

XLIX. Matthew in Biblical Perspective
The Kingdom of God and the Word of God
“The Parable of the Sower, Part 3—An Essential Observation”
Matthew 13
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May 17, 2015 – Morning Sermon

We will start by looking at Matthew 13. This is the parable of the sower. Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23 says [1] *That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. [2] And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. [3] And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. [4] And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. [5] Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, [6] but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. [7] Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. [8] Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. [9] He who has ears, let him hear.”*

[18] *“Hear then the parable of the sower: [19] When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. [20] As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, [21] yet 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. [22] 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. [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, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”* The grass withers, the flower fades, this is the Word of God, it abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

I did some sermon manipulation here due to this being graduate Sunday and this study was supposed to be on the rocky ground but I’m doing the summation for this study and we’ll pick back up in the other soils in the following studies. So this is how this study on the sower will end. I want to do this by giving you one explicit lesson from the parable and then two implicit lessons from the parable. This parable comes as the first of seven parables that Jesus uses and Matthew records as the third of five of Jesus’ sermons found in this book. It becomes obvious to the disciples the wondering of why Jesus is talking in parables with the public because when Jesus talks with the disciples He doesn’t use parables. Perhaps Jesus is just using sermon illustrations.

The parables of Jesus’ ministry are much more than that for not only do they reveal He is the Messiah, but they also reveal the spiritual disposition of the hearer and then accelerates it. Psalm 78:2 tells us that the Messiah will come teaching in parables so when Jesus talked to the public in parables it was a fulfillment of prophecy. Also, those who do not have a heart for Christ become disinterested, distracted and could care less about it. Those who have a new heart are intrigued by the parables and draws them toward the meaning of it. It also excites the believing heart to want to know more and it

further drives the unbelieving heart away. Seven of Jesus' thirty two parables are focused right here on the Kingdom of God.

If you are a Christian reading this today you live in two kingdoms. If you're not a Christian you don't live in the same two that a Christian does. As a Christian you live in the Kingdom of God and that is where your citizenship is, from which we eagerly wait for our King and Savior to come. It is a Kingdom that is spreading to all the nations and it is that which is going to usher in the new heavens and the new earth. As a Christian you also dwell in one of the kingdoms of this world, particularly those here dwell in the United States. Wherever you live as a Christian you have two citizenships going here. The citizenship you have in this world is temporary. It is a physical kingdom with spiritual implications and it is passing away. The kingdoms of this world all pass away.

If you're in the Kingdom of God you also have another Kingdom. You have a King of Kings of this Kingdom. You have a King who went to the cross and died for your sins, arose, ascended and now intercedes for you and your redemption to bring you into the glory of His Kingdom when the King returns. That is a spiritual Kingdom with physical implications. So what does this Kingdom of God look like? Jesus decides to teach an essential lesson about the Kingdom of God in this world to those who are in it. These people are not like Nicodemus when Jesus says, "You cannot see or enter the Kingdom of God until you're born again." You are born again by the power of the Word and the power of the Spirit and you're in the Kingdom of God.

So what does that Kingdom of God look like? So Jesus takes the time to teach them about the Kingdom of God and He uses seven parables to teach it. I realize I am taking many studies on this one parable but I don't make any apologies for this for several reasons. First it is the first of the Kingdom parables. Number two it was interpreted by Jesus. Three this parable and its interpretation were in all three synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Four, and the biggest reason why is that Jesus told the disciples that if you can't understand this parable then you can't understand any of the rest of them. It helps to have Jesus interpret a parable and now we're learning how to interpret parables. The very content of this parable helps us understand all the other parables so I want us to get this right and take the time to walk through it together.

There is an explicit lesson that this parable teaches and then there are two implicit lessons that don't come from the parable but are consistent with the parable that are surfaced by the parable. After each one of those three lessons I'll also give you a takeaway with each one.

The first explicit lesson from this parable is the fate of the seed is determined by the condition of the soil. Jesus sets up this parable in this way. In the parable there are four ingredients – soil, seed, sowing and a sower. Three of the four ingredients do not vary or change. They stand as true seed, true sowing and true sower. He does this because the one thing that changes is the soil, the hearts. He gives four soils to explain the unbelieving heart and the believing heart. The seed is the Word of God, specifically the Gospel of the Kingdom which has made a way for us to be redeemed.

Jesus loves you. He met the conditions to love you for you. He satisfied the holiness of God and paid for your sins. He did that for you while you were yet enemies, helpless and hopeless. You needed Him but you didn't want Him. He wanted you but He didn't need you and He came to save you there on the cross because He loves you and

He has given Himself for you so that you could have everlasting life. That is the message of the seed. That is the Gospel of the Kingdom.

