

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (Parable of the Sower – Part 2)

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[0 : 00] So let's go ahead, go into our text, we'll read it, and get into it. Matthew 13, starting in verse 1, says, And then down to verse 18, Matthew 13, starting in verse 1, Before we get into it, let's pray.

Amen.

Amen. Amen.

He also is providing us a promise.

[3 : 52] Jesus provides a promise that there will always be people who will not respond to his message. There are those who will simply not accept it. But at the same time, there are those who will, and he promises that they will produce an abundant harvest.

No amount of weed-infested soil or untenable ground will be able to stop that. This is what we can expect from the kingdom of heaven. Matthew further expounds on these ideas, and he presents Jesus' teaching on the parable of the sower.

But before we get to the parable itself, Matthew sets the scene for us. At the very beginning of our text, Matthew mentions that same day. So it's all happening on the same day, and for good reason, because quite a lot has happened up to this point.

Before the event of our text, Jesus has performed a number of miracles, ranging from healing to casting out a demon. He has also engaged with scribes and Pharisees, and on a couple of occasions called them an evil, or on one occasion called them an evil and adulterous generation because they asked for a sign.

This work and this routine of Jesus' healing, performing miraculous signs, and teaching was more than just some attractional method. It was to prove his divinity and his authority. Matthew has recorded the day full of events to further validate Jesus' message and prove that he is the Christ.

[5 : 07] Matthew is saying that as difficult as they may be, Jesus' words have authority. Just before the events of our passage, and literally right before it, in Matthew 12, 46-50, Jesus' mother and brothers were seeking him, but instead of rushing out of the house to see them, he took the opportunity to talk about the nature of the kingdom of heaven.

In that text it says, Notice in that text both the exclusive nature of the response in addition to the visual imagery of separation.

Those who do the will of Father being inside the house, while even Jesus' own family are on the outside. Matthew is helping to prime his readers for this type of exclusive language that is about to follow.

So, let's pick up where the narrative starts in our text. Matthew records for us that, Our passage begins with Jesus leaving the house to go and sit beside the sea on his own.

In all cases, Jesus knew what was about to happen next, but Matthew does not tell us why exactly he does this in the text. From a practical standpoint, Jesus may have been seeking some time alone.

[6 : 30] He often does this to pray, to prepare for the next task, before making a decision, to grieve, and even just to rest. As is often the case, though, the crowds find him and gather all around.

In order to alleviate some of the chaos of the amount of people, and perhaps allow the crowd to hear better, he gets into a boat while the crowd stands on the beach. Although it is not mentioned, we see that later in the text, the disciples are able to ask him a question privately, so it would seem that they were able to join him in the boat as well.

Here is yet another distinction being made, this time between the crowd and his disciples. Lastly, one other thing to notice. After getting to the boat, Jesus does something significant. He sits down.

If you are an astute Bible reader, you may have noticed that this was something he does a lot before he begins to teach. He does this in rabbinic fashion, as was common for teachers of the day, as an authoritative stance.

If the signs were not enough, even the way that he sits expresses his teaching authority. The words that are about to come forth are profitable, so we would do well to listen. So let's do that. Let's begin starting in verse 3, and see what he begins to teach the people.

[7 : 41] Verse 3 says, And he told them many things in parables, saying, A sower went out to sow. This image would be quite familiar to the listeners, and they would have easily pictured a farmer utilizing what is known as broadcast sowing.

This is taking seed by hand and then scattering it over the surface of the field. In this context, the most common seed would probably have been some kind of wheat or barley, and that was very common in that region. Jesus then goes on to talk about where these seeds fall.

And that will be where we take most of our time, and how we will unpack the rest of our text. We're going to talk about, firstly, the soils. That will be our first point, is the soils. And then secondly, we'll have the interpretation.

We'll talk about the situations that are presented to us as they come, and then we'll discuss their meaning afterwards. So, point number one, we have the soils. Starting in verse 4, Jesus says, So, our first soil that we're going to talk about is the path.

The first soil will be the path. This is found in verse 4. See, these types of paths would have been all over the area. With much of the land being used for farming, these paths were used to cut between plots of land during travel, either from one farm to another, or just simply going through the country.

