

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.”

Questions On The Text

What did the sower go out to do?

Verse 3: The sower went out sowing seed.

How many different kinds of soil are there in this parable?

Verses 4-8: There are four different kinds of ground: the wayside, the stony places, the thorny ground, and the good ground.

What reason did Jesus give for communicating in parables?

Verses 11-17: It might be thought that Jesus spoke in parables as mere anecdotes, like a preacher uses sermon illustrations. However, it is clear from what Jesus said, that a parable has a two-fold purpose. For those with seeing eyes and hearing ears, they communicate important truth that will help the hearer understand more completely the Kingdom of God. The mysteries of the kingdom are revealed through the parable. (A mystery is a hidden truth.) But for those who have hearts that are spiritually dull and have become spiritually deaf and blind, the parable hides the truth from them.

What does the seed falling by the wayside represent?

Verse 19: The seed is referred to as the word of the kingdom, or in Luke 8:11, the Word of God. This kind of ground represents the person who hears God's Word but does not understand it. Because of their lack of understanding, the devil immediately moves in and snatches the word from their heart. Hard ground represents a hard heart.

The hearers of God's Word need to beware. When God's Word goes forth, Satan is always waiting for an opportunity to snatch it out of the heart of the hearer. Satan even tried this on Jesus. When Jesus was baptised, he heard His Father say, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This was a great moment of affirmation for Jesus. Yet the devil was watching too, and no doubt he heard the voice. So when Jesus went into the wilderness, immediately after His baptism, Satan came to Him with three temptations. Although each temptation was different, each one also contained an attempt by the devil to make Jesus doubt His own Sonship, and to snatch out of Jesus' heart the word that had been planted at His baptism.

If the seed is the Word of God, then it is clear that the sower is anyone who preaches or teaches God's Word. See 1 Corinthians 3:9 which tells us that believers are God's field. See also 2 Timothy 4:2 which says that the word should be preached regardless of whether it is the right season or not. It is always the right season for the teaching and preaching of God's Word.

What does the seed on stony places represent?

Verses 20-21: There is a lot of stony ground in Palestine. There the bedrock is so close to the surface and the soil so shallow that it is difficult for a plant to send down roots. This shallow ground represents a shallow heart.

This kind of person not only hears the word, but receives it with joy and believes for a while (Luke 8:13). But their heart is shallow, and God's Word is unable to send down roots and to grow. The plant that is unable to send down a root into the ground is easily scorched when in the full sun. Because of this, the person with a shallow heart easily falls away when the heat is on.

According to Matthew's version, the sun represents persecution because of the Word. According to Luke's version (8:13), the sun represents temptation. Temptation and persecution will cause the shallow-hearted person to lose faith. It's easy to follow the Lord in the good times, not so easy during times of trials.

What does the thorny ground represent?

Verse 22: The thorny ground is the heart of the person who hears God's Word, but the word is choked by four things. 1) cares of this world; 2) deceitfulness (delight / pleasure) of riches; 3) desires for other things (Mark 4:19); and 4) pleasures of life (Luke 8:14).

It's easy to get caught up with the things of this world and to lose sight of our reason for being. Paul not only warns against the love of money (1 Timothy 6:10), but also points out that we should not get entangled in the affairs of this life (2 Timothy 2:4). When we do, as this parable points out, we become unfruitful.

What does the good ground represent?

The good ground is the person who hears God's Word, understands it, accepts it (Mark 4:20), has a noble and good heart (Luke 8:15), and as a result of their patience (Luke 8:15), this person bears fruit. Jesus describes the level of fruitfulness as thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold.

This is not to be confused, as it often is, with 30%, 60%, and 100%. If a man invests \$100 and makes 100%, he will end up with \$200. But the man who invests \$100 and makes a hundredfold has made another \$10,000. Which would you rather have?

Further Questions For Discussion:

Why do you think God hides the truths of the parables from those with hard hearts.

What kind of heart do you think you have?

Do you know people who have received God's Word with joy then quickly fallen away?

Is your heart cluttered by thorns that prevent you from continuing to grow?

Is your life affected by the love of money?

What does it mean to be entangled in the affairs of this life?

What do you think a person can do to help their heart become good, fruitful ground?

Why do you think some people with good hearts produce thirtyfold, while others produce sixtyfold or a hundredfold?