The sowing is the proclamation of that. How does that take place? It can take place in small group Bible studies where the small group leader is sowing the seed. It can take place in life of life discipleship. The discipler is sowing the seed. It can take place when you speak truth in love to one another for you are sowing the seed in each other's lives when you are doing that. It happens in the preaching of the Word, Lord's Day after Lord's Day. The seed is being sown in the exposition of the Word of God. As this sowing is taking place, the Sower, Christ is working through those different ways of sowing. When we are faithful to God's Word and surrender to God's Spirit something glorious happens. It is Jesus Himself who begins to sow the seed.

Romans 10:13–15 says [13] *For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* [14] *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?* [15] *And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"* People need a preacher. General preaching is when you share the Word and Christ speaks through you. Special preaching is from the pulpit of His church and Christ Himself begins to speak through the preaching of His Word. That's why He says that faith comes by hearing, not simply hearing the words of men and women but hearing the Word of Christ. Christ Himself speaks to our heart. The text says there is no variance with the seed, the sower and the sowing. It is good seed, good sowing and good sower.

Here are the soils. There are three kinds of unbelieving hearts – hard ground, rocky ground and thorny ground. None of them bear fruit. Jesus said "By this is My Father glorified that you bear fruit." So if you're saved you have a root. If you have a root then you have a shoot and you get fruit. The three other soils don't have fruit. The hard ground is not receptive. The seed just lays on top and Satan comes and snatches it away lest they believe and are saved. The rocky ground loves the blessings of the cross but they do not want the call of the crown. So when the sun rises and hardship and persecution begin because of owning Christ, they wither away and the text said there was seed but no root. The shoot had no root. Then there is the thorny ground. These people think Jesus is great and add Him to everything else they adore and love. They never root out idolatry with repentance. The weeds of idolatry grow up and choke it out and bears no fruit because there is no room to be utterly devoted and surrendered to Christ.

The good ground has a root, a shoot and fruit. Some bear fruit thirty fold, some sixty fold and some a hundred fold but the believer with the root is showing fruit. Jesus is telling us that the fate of the seed was determined by the condition of the soil. So the problem was the heart for there was good seed, good sowing and a good sower. The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. So here is the takeaway with this explicit lesson.

Since the impact of God's Word (the seed) proclaimed (sowing) is based upon the condition of the hearer's heart then consider two things here. One is that I should pray for the hearts of those with whom I am sharing the Gospel. Whatever situation you have to share the Gospel you should not only pray for that situation but you need to pray for those you will be sharing it with. "God, will You go before me and work on their heart? I can't work on their heart for that is impossible." In other words, for something to grow

with a root and bear fruit Somebody has to monkey with the soil and it's only the Holy Spirit that can do that. God delights in entwining His redeeming and sovereign grace with the prayers of His people.

I'd like to give you an illustration of this. Our Wednesday night sharing is part of sowing the Gospel with people. If you don't know how to conversationally share the Gospel please come and learn how to do this with our one verse evangelism class for it is so effective. The Wednesday night group is not only prepared to share Christ but the last thing they do before they go out is they pray together saying, "God, give us divine appointments. Go before us and give us the ability to see this divine appointment. Help us to be faithful at that moment." Divine appointments don't just happen on Wednesday nights but they happen at various times throughout the week in your life. Divine appointments are all over the place.

This one Wednesday night this group went to some apartments. They use this Briarwood survey and it ends with asking them if they can share about Christ with them. They knocked on this one door and a guy with a beer in his hand answered the door. They asked him if they could share this survey with him and he invited them in. He told them he liked religious people. They began to share with him and his roommate was there listening to them at the same time. This guy was very jovial and would cut in as they were sharing thinking he was funny. They kept patiently going through this with him while the other guy was listening and when they got to the end they said "Would you like to pray to receive Jesus?" The guy with the beer said "Are you kidding me?" There came the birds who took the seed away. The roommate says "I want what you have been sharing. Can I pray with you?" They prayed with him and he committed his life to Christ right there. There was a believing heart and an unbelieving heart.

The night wasn't over. The bedroom door creeped open and a young lady came out. In the conversation it became clear what had happened. She had left her mom and dad, gone to the bar on purpose to be picked up and she was by these two men. She was brought to the apartment and she knew what was going to happen next. She says to them, "God sent you here tonight. I want to recommit my life to Christ. Would you pray with me? I came here tonight knowing what was going to happen, wanting what was going to happen but I don't want it anymore. I want to go home." It was a divine appointment and that's the Lord working in the heart. That's the Lord sending His people to sow the Gospel. That's why we pray for divine appointments and for the Lord to give us the sensitivity to know the divine appointments.