[9 : 18] They were well used, and the dirt on it would be well packed down, and pretty hard. The seeds fell on the ground, and do not find soil to be in good condition. It's too hard to penetrate, and so they remain on the surface.

This allows birds to come and eat. And in addition to that, Luke, in his account, mentions that not only did the birds eat, but the seeds were also trampled underfoot by some of those travelers. In other words, the seed has no chance to take any root.

So that is the path. Our second point under soils is the rocky ground. This is found in verses 5 through 6. Now, when you think of rocky ground, you might, as I did at first, think of soil that has just a bunch of rocks in it.

And this was not the type of rocky ground that Jesus was referring to. Rather, in that region, it was common that the bedrock was quite high and allowed for little depth of soil. This stone, probably limestone, would lead to shallow ground, where plants would have difficulty finding any actual depth, and the roots, therefore, would have a difficult time accessing nutrients.

What looked initially like a promising and healthy plant that were growing at a remarkable rate would be dead and withered away not long after the sun scorched it, resulting in a dead plant.

[10:30] This brings us to our third type of soil. We had the path, the rocky ground, and now we have the thorns. This is found in verse 7, the thorns. This seed falls into an area where there are competing plants to worry about.

It is less that the thorns grow around it and literally cut and choke the plant, and more likely that they would have been competing thorns around it and simply blocks too much sunlight, used too much water, or literally entangled its roots with the roots of the good plant.

The soil might have been healthy. It might have even been the best soil of them so far. But the thorn plants grew along it so that the good plant ended up producing nothing worthwhile. The case in all three of the previous soils and the commonality between them is that they had no yield or fruit.

Notice the progression of the three. The first had no chance to begin at all. The second started but withered away, and the last grew some but ended up producing nothing. A good harvest cannot be gained in any of these cases, and all three are going to fail to produce anything worthwhile.

Jesus mentions one other thing, and we'll see that in verse 8. He says, Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. That brings us to our last and final type of soil, and that is the good soil.

[11:48] The good soil. Unlike the other types, in this circumstance, the seeds fall on the ground in good soil and produce a crop. There are nutrients, water, sunlight, and no competition.

The plants not only grew, but produced a significant crop with varying levels of a hundred, sixty, and thirty fold. This is the main difference between that soil and the previous three. These produce a grain.

Jesus then ends the telling of the parable with the phrase in verse 9, He who has ears, let him hear. Stealing a bit from verse 10, the narrative continues, because the disciples seemed to know that Jesus was talking about more than just the forming practices of the day.

They ended up coming to him and asked him, Why do you speak to them in parables? This is a good question, as Matthew records that following this parable and the explanation that Jesus gives, then places three more parables before the crowd.

In verse 24, 31, and 33. And then ends in verse 34, or Matthew ends in verse 34, saying, All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables. Indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable.

[12:53] The disciples are curious why Jesus would use this method when it was clear the crowd would not be able to hear and understand. The answer seems initially pretty unfair.

Jesus tells them in verse 11, To you, that is the disciples, it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. TJ talked in depth about the purpose of parables last week, so I will not go in that depth today.

But to answer the disciples' question, remember, parables are the method that Jesus often employed to share the mysteries of the kingdom. To some, the knowledge of the kingdom was given, and to others, it was not. Both divine sovereignty and human responsibility are on display simultaneously here.

So, from a narrative perspective, picture the distinction that Matthew is displaying for us. You not only have the crowd separated from Jesus physically by the shore and by the boat, but the disciples, close enough to ask Jesus these questions, showing the distinction in knowledge.

Many of the people on the shore will not understand, and all the while, he is revealing to the disciples the true meaning. It is a visual portrayal of the parable itself in action, and begins to provide our explanation on the polarizing response that he is beginning to receive.

[14:03] We will see exactly how this parable explains the distinction more as we continue to our second point, and that is the interpretation. So, we had the first point talking about the different types of soil.

Now, we will get into the interpretation. Before we do, let's see how Jesus interprets the parable. Starting in verse 18, he says, this evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.

This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet 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.

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and it proves unfruitful. Before we get into the interpretation, I said we would, but before we get into that, first, notice that Jesus tells us the seed is the word of the kingdom.

Mark makes it even more clear by telling us that the seed that the sower sows is the word, and Luke simply says the seed is the word of God. This word is the message about Jesus Christ.

