

Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:1-23

Intro

As we pick up our study of the gospel of Matthew this morning we come to Matthew 13 where Jesus shares a number of **parables**...

*Now, the word **parable** comes from a Greek word meaning “comparison” or “a placing side by side” or “to throw alongside”...*

- The literal idea is *“placing one thing beside another so they can be compared”...*

This adds clarity to another way that parables are defined — they are *“earthly stories with a heavenly meaning”*...[expand]

- Now, as we will see in Matthew 13, some of parables that Jesus gives will be explained by Him and some will not be...

I will do my best to interpret them but, as always, I encourage you to be a Berean and study them for yourself...

- Also, as we seek to properly interpret the parables, I think we should beware of trying to give every piece of the earthly story a heavenly meaning...

There may be some elements of the parable that are incidental to the meaning — they do not necessarily have a spiritual meaning behind them...

With all of this in mind, let's move into the first section of our study...

1) The Setting (vs 1-2)

1 On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea.

Now, it is important to realize that some commentators consider Matthew 12 to be the turning point of the gospel of Matthew...

The rejection of Jesus by the religious leaders had reached an all-time high and the majority of the people continued to misunderstand who Jesus is and what He came to do...

- So Jesus begins to adapt His style of teaching — and we will get more on the *why* behind that decision a little later in the study...

With that said, we see here in vs 1 that Jesus went out of the house where He was staying and sat down by the Sea of Galilee...

2 And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

This is very interesting — the Lord Jesus gets into a boat so that He may speak to the people...[expand — describe the scene...]

Now that the scene has been set, let's move to our second section...

2) The Parable of the Sower (vs 3-9)

**3 Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying:
"Behold, a sower went out to sow.**

This is a picture of a farmer who is *broadcasting* — he is throwing out seed onto his field...[expand]

4 And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them.

As the sower sows the seed, some falls on the **wayside**, the pathway on the edge of the field — ground that is too hard for the seed to penetrate...

- And since that seed stays on the surface, it is devoured by the birds...

5 Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth;

This is an area of the field that has a thin layer of soil but it is rocky just below the surface...[expand]

Continuing on in vs 5 we read...

and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth.

The thin layer of soil is warm and the seed grows upward because it is unable to put down roots...[expand]

6 But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.

Unfortunately, the sun devastated the plant that grew up in the rocky soil...

- Because the plant did not have a sufficient root system, it was not able to survive when the heat of the sun fell on it...

7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them.

Some seed fell in an area of the field that was dominated by plants with thorns...

- And these plants with thorns overtook the plants that sprouted from the seeds that the sower was spreading...

8 But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Some seed fell on the best area of the field — an area of **good ground** — and this seed **yielded a crop**...

- *Interestingly, the seed that took root in the good ground did not yield an equal crop...*

Some yielded a hundredfold, some sixty and some thirty...[expand]

Let's move into vs...

9 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

This is very similar to what the Lord Jesus says to each of the seven churches that He addresses in Revelation 2 & 3...

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"...

- The idea is that God is speaking — but we must be listening if we are to hear Him...

[expand — we have all been in situations where we were speaking but others were not listening / and we have been in situations where others were speaking and we were not listening...]

For more on the topic of God speaking, please turn to...

Psalm 19:1-4 (NKJV)

**1 The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.**

**2 Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.**

**3 There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.**

**4 Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.**

Here we are reminded that God is speaking through *creation* — *through the world that He has made* — the Apostle Paul expands on this truth in **Romans 1...**

Also, the Apostle Paul also tells us in **Romans 2** that God is also speaking to us through our *conscience*...[expand]

Furthermore, God is also speaking through the written Word of God — through the Bible...

God has also spoken to mankind through the Lord Jesus Christ Himself...

Hebrews 1:1-2 (NKJV)

1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,
2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...

God has spoken to us through His Holy Spirit as well — for a reminder of this, please turn to...

John 16:8-11 (NKJV)

8 “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:
9 of sin, because they do not believe in Me;
10 of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more;
11 of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”

Now, these examples simply scratch the surface of the countless ways that God speaks to human beings...

• ***But the question must be asked — are we listening?...***

Let's turn back to Matthew 13 as we move to our third section...

3) The “Why” of Parables (vs 10-17)

Now, it is important to understand that what Matthew recounts in vs 10-23 of this chapter took place at a later time — after the Lord Jesus had finished giving the parables...

- *And I believe Matthew includes this information here to help us understand why the Lord Jesus was using parables...*

10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

The disciples don't get it — why was the Lord Jesus speaking to the multitude in this way?...

- *Why wasn't Jesus just saying these things directly?...*

11 He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

This is very interesting — the Lord Jesus is making a distinction here...

- *But what is the distinction? — Why were some given knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom while others were not?...*

I believe the answer is simple — some were disciples and some were not...

You see, the **disciples** were given access to the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven and **non-disciples** were not given access to the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven...

- [ex. I do not understand the mysteries of carpentry because I have never studied carpentry — I have not been a disciple of a carpenter...]

The Lord Jesus expands on this reality in vs...

12 For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

This is a principle that we see in all of life — if a person is a faithful steward of what they have been given — they will be given more...

- But if they fail to use what they have been given then they will lose even that...

The Lord Jesus speaks of this reality in other places...

Matthew 25:21 (NKJV) [Parable of the Talents]

... ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’

Now please turn to...

Luke 16:10-12 (NKJV)

10 “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.

11 Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?

12 And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?”

James 4:6 (NKJV)

**"God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble.”**

PRINCIPLE — Obey what you know and you will be given more knowledge — refuse to obey what you know and you will lose even that...[expand]

The reality is that we become the **disciples** (or **non-disciples**) that we are through the choices that we make...

