word that will never be able to grow to maturity.

'Still other seed fell on good soil'

. . . and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown. It may seem like funny math and bad business, but God knew what he was doing when he sent Christ to scatter the seed everywhere.

There'll be times in your life when you feel like you're firmly planted in the good soil. Use this opportunity to share God's Word with others. That's when you become the sower!

When Jesus speaks of a huge harvest, 30, 60, or 100 times what was sown he's not talking about just the seeds that he planted. He planted some seeds 2,000 years ago. Those couple of hundred have grown to something like two billion Christians today. And Jesus is saying, he wants this to continue. He wants each of you sitting here today to be a sower of seeds. Yes, some will fall on concrete, some on rocky soil, and some with the weeds. But some will fall on fertile soil.

But remember, the fruit of sharing the Gospel doesn't just happen on its own. It takes a humble heart and meditation on the Word of God to produce a good harvest and to further the Kingdom of God. The way you sow your seed will be different. All of you can tell your own story. Your own testimony. Some of you might be in a position to lead a small group. Some of you could become preachers. Some of you could start a small Bible study where you work. Some of you could go on missions trips. There are so many opportunities to become a sower if you just keep your eyes open. That's what Jesus wants you to do. Don't disappoint him.

To reiterate, the parable has three meanings:

1) To show that Christ came to share the Word of God with *everyone*. We don't serve a stingy God who picks and chooses who is good enough to hear the word. He graciously sows into everyone who is willing to accept his word.

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