[15:13] He himself says in John 5, you search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness about me. So, the seed is the word that takes root in the soil.

The soil are examples of different types of hearts. When talking about the soil on the path, Jesus says the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. The heart seems to be the place that the sower sows the seed.

The sower is the one who is spreading the word of the kingdom to different types of people. In this case, the primary sower in our passage is Jesus himself. He is the ultimate sower, and as the word made flesh, are the ultimate seed.

Any believer who sows Christ's word is doing so in the sower role on the Lord's behalf. There is a sense that this is a timeless ongoing action of sowing and growing when he uses the phrase when anyone hears the word.

It implies a sower and then someone to hear that. And this word of the kingdom is referring to the time when Jesus is reigning as king on the throne, but his kingdom not fully realized. In this parable, Jesus has revealed for us some of the expectation we should have about the age of the church.

[16:17] So, with all that in mind, now let's look at Jesus' explanation about the different soils. And while doing so, take a moment to see how we might apply this teaching to our lives.

So, under interpretation, we have the first type, and that is the path. It's going to be very similar to the previous soils because they follow one to one. So, the first one will be the path, and that's found in verse 19. These are those who hear the word and do not understand.

There's nothing wrong with the message. The seed was not defective or something like that, but rather, the issue is the hardness of the person's heart. They are not interested in anything regarding the gospel message or of who God is.

They are the person who thinks the message to be foolish, all the while, they are the fool who says in his heart, there is no God. The person is prideful, self-righteous, and under the impression that they do not need God.

There's also a quickness in the word snatch that Jesus uses when he says, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. The evil one takes no chances and ensures that there is zero opportunity for a root to even begin to take root.

[17:21] This person will surround him or herself with teachers to suit their own passions and assure themselves that everything is okay, that they are an amazing person and no need for approval from some God. They have all they need right here and now, be it fame, money, power, comfort, praise, or even a type of self-righteousness.

Different though from the thorns, these vices serve less as a distraction and more the main focus. There's no second thought about the message at all. The word is given to them and it immediately just bounces off.

The gospel absolutely has the power to save them, but their heart is too hard to acknowledge their own need for a savior. There is a sense that this person is unconcerned because there's nothing in their minds to be concerned about.

The question for us is, do you give up on this type of person? I know that I am tempted to do so, but the reality is we are not responsible for the response of this person.

We are simply called to provide a faithful presentation of the message. God can soften any heart regardless of how packed down and hard the soil might be. Our work is to pray for the Lord to change their heart so that they might be able to hear and understand.

[18:31] Ezekiel 36, 26 says, and I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

It is God who does this work. Our next type of soil that we are going to interpret is, as you guessed, the rocky ground. This is found in verses 20 and 21.

The rocky ground is the person that has much initial emotional excitement. Notice the term immediately, it is happening quickly. And Matthew wants us to see the speed at which this person accepts the message. This response often results in happiness and joy as they accept it, as his or her feelings are changed by the word at a breakneck speed.

What a difference from the previous soil, right? Like, this is great. But it is short-lived. They have heard and even received but never fully understood. There is no true change of heart.

And if we follow the parable, it is even worse than we think, as the hardness from the dirt in the first type of soil, is nothing compared to the hardness of heart that we find in the rocky depths of this ground.

[19:39] Their heart is as hard as stone, with no marks of true remorse for sin. There is no repentance, no brokenness, and no humility. The thing that causes the person with rocky soil to fall away, as Jesus says, is persecution and trials.

Just as quickly as this person accepts, notice the other immediately, so immediately they accept and immediately they fall away, is this persecution. Anyone who accepts the word, though, we're reminded, is promised this trouble.

Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy 3, Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imitators will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

The problem is that they have not firmly believed, and since they have not firmly believed, they are not encouraged by the sanctification and growth that comes after persecution. 1 Peter 5 reminds us, After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

What causes the unbeliever to fall away as quickly as they came is what actually increases the faith of a true believer. This shallow acceptance that we're talking about is often the result of a shallow gospel presentation by those that may let a person know about the benefits of salvation, but fail to talk about the cost.