- And if we want to grow as disciples then we must have ears to hear what God is saying and simply obey what God says...

Let's turn back to Matthew 13 as we move into vs...

13 Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

Parables keep non-disciples from understanding — it takes too much effort to figure it out so they just move on...

Moving on to vs 14-15...

14 And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

**'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;**

**15 For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.'**

Tragically, the majority of the multitudes who followed Jesus during His earthly ministry were ***non-disciples*** — and as a result they were fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah...

- They had hearts that had grown dull — hearts that were insensitive to the truth of God because they had not responded to God's prompting in the past...

They had grown hard of hearing because they had not listened to what God had said in the past...

- They had closed their eyes against the truth that God had revealed...

“There are none so blind as those who refuse to see”...

Now, please notice again the last part of vs 15...

**Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.'**

The reality is that it was God's desire that the people *see* and *hear* and *understand* and *turn* and *be healed*...

- It was God's desire that they would become disciples...

Unfortunately, because they had continually closed their eyes and refused to listen, their hearts had grown dull and unfeeling...

- They could not understand the Lord Jesus *because* they had no interest in becoming His disciples...

And this is key — a refusal to become the Lord Jesus' disciple will result in a failure to understand what the Lord Jesus is saying...

- [ex. refuse to learn the alphabet — can't learn to read / refuse to learn multiplication — can't do algebra...]

However, those who had chosen to respond — those who chose to be His disciples — those who were willing to see and hear and turn — received the blessing...

16 But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear;

17 for assuredly, 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.

What we see here is the blessing of discipleship — the ability to see what God is doing and to hear His message...

- The OT prophets and the other righteous servants of God had longed to see and hear what the disciples got to see and hear...

This reminds us of the cost of non-discipleship — if we fail to be disciples then we are missing out on seeing the work of God and hearing what God is saying...

- And we will fail to see and hear what the Lord has for us — what He wants for us — who He wants us to become...

One of my favorite passages on this topic comes from Jesus' first miracle — turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana — so let's turn there...

John 2:5-9 (NKJV)

5 His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."

6 Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece.

7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

8 And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it.

9 When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom.

I believe this passage shows us that the key to seeing and hearing what the Lord is doing is to ***serve Him as a disciple — to simply obey what He has told you to do...***

- Simply be faithful in the little He has given you and then He will give you more — that is the life of a disciple...

Please turn back to Matthew 13 as we move into our final section...

4) The Parable of the Sower Explained (vs 18-23)

18 "Therefore hear the parable of the sower:

Now, the explanation that the Lord Jesus gives is going to be pretty straightforward...

And I would simply add that I believe this parable applies to both ***non-disciples*** and ***disciples***...

- In other words, in this parable we see ways that people are prevented from becoming disciples in the first place but these are also ways that disciples are hindered in their growth...[expand]

19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it,

understand — *to have an intelligent grasp of something that challenges one's thinking or practice...*

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.

This is the condition of the ***insensitive heart*** — a condition in which a person *refuses to consider something that challenges them...*

- The **word of the kingdom** is unable to penetrate that person's heart — the word remains external — on the surface — and the wicked one — the devil — snatches it away...

This is the person who refuses to entertain the idea that they may be wrong — that the word of God may seeking to correct them...

REMEDY — Maintain an open heart — understand that any day is a good day for correction...

Hebrews 12:7 (NKJV)

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

Moving on in Matthew 13 to vs...

20 But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;

21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

This is the person who is initially excited about the word of the kingdom and immediately they are off and running...

- [ex. XC runner who goes full speed at the beginning of the race — unable to maintain that pace — weariness and discouragement sets in...]

In the parable, the Lord Jesus says that this person is like a plant who spends all of its energy shooting upward but fails to put down roots...

- When the scorching heat of **tribulation** and **persecution** begins then that rootless person withers away...

REMEDY — Focus on growing downward, not upward — establish roots — spend time with God behind the scenes, in the secret place where no one else sees...[expand]

Colossians 2:6-7 (NKJV)

6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,

7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

Moving on in Matthew 13 to vs...

22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

This is the person who initially receives the word of the kingdom but the word cannot flourish because other things are a greater concern...

cares of this world — *anxieties, concerns...[broad category]*

The word cares here is the same one used in...

1 Peter 5:6-7 (NKJV)

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,

7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

deceitfulness of riches — *riches are deceitful because they promise freedom and fulfillment but they do not make good on their promise...*

For more on this topic let's turn to...

1 Timothy 6:6-10 (NKJV)

6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

REMEDY — Cast your concerns on the Lord, knowing He cares for you — and learn to be content with what you have — store up treasures in heaven and not on the earth...

Let's turn back to Matthew 13 as we move into our final verse...

23 But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

This is the person who hears the word and is willing to be challenged by it — who is willing to obey — who is willing to change...

- Ultimately, this is the person who is willing to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ — who is willing to submit to Jesus as Master...

Now, please notice — the word of the kingdom *bears fruit of varying degrees — some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty...*

- I believe that this is to be an encouragement to the disciple — that the person who is willing to see and hear — who is willing to receive the word of the kingdom — *will be fruitful...*

So, no remedy needed here — but I will give an exhortation...

Why not seek to be as fruitful as possible? — Why settle for 30 or 60 if we can bear a hundredfold?...

Conclusion

With this in mind, let's close by turning to one final passage — a passage on the fruitfulness of the disciple...

John 15:1-5 (NKJV)

1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

[expand — progression of fruit — more fruit — much fruit...]

Let's pray...