One more thing on this, is if the fate of the seed is determined by the condition of the heart, that is the Word of God proclaimed, its ultimate effect is dependent upon the hearer's heart. Should I not work on my heart to be ready to receive the seed? When I'm going to be in fellowship with one of the believer's to share about Christ, shouldn't I be ready to receive from my brother or sister? I want to pray that my heart is ready for what is being sown in those divine appointments and opportunities. The condition of your heart will determine the ultimate effect of what they share. So I should give attention to the condition of my own heart to profit from God's Word. I'm not trying to excuse bad preaching for that's a whole other issue. Right now I'm taking into account good seed, good sowing and good sower.

Our forbearers used to have a Sabbath evening preparation to prepare their hearts for the receiving of the Word being preached the following Sunday. Fathers and mothers

would gather their children on Saturdays and read a text of Scripture or even the text that would be preached the next day so that they would be prepared to worship the next Lord's Day with the heart ready to receive the Word. I'm not saying we don't try and give good leadership but we don't want them to do for us what the Holy Spirit could have done if we had met with Him earlier.

I did something similar to this with my family on Saturday night before the Lord's Day but the problem was we had to get in the car the next morning to drive to church. Do you know how many worship services are lost in the car on the way to church due to all the arguing that went on between kids and parents? So when this would happen we started changing our times of getting ready for the Lord's Day. When we would get in the car to go to church, before any pinch would start taking place, one of the kids had to read the Bible, the other would pray and then the other would sing or we would all sing and my wife would lead us in singing. So that would take us to church instead of catastrophe or personal conflict. My point is, prepare your heart for the preaching of the Word of God or meet your brothers and sisters in Christ for fellowship or when you go to sow seed for the Kingdom.

That was the implicit lesson from the parable and now I want to give you two explicit lessons from the parable. These lessons are not in the parable but the parable raises this for us from other passages where Jesus taught. The first explicit lesson is while the parable assumes the seed, the sowing and the sower are true and authentic, we know this is now always the case in a fallen world. I wish I could tell that any church you walk into will proclaim the Seed (The Word) and there will be true teaching, preaching, discipling, fellowshiping and sowing that spreads the Word but I can't tell you that because Satan is too active in this world. Satan is doing a great work as an angel of light in pulpits all over America and here is the problem. When theological liberalism gets in it's not the true seed. Or hirelings get in the pulpit because they are there for the job and what they can get from the job so instead of having sowers that are sowing, there is no true seed, true sowing or true sowers.

That is why the second most important choice you'll make in your life wherever you are headed in this life, is the church you choose to be a part of. I'm not talking about drive-by church or show up on Sunday periodically. I'm talking about being a vital member of the body of Christ spiritually, physically, socially, relationally, functionally, emotionally and with my spiritual gifts added to the whole so that the body is functioning the way that it ought to. The first thing you look for is the Seed being spread. Is the Word of God being proclaimed?

Theological liberalism opposes everything essential to Christianity. It also still uses the same vocabulary so it is hard to spot. The first most important decision you'll make is what are you going to do with Jesus. Jesus doesn't leave you a lot of wiggle room here because He says "I'm the Truth, the Way and the Life." If you don't believe that you can't call Him a Good Teacher. Rabbi Duncan who C.S. Lewis hit it right on target. He said "Jesus doesn't leave room for that for He is a lunatic, a liar or the Lord." That is basically your choice here. Jesus came from eternity to bring you eternal life at the cross because He loves you so what you do with Him is the most important choice you'll make in your life. He loves sinners, takes them and saves them and grows them in grace. So I encourage to make that decision for Him if you haven't already and the next

most important decision will be how you treat Christ's church, the only institution in this world headed to the new heavens, and the new earth which He sanctified with His blood.

Some of you are thinking what about my decision for my marriage partner? You will learn how to choose that in a church that is discipling you and they'll teach you how to pursue a marriage partner. What is the relationship spiritually, physically, sexually and what's the purpose of the marriage? Why are we getting married? Is the world setting our agenda or is God's Word setting our agenda? What about my job? Why should I go to work? How do I work with a Christian world and life view? That church that you pick that is a part of your life, you're not assigned for the Holy Spirit leads you but when you engage you engage in the one that is going to help shape you so you can think Christianly. You want to live and love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind. God, give me the church that will fill my heart, shape my soul and lead me to think Biblically. That is a crucial decision that you make. If the Word of God is important and there are false sowers, false seed and false sowing then make that choice Biblically and rightfully.

