

## Parables of Jesus

### The Parable of the Sower

Mat 13:3-23 Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: “Behold, a sower went out to sow. (4) And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. (5) Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. (6) But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. (7) And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. (8) But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. (9) He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (10) And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” (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. (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. (13) Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. (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.’ (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. (18) Therefore hear the parable of the sower: (19) 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. (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. (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. (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.”

There is no doubt that Jesus was an amazing storyteller.

Partly because of the way He used the ordinary things of life to grab the attention of His listeners, but mostly because He didn't tell stories just to entertain, but to teach spiritual truths.

In this parable, there are certain features that we need to be aware of before we look at the parable itself.

First, this parable is the key to all the parables.

In the parallel passage in Mark 4:13, Jesus said, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?”

In other words, understanding this parable is fundamental to understanding the rest of Jesus' parables.

The second thing we see is that when Jesus interpreted this parable, He didn't interpret the meaning of absolutely everything in it.

For instance, He didn't give a meaning for the stones or the roots of the plants.

It's tempting for us teachers to want to analyse absolutely everything and try and give it a meaning when, really, the beauty of a parable is that, even though it may have several different parts, they all contribute to one central truth.

The third thing we need to note is Jesus' reason for talking in parables.

We might naturally assume that the parables are like anecdotes in a sermon used to illustrate a point and make it clearer.

But that would only be part of the reason.

In verses 10-17, Jesus explained to His disciples that the reason He spoke in parables is that the parables hide mysteries.

A mystery is a hidden truth.

So why would Jesus want to hide a truth, and from whom did He want to hide them?

The parable brings a truth in such a form that those who are dull-hearted, whose spiritual ears are hard of hearing, and whose spiritual eyes are closed, will be unable to understand it.

So whereas the parable illustrates a truth to those who will hear it, it hides that same truth from those who are spiritually dull.

The ones who see and hear and understand, Jesus calls blessed.

So let's take a look at the different parts of the parable and how Jesus explained it.

### **1. The Seed**

This parable is told in Matthew, Mark and Luke, each gospel giving us slightly different information.

In Matthew, Jesus says that the seed is the word of the kingdom; in Mark, it's just simply the word; in Luke, it's the Word of God.

But each time it's clear that the seed is the going forth of God's Word.

And although God's Word is powerful, it's just in seed form.

It's not fully developed; it's just a seed.

But it contains within it all the potential of new life and fruitfulness.

### **2. The Sower**

Now that we understand what the seed is, we can understand who the sower is.

The sower is the one who sows the seed, the one who plants the Word of God.

There is nothing here to indicate that it's talking about a full-time preacher or teacher of God's Word.

This can be anyone who speaks God's Word.

Every time you speak the Word of God, whether you're in a pulpit or in a coffee shop with a friend, you're sowing God's Word and this parable and its' principles applies to you.

1 Cor 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

Those who speak God's Word are God's workers working in God's field.

So when is the right time to plant?

If you've done any gardening at all, you'll know that certain plants need to be planted at certain times of the year in certain seasons.

Any farmer will know this.

But when it comes to God's Word, this is what Paul has to say:

2 Tim 4:2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

When is the right season for speaking God's Word?

It's always the right season.

I'm not suggesting that you just quote Scripture non-stop.

But even though there seem to be definite seasons in the moves of the Spirit, we should not stop preaching the Word of God just because we're not in the middle of a revival.

### **3. The Soils**

This is the focus of this parable.

In fact, even though we call it the parable of the sower, we could just as easily call it the parable of the soils.

It's aimed at hearers of God's Word, and the soil represents the human heart.

And there are four different basic conditions of the human heart when it comes to responding to God's Word.

Here they are:

#### **1. The Wayside**

The wayside is a hard path, and a hard path represents a hard heart.

Jesus said that when the Word of God is sown into this kind of heart, the birds of the air come and eat up the seed.

The devil, Satan, the wicked one, comes and snatches it out of their heart because they do not understand it.

In this person's heart, God's Word never gets a chance to grow.

Their lack of understanding means that the seed just sits on the ground and never penetrates the heart.

So what we have to realise is that when God's Word is preached, Satan is waiting, ready to attempt to snatch it out of the hearers heart.

Just think of what happened to Jesus Himself.

At the end of Matthew 3, Jesus is baptised, and when He comes up out of the water, He hears the Father speak to Him saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

This statement of Jesus' Father's, was a speaking forth of the Word of God.

What happened next is that Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

How did the devil tempt Him?

He immediately set about trying to snatch the Father's Word out of His heart.

Notice this, that even though there were three different temptations, two of those temptations began with, "If You are the Son of God."

But the Father's word had already sunk deep into the heart of Jesus.

You might be wondering: What hardens hearts?

Simple. Sin hardens hearts. Attitudes harden hearts and make it impossible for God's Word to penetrate.

This is why Proverbs 4:23, "Keep (guard) your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life."

When you start to harbour sins like unforgiveness, hatred, lust, anger, and all those sorts of things, your heart will harden and prevent the Word of God from penetrating and growing.

#### **2. The Stony Ground**

There was a lot of stony ground in Palestine.

The bedrock is so close to the surface, and therefore the soil is so shallow that plants have nowhere to send their roots down.

So the roots are very shallow.

