

# Mysteries of the Kingdom - Matthew 13:1-9; 18-

23

## The Kingdom's Origin - The Sower

This is the first of Jesus' parables in Matthew's gospel. Chapter 13 contains seven parables, all of them about the kingdom. Matthew's gospel could well be called a kingdom gospel! When my children were young, we used some picture cards to help them learn their books of the Bible. The card had a picture designed to help them know the name of the book and the main theme of each book. The theme shown for Matthew's gospel was "king."

Matthew 1:1 introduces Jesus as the son of David, Israel's great king. John the Baptist came preaching the "kingdom of heaven" (3:2). Chapters 5-7 are known as the sermon on mount, considered by most interpreters as ethics of kingdom living. Chapters 8-12 record many of Jesus' miracles that demonstrated the power of God's kingdom. But when we get here to chapter 13, we are introduced to a new teaching device - parables. A parable is not a fable where animals talk and are often people in disguise like Aesop's fables. Neither is a parable an allegory where each detail has meaning and represents something else. A parable is a story taken from real life from which a moral or spiritual truth is drawn. It is not surprising then that the first parables should be about the kingdom!

In this passage we have the first of the parables. It is commonly known as the parable of the sower. But we not only learn about a sower, we learn of seed and soil as well. Let's notice what we learn from each in this parable.

Note first of all **the sower**. That the sower represents God is immediately obvious. In Scripture, God likens Himself to a sower. Jeremiah 31:27 says . . . We also see Christ as a sower in the next parable, the parable of the tares (Matthew 13:24-30). Note especially 13:36-37: . . .

A great truth is that God, in His sovereignty, allows His word to be sown in our hearts. An even greater mystery is that God, in His sovereignty, allows us to be sowers of His word. 1 Cor. 3:6 tells us that Paul sowed the seed and Apollos watered it. In fact, we are ALL called to be sowers.

Herbert Lockyer says, "It is also the privilege and obligation of all who are Christ's to function as sowers. We were saved to serve and sow. Alas, in comparison to the vastness of the field, the sowers are few! . . . The greatest service any Christian can render is sowing the good seed of the Word by life, lip and literature."

Are you a sower? All the sower is called to do is sow. It is beyond his power to make the seed grow. Each spring, there are some people who plant gardens and others who do not. Why is it that some do not plant a garden? Is it because they might not be able to make the plants grow? Of course not. Such a thought is foolishness. It is not their responsibility to make plants grow - they grow on their own. Notice Mark 4:26-29 . . . The Greek word translated "of herself (itself)" is the word *automate* (we get our English word automatic from it). The farmer can not MAKE the plant grow. But He CAN sow the seed. In fact, if he does not sow the seed, there is no way the plant will grow!

In the same way, we can not MAKE the seed of God's word take root in somebody's life. But if we do not sow it, it will never have the opportunity to take root. "The sower sows the Word," Jesus said in Mark 4:14. Thank God it has been sown in our lives. Will you sow it in the lives of others?

We see next **the seed**. Obviously, the seed is the Word of God. For those unsure, notice what Luke says in his account of the parable in Luke 8:11 . . .

One summer when I planted my corn, I planted two types. One of them produced a good harvest but the other hardly produced anything. Why was that? Obviously, the good harvest came from good seed, but, as one friend commented to me, the other type of corn "must have been bad seed." You can be sure that when you share the Word of God you are spreading good seed. In the next parable (the parable of the tares) Jesus even says . . . 13:24, 27. Throughout Scripture we see evidence that the Word of God is good seed. Note the descriptions:

- 1 Peter 1:22-25 - living and incorruptible
- Isaiah 55:10-11 - heavenly and divine
- James 1:21 - engrafted and able to save

The Word of God is GOOD SEED! T.H. Huxley, well-known agnostic, was once with a group of men at a weekend house party. It was Sunday morning and most of them were preparing to go to church. Huxley approached a man known for his Christian character and said, "Suppose you stay home and tell my why you are a Christian." The man hesitated, knowing he could not match wits with Huxley. But then the agnostic said gently, "I don't want to argue with you. I just want you to tell me simply what this Christ means to you." The man did, and when he was finished, there were tears in Huxley's eyes as he said, "I would give my right hand if only I could believe that!"

Now what happened? Did the Sower mess up? Did he do something wrong? NO! He sowed as he was called to do. The response did not have anything to do with the sower. Was it the Seed? Did Huxley get a batch of bad seed? NO! The seed was the Word of God. It is ALWAYS good seed! Then what happened? It had to do with the soil.

So notice finally then, **the soil**. You will notice in the parable that Jesus describes four types of soil. In verses 18-23 he gives the explanation of each.