[21:00] They focus on things like being saved from hell or a vague idea of the love of Jesus, but no mention of repenting from sin, dying to self, or what Christ's love has actually accomplished. In Matthew 16, 24, Jesus tells us that if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever would lose, or whoever would save his life, he will lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. This is the type of heart that we're looking for. John MacArthur on this type of person says in his commentary, he has come to Christ for what he thought he would get in the way of personal benefit, but when confronted with the high cost of salvation, he will not pay the price.

He's built his religious house on the sand of emotional experience, and when the storms of affliction or persecution beat on his house, it crumbles and washes away. He has the foliage of a religious experience, but has no root in spiritual reality, and therefore cannot produce spiritual fruit, which, as Jesus goes on to say, is the only reliable evidence of true conversion.

Our question for today is, does your life show this evidence of fruit, or are you simply writing a religious experience? If you have no concept of dealing with your sin or of having a true desire to seek after God, to know him by his word, then you might know something about God, but do not know the salvation that this text is referring to.

Do you perhaps know others in this situation? Are you being open and honest with them about it? These interactions need to be handled with the utmost love and care for sure, but all these conversations must be guided by truth.

[22:34] If a life is not evidenced by fruit and it is hard to find genuine faith, the most unloving thing that you can do is allow them to continue believing a lie. Brings us to our next type of soil that's found in verse 22, and that is the thorns.

So we're back with the thorns. This person finds the world to be more interesting than the things of God. Perhaps in the beginning they grow well and there's some promise, but there are weeds and thorns in the picture that grow up with the plant.

Think of the man with many possessions and so turn back from following Jesus. But what started as a healthy shoot beginning to rise up starts to weaken and they become more and more consumed with other things.

Soon enough, they find that they have no need for the good word when they have the world to fulfill their needs. All the while, not knowing, those needs will never be filled by the world with true satisfaction.

The plant is all but choked to death. Their faith fails because they're caught up in the care of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. The true difference between the thorns and the path come from that initial response.

[23:41] While those on the path don't consider it long enough to make any difference, those in the thorns initially show promise for however long or short. Even the rich young man was willing to follow Christ until, of course, he learned what the cost was.

1 John 2 reminds us, Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life is not from the Father but is from the world.

And the world is passing away along with its desires but whoever does the will of God abides forever. At some point in the life of a person who has heard the word, they will come to a moment where they discover that being in the world and of the world cannot happen simultaneously.

The person must forsake one of the two and prove to be a true or false disciple. I want to be careful and I'm not saying that this action is what saves a person but I am saying that one who is saved will prove to be saved by not being of the world.

This soil can look a little bit different too. It can look like the anxious one from Matthew 6 asking, What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear? Throw in whatever question of anxiety in there.

[24 : 52] All the while not remembering that life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Our Heavenly Father feeds the birds of the air. He clothes the grass of the field so there is no need to be anxious about life and ask such questions.

Our Heavenly Father knows that we need them all. Jesus calls us to do one thing in verse 33 of chapter 6. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

My encouragement for this person is not to give in to temptation. Even if what in front of you might seem good or be an important thing to be concerned about if it pulls you away from Christ it is not of the kingdom.

So in the case of all three previous soils the path, the rocks, and the thorns the point is I'm sure that you've seen is that we see no fruit. The parable gives us harvest.

In all cases the seed was not able to take root, grow, or produce. In other words, they were not able to hear, understand, and believe. So, what would it look like for a seed to take root?

[25 : 58] Before we look at what Jesus says, let's first look at John 15, verse 5 says, I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I am him, he it is that bears much fruit.

For apart from me you can do nothing. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. In this passage from John, not only is there language of bearing fruit as being the sign of true discipleship, but also the exclusive nature of the relationship.

There's only those who abide in Christ. And who are those that abide in Christ? Those whose heart has received the word and accepted it. And what do those people look like? Matthew tells us, starting in verse 23.

As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, and another sixty, and another thirty.

This is our last type of soil under interpretation, and it is the good soil. The good soil. All of the other soils heard the word, but the difference in this one is understanding.

[27 : 01] This soil has been prepared by the Spirit and therefore able to receive the word. And this is not a work of that person or the soil. John 16, 8 says, and when he comes, that is the Spirit, that's what he was talking about, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

The Spirit is the one that does this. It is not because of anything more amazing or good that someone has done to receive this conviction, it is simply by grace. There are those who have received the word, these are the ones who have received the word of God and understood.