These are the people who hear God's Word and receive it joyfully.

But shallow ground means a shallow heart.

So the Word is unable to send down deep roots.

But after the seed has been planted, the sun comes up and scorches the plant which then withers away.

So what does the sun represent?

What is it that causes the seed of God's Word to be scorched and wither away?

If we put together the information we get from Matthew's version with Luke's version, we see that what causes a shallow believer to fall away is persecution or trials or temptation.

A bit of opposition or some difficulties or temptation to follow after something else, and the believer with a shallow heart is unable to stand and he falls away.

Jesus had plenty of followers like that.

They loved His miracles, loved His healings, the exorcisms, His wonderful teaching and the way He stood up to the religious leaders.

But when it came to the crunch, they had not allowed God's Word to take root in their hearts and they deserted.

Matthew says they endure for a while; Luke says they believe for a while.

They endure while they believe.

But a shallow heart cannot stand a test of faith through persecution, trials, or temptations.

### **3. The Thorny Ground**

When the seed fell on thorny ground, the thorns sprang up and choked them.

Again, the Word of God became ineffective because of the condition of the heart of the hearer.

So what chokes God's Word?

Jesus says there are four different things: 1) the cares of this world; 2) the deceitfulness (delight / pleasure) of riches; 3) the desires for other things (Mark 4:19); and 4) the pleasures of life (Luke 8:14).

Have you ever noticed that weeds don't need any encouragement?

You have to nurture your flowers and your vegetables, but the weeds just pop up anywhere and with the greatest of ease.

Our hearts are like a garden; we have to nurture what is good, but grow with no problems at all.

Here are the four weeds that we have to be careful of because they choke God's Word in our hearts:

First, the cares of the world.

This is worry, and the Word says to be anxious for nothing. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Anxiety will kill the word so that it can't grow.

Second, the deceitfulness of riches.

Paul is very strong in his warning against this in 1 Timothy 6:6-10.

Verse 10 says, "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.

Money isn't bad, but the love of money is.

How do you know if you have the love of money?

Read verse 9: The desire to be rich.

Third, the desire for other things.

What sorts of things are we talking about here?

Anything that interferes with our pursuit of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus said, "But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness..." (Matthew 6:33)

What are we to pursue first in our lives?

The Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Not second, not third, but first.

It has to be of the highest priority.

2 Timothy 2:4: No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

The affairs of this life can even include good things like success, business, your marriage, your ministry, money, your career, education.

There's nothing wrong with any of these things, but if they come in between you and your pursuit of the Kingdom and God's righteousness, they're nothing more than idols.

Fourth, is the pleasures of life.

Again, there's nothing wrong with pleasure.

God designed such pleasures as food, sex, the arts, and a whole bunch of other things.

But they can be idols too.

All of these things can spring up as thorns in your heart and choke God's Word.

#### **4. The Good Ground**

This is the kind of ground, the kind of heart, God is looking for.

This is the kind of ground that produces fruit.

Let's put together what the gospels say about this kind of heart.

It hears God's Word, accepts God's Word, understands God's Word, is noble and good, demonstrates patience.

This kind of person, with this kind of heart, bears fruit

Why do you need patience?

Because when you plant a seed it doesn't start producing fruit the very next day; it takes time.

Here is something we need to note here, that when it comes to fruitfulness, the person who hears, and accepts, understands God's Word with patience and a noble and good heart, bears fruit thirtyfold, sixtyfold, or a hundredfold.

This is not the same as 30%, 60% or 100%.

This is a common mistake and the two are very different.

Let me illustrate this.

ILLUS – Let's say I present to you two investment opportunities. You give me \$100 and in Investment 1, there's a return of 100%. That means that at the end of the investment period you'll get \$200. With Investment 2, you give me \$100, and at the end of the investment period, you'll get a return of one hundredfold. Can anyone tell me how much that is? You get another \$10,000. Which investment would you rather have?

100% means multiply by 2; one hundredfold means multiply by 100.

That's a colossal difference.

This is the kind of fruitfulness God is looking for.

So why is it that some produce thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold?

It's not because of their heart condition.

We've already seen that all these people have a noble and good heart.

It's got nothing to do with their level of commitment.

Revelation 3:16 tells us what God thinks of a lukewarm commitment.

But they produce fruit according to their ability.

Different people have different levels of ability and how much fruit they produce depends on that.

I want to finish this message by offering some advice.

If you are a person with a hard heart, God has something to say to you.

Hosea 10:12 Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD, till He comes and rains righteousness on you.

How do you break up that hard ground so that it is ready to receive the seed of God's Word?

It's time to seek the Lord; in prayer, in worship, in studying God's Word, in faithfully fellowshiping with God's people, in fasting, in setting your heart to practise faith and righteousness.

If your heart is like the stony or thorny ground, God has something to say to you too.

Joshua 1:8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Meditation allows God's Word to sink into your heart, to take root, to grow, and to produce fruit.

Meditation on God's Word means to think about it, reflect on it, allow it to do its work.

Do this, and you will produce fruit.

If your heart is like good ground, let me just say this: Keep up the good work.

Remember Proverbs 4:23: Keep (guard) your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.

Guard your heart, keep the weeds out, and cultivate the kinds of things that God wants for your life.