

Genesis 25:19-34

Psalm 19:105-112

Romans 8:1-11

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23



HEAR THEN THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Why did Jesus teach in parables? Following the Parable of the Sower, in Matt 13:11-13, he gave his disciples a reason they may not have expected: *“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to him who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.”*

In other words, the parables of Jesus serve to *divide*. They unveil the secrets of the kingdom of heaven to those who are being saved, but take on other meanings to those who are perishing.

Furthermore, his parables are like catalysts. They unlock things in peoples’ hearts. They do not enlighten everyone, but they do enlighten those whose hearts hold the seeds of repentance. The parables Jesus taught appeal to all listeners, but they have always succeeded in dividing his listeners into two groups.

Some view the Bible, including the parables, simply as literature. Others think it is inspired by God and are drawn to Christ through it. You can’t force anyone to be inspired by Scripture, but the Spirit of God can use it to lead one to repentance, and the Word of God will dwell in any heart willing to receive it (John 7:17).

If you study the Parable of the Sower today, and as a result are drawn to Christ, then, *“Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”* (Matt 13:16-17).

Matt 13:1-9. That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat there; and the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, ⁶but when the sun rose they were scorched; and since they had no root they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell upon thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹He who has ears, let him hear.”¹

- *That same day.* Review Matt 12:9-21. Jesus was at Capernaum. Earlier that same day, he had remarked how differently the people were responding to his teaching. The Pharisees had taken counsel against him and were seeking to destroy him (12:14). On the other hand, *many followed him, and he healed them all* (12:15), and they believed him to be the one Isaiah spoke of: *“In his name will the Gentiles hope”* (12:21).

Finally Jesus said, *“Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother”* (12:50). These – the family of God – are the “good soil” in the Parable of the Sower.

- *The whole crowd stood on the beach* (v.2). Imagine that scene. In church we pray, *“Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid”*² From the boat where Jesus sat, he could see the crowd before him on the beach. He could see all kinds of hearts: hearts eager to hear the truth, hearts more concerned with their own affairs, hearts inclined to disbelieve and mistrust – the whole spectrum of faith ranging from worship to outright rejection. *No secrets* are hidden from his sight.

This was the scene as it appeared to Jesus, and what he would speak on. He wants us to see the Word of God as *seed* scattered among them, and see the ways we have been receiving it – whether or not the Word is

¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV.

² The Book of Common Prayer, p.355

able to grow in us and produce fruit. And this is how we should discuss the parable today – not thinking about others, for we do not know the hearts of men, but examining our own hearts, which we do know, for evidence of the “good soil” Jesus spoke of in the parable, that is, the fruits of abiding faith.

• *And he told them many things in parables ...* (v.3). Review verses 4-8 about the seeds along the path, on rocky ground, among thorns, and on good soil. Suppose you were hearing about the sower and these four kinds of soil but did not yet know Jesus. How would you have interpreted these sayings?

Matt 13:18-23. *“Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When any one hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart; this is what was sown along the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³As for what was sown on good soil, this is he who hears the word and understands it; he indeed bears fruit, and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”*

• *“The word of the kingdom”* (v.19). The *seed* is the word of the kingdom. The sower is God. Neither of these is flawed. The sower may seem a bit wasteful by our standards, scattering his seed all over rather than just on good soil, but it is his seed, and he can scatter it as he pleases. The differences are in the soil, not the seed. Some of us are going to receive the Word of God, and bear the fruits of it, and others of us are not.

The imagery here is unusual in the Bible. Usually the emphasis is on the one *producing* the fruit. For example: *“Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire”* (Luke 3:9); *“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit”* (Luke 6:43); etc. (See also Ps 1:3, Prov 11:30, John 12:24, John 15:5-9.)

But in the Parable of the Sower, it is God, not man, who produces the fruits of good works in men. God provides the seed, he plants it, and he makes it grow. What is sometimes lacking, Jesus said, is *good soil*. It is more like *“I am the vine; you are the branches”* (John 15:5). God does everything. You and I do not produce any good thing until we have the life of God – the life he offers us through Jesus Christ.

• *“This is what was sown along the path ... on rocky ground ... among thorns ... on good soil ...”* (v.19-23). These are the four kinds of soil in the parable. Jesus related them to different kinds of people. They apply to young and old, rich and poor, simple and educated – there are illustrations here for us all to use in examining ourselves. The following is from a sermon for children (of all ages) titled, “It All Depends on the Dirt”³:

Often, when we come to church, the preacher is preaching the Word, but we aren't really paying attention. Maybe we are thinking about what we are going to do that afternoon or about what we did yesterday. We are hearing the Word, but we are not listening. That's like throwing seed on the top of the ground. It won't ever grow into anything in our life.

There are other times when we hear the Word and we get excited about it, but then our excitement fades and we drift away. That's like the seeds that fall on the rocky ground. The plants spring up, but then die because the roots are too shallow.

Sometimes we hear the Word and we believe what it says, and want to obey it, but we also want to keep on doing the same things we have been doing. That's like planting the seed in with a bunch of weeds. I can tell you what will happen; the weeds will soon take over!

But when we hear the word, and we listen and try to understand what it says and put it into practice in our daily life, then we are like good soil. We are like soil where the seed takes root and grows and produces a plentiful harvest. That's the kind of soil that Jesus wants us to be. What kind of soil are you?

Dear Jesus, I want to be like the good soil. Help me to listen to God's Word, and read it, and put it into practice in my daily life. I ask this in your holy name. *Amen.*