They not only know stuff about God, the difference, if you remember, is not knowledge, but commitment. This commitment produces joy and that produces action and that leads to proclamation. This is the sign of a true believer and what it means to yield fruit.

In Galatians, Paul tells us exactly what this fruit should look like. He says, but the fruit of the Spirit is what? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

This fruit leads them to become sowers as well, sowing the seed of the word of God and inviting others to true life. These are those who respond, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

[28 : 14] See, Jesus' kingdom came not through a conquering king like Israel expected, but as a baby born in a stable. He came not to be saved or serve, but to serve, to give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus Christ served not only in his long days of ministry, pouring out his life for the disciples and the people, but ultimately by dying on a cross for us. You see, our hardened or rocky or choked hearts are the result of sin.

We are all sinners before God in need of his grace. We are, as Paul says in Ephesians, dead in our trespasses and sins. We're following this world and carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind and by nature children of wrath.

This is the state of all humanity and this is the unproductive soil that Jesus is talking about. We could not do the work of becoming good soil on our own. It took God himself through his son to save us.

Paul continues in verse 4 of Ephesians 2, but God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

[29 : 15] It is by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not your own doing, this is a gift of God, not a result of work so that no one may boast. Christ is the only one who can change your heart and is more than capable of doing so.

He can change your hard or rocky or thorn-infested heart and cause the seed to grow, for he is the one that causes the growth. He brings forth rain and created the sun to rise. As a believer, we become his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

This is good fruit, works that will ultimately bring glory to God. If this is a new word for you, I would ask that you turn to Christ for the salvation of your soul. Do not let it bounce off, but take time to truly consider these words in the cost.

This is also an encouragement for Jesus' disciples and for us. It would seem that we may serve in different measures, some 100, some 60, and some 30, but it would also seem that we are called to be sowers in some capacity or another.

Jesus provides a promise that through the sowing that there will be those who truly believe. Think about that. What an encouragement. He is promising that those who hear word will accept it and believe.

[30 : 29] Jesus is promising that in this age we will encounter those who will not accept the message. This is for sure. He is promising this distinction and all of the difficulties with it. But by promising that distinction, he is also promising us that seed will bear fruit.

He is promising us that there will be those who hear, understand, commit, and also join in proclaiming, resulting in a great harvest of faith through the fruit of their lives. Isaiah 55, verse 11 says, For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return, there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out of my mouth.

It shall not return, I sent it. We are not able to discern exactly where all the seed will go. Only God knows and changes hearts. We are able to be faithful in proclaiming to as many as would hear it.

Jesus does not tell us that the sower was selective with the seed. Instead, he distributed in such a way that the seed would fall on a variety of different types of soil. What you might perceive as difficult soil or hard soil might not be so.

Only God truly knows a person's heart. 1 Samuel 16 reminds us, For the Lord sees not as man sees, for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. We are simply to go as far and wide as possible, spreading the good seed of the kingdom to all soil.

[31:50] For us, we are to pray that God would give us the heart to do that and for the different types of soil we encounter. The Lord is able to take that hard soil and till it. He can remove the stone that is under the surface and he can also weed out the garden.

Our job as a sower is to be faithful in the proclamation of the word, knowing that it is the Lord that gives the growth. 1 Corinthians 3:6 says, I, this is Paul talking, planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

I want to end with a quote from Spurgeon. He's talking about the parable of the sower in this. And he says, The preacher of the gospel is like the sower. He does not make his seed.

It is given him by his divine master. No man could create the smallest grain that ever grew upon the earth, much less the celestial seed of eternal life. The minister goes to his master in secret and asks him to teach him the gospel.

And thus he fills his basket with the good seed of the kingdom. He then goes forth in his master's name and scatters precious truth. If he knew where the best soil was to be found, perhaps he might limit himself to that which had been prepared by the plow of conviction.

[32:58] But not knowing men's hearts, it is his business to preach the gospel to every creature, to throw a handful on the hardened heart and another on the mind which has overgrown the cares and pleasures of the world.

He has to leave the seed in the care of the Lord who gave it to him, for he is not responsible for the harvest. He is only accountable for the care and industry with which he does his work.

Let's pray. Let's pray.