Notice the first soil - the *way-side hearer*. This represents the hard-hearted hearer - the hearer with a closed mind. Here the seed is on the ground but not in the ground. First century life was largely agricultural. Cultivated fields abounded. There was no developed road system as such, so farmers left paths between their fields. Everybody walked on those paths. The ground became so hard that the seed could not penetrate beneath the surface.

One spring I did a foolish thing. I got the notion that we needed grass under the swing set. My schedule was busy, however, so all I had time to do was get some seed and throw it out. Have you ever seen the ground under a well used swing? I remember weeks later the seed that hadn't been kicked away by little feet going back and forth on the swings still sitting there on top of that hard, compact soil. At the end of the summer, the ground under my swing set looked no different than it had the previous spring.

Jesus said the way-side hearer has a heart as hard as that ground under my swing. What causes such hard-heartedness? In a word, SIN. Sin hardens the heart and the heart that is hardened sins even more. That explains clearly why so few people come to Christ in their later

years. The statistics are staggering: nineteen out of every twenty who become Christians do so before they reach the age of 24. After 25, only one in 10,000 will be saved. After 35, it is only one in 40,000. After 45, one in 200,000; 55, one in 300,000; 65, one in 500,000; and after 74, only one in 700,000 people will give their life to Christ. How dangerous it is to say I'll wait - your heart will only continue to harden!

The second type of soil Jesus describes is the stony ground hearer. This represents a shallow heart - the emotional hearer. In this case the seed is both on and in the ground but not down. The Promised Land is a rocky geographical area. Often you can find ground that appears rich and fertile on the surface, but lying buried and hidden just several inches below are rock ledges. Nothing requiring any significant root system can grow for lack of depth of soil.

There are plenty of stony ground hearers in church today. James M. Boice in The Parables of Jesus, says of these type people, "*we see them in our thriving evangelical churches. Their shallow hearts are attracted to the joy and excitement of a church where much is happening. They hear the gospel and seem to fit in. Many even make a profession of faith. But then some difficulty comes - loss of a job, misunderstandings with other Christians, sickness, even a bad romance - and just as suddenly as they once seemed to embrace the faith, they fall away, because they were really never born again.*"

Let me warn you - difficulty will come. Perhaps it will be personal struggles, maybe family struggles, difficulties at church, even persecution! There are many who do not endure such because the reality is that their hearts were stony ground.

The next type of soil is the Thorny Ground hearer. This represents the strangled heart - the wandering hearer. In this case the seed is on, it is in, and it is down, but it never comes up!

Anybody who has ever gardened knows the havoc that weeds can wreak. Several times in my gardening experience I would plant a patch, go away on vacation, and get busy upon returning from vacation. When I finally made time to go to the garden, I would always find that weeds had literally taken over!

What do you have to do to have weeds come up and choke things out? Nothing - just wander off awhile and next thing you know all chance of fruitfulness is gone. Notice that Jesus mentions two things that specifically assist in this process.

First are the cares of this world. Granted, we have responsibilities. Certain things must be done. But an anxious, unrelaxing attention to the business of life will choke the seed of God's word in your life.

Next, he mentions the deceitfulness of riches. It was true in Jesus' day, and it is even truer today. Note carefully this warning. The riches do not choke us all at once; rather it is a gradual process. I can not begin to detail the families I have seen travel down this path. In each case they were once active in serving God. But then the career really takes off. They begin to acquire "things." Trips come to dominate their calendar. The next thing you know, they are hardly ever seen at church in worship much less active in service!

Perhaps tonight the seed is on, in, and even down in your life. As it seeks to sprout forth to harvest, have you been doing your weeding? Do not let the weeds and thorns of life choke out the fruitfulness of God's good seed!

There is one final type of soil Jesus mentions - the good ground hearer. This represents the open heart - the hearer with the understanding mind. In this case, the seed is on, it is in, it has gone down, and it is up.

There are a number of applications that could be made. Only a portion of the preaching of the gospel bears fruit (1/4 in this case!). The evidence of reception of the word is the bearing of fruit. The amount of fruit is not as important as the bearing of some fruit. A case can be made for all of these.

But I believe that the main point of application is this: it is only the open heart that receives the benefit of the Word and is saved! Is your heart an open heart? Are you receptive to God's truth? If you answer No to these, what can you do? – NOTHING Just as the soil can not change its nature, neither can you. But that does not mean the news is bad because there is One who can change your nature - the Divine gardener. He can break up your hard heart, uproot the rocks and remove the thorns. That is our hope - not us, but Him!

My wife sings a number of songs I like. One of my favorites is titled, "I put my hope in you." The words go, "I put my hope in you, O Lord, trusting you I will not be shaken, knowing that you will see me through, I put my hope in you. In this parable Jesus presents an image of Himself - He is our hope! As one commentator said, "Jesus is not so much teaching here as reflecting aloud upon the results on His teaching." How has His teaching impacted you? What type of soil is your heart?