So the takeaway for this lesson is, that I not only need to pay close attention to how I listen to God's Word but also to whom and to what I listen to. Let's look at the way He ends this in Mark 4. After Jesus gives the interpretation of this parable He sums it up with this illustration of a lamp in a basket and then He finishes the parable like this. Mark 4:24a says [24] *And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear..."* Let's look what He does at the end of the parable in Luke 8. He comes to the same summation of the lamp and the basket and then ends with this in Luke 8:18 which says [18] *Take care then how you hear...* If I understand this parable right I need to deal with my heart and I need to ask God to deal with my heart. Now with a good heart I need to make sure I'm in His church where there is good seed, good sowing and the Sower is being honored, Jesus Christ.

You need to pay attention to who you listen to because when it is all said and done the pupil becomes like the teacher. You need to pay attention to what you listen to, the content and not what tickles my ear, but what is faithful to God's Word and what goes to my heart, mind and soul. Then I need to pay attention to how I listen to it. So I need to pay attention to who, what and how. Now let's move to the third lesson.

The second explicit principle is good soil hearers not only receive good seed from good sowers to bear fruit, they also become good sowers of the good seed in order to bear fruit. I received an email from one of our members last week who asked me "Where do the sowers come from? Do you think we're good soils and good sowers?" I said "Whatever you do please come to hear this study." The parable doesn't deal with this but expects you to deal with it because the parable says when you have good soil you have a root, a shoot and fruit. How do you bear fruit? The good soil hearer becomes one of the good sowers of the good seed. You begin to sow the seed in the lives of other people. God works in your life that way.

Therefore I need to intentionally commit to a Gospel walk and a Gospel talk to sow the good seed everywhere. So do you get it? So where do the good sowers come from whom Jesus uses to give good seed to put into the soils of people's hearts? They come from the good soil because when the good soil has the root, the shoot and fruit it bears its fruit through its Gospel walk and talk to share the good seed as a sower in the lives of other people. I will give you an illustration of this and then I'll close in prayer.

I used to pastor a church in Miami, Florida and there were no children in this church because the average age was elderly. My three kids were the Sunday school class. It had about 50 people in its membership. When these people went to buy bananas they didn't buy green ones because it was a good possibility they wouldn't be around long enough for them to get ripe. When we would have a pot providence dinner they would go to the dessert first. They were wonderful people but they were pretty close to meeting Jesus. I hadn't been there hardly a month and in walks this guy who was 6 foot 7. His shoulders blocked out the sun and he had this small waist. Right next to him was this beautiful, gorgeous, Puerto Rican woman and they walked down to the front all smiles and sat down. After my sermon that was live meat and I was going after them.

I got to the back and shook hands with him. Somehow my hand got lost in his, it was so big. He had played professional football for the Miami Dolphins and the Houston Oilers. I said "Would ya'll sign the register for I'd love to pay you a visit." They did and I went to look at the register and noticed two different names but the same address. Coming from Charlotte, North Carolina that was a new experience for me but I wasn't dumb because I knew people did that but I didn't know many that signed church registers that way. I asked them how they found out about our church. He said "We were going to go to this church called Pinewood but somehow we got it confused with your church and decided to come in anyway." That kind of deflated me a little bit but I ended up sharing the Gospel with them and they both got down on their knees and committed their lives to Christ. It was glorious.

I asked them if they would be a part of a small group and they agreed to. It was interesting how the small group went to the study of marriage pretty quickly. I gave them four weeks and then I called them. Get them in the Kingdom now let's deal with the issues of sin. I got a call from them shortly thereafter and he said "We've been living together for nine years and now that we're Christians we don't think this is right." I thought 'Praise the Lord' for I did not want to go confront this 6 foot 7 guy. So they separated, we counseled them, and then they got married and every Sunday after that there would be sitting out in the congregation of the church two couples, four couples, and then six couples all about their age sitting with them.

This couple was Ted and Fran and they have let me share this. Ted was a Clint Eastwood aficionado where he could talk like him and everything. Ted comes up to me and says "Harry, all these people we are bringing don't know Jesus. Is it okay if they come?" I said, "I'll make a reserve section for them just bring them in." He said "I don't want you to be embarrassed but to get them here I say 'I want you to meet my pastor and I call him 'dirty harry.' So if you'll sit there long enough he'll make your day.'" I thought, I haven't thought about that as my calling card but get them here. God gave him a good heart and then they became good sowers.

Ted had a lot of concussions playing football and he has early onset Alzheimer's. We have stayed in close contact and I saw him last summer. He comes and goes. Every morning at 7 o'clock I would see him out there with his Bible open, reading and talking to Jesus like I remember him talking to Jesus. Good soil makes good sowers and they get a good life of growing in grace to meet the Sower who works in their life. Their life is not perfect but they are growing in grace. As we close in prayer take a moment to think through these implications, the explicit one and the two implicit ones and see how the Lord will speak to your heart. Let's pray.

Prayer:

This day you may be reading this and the Lord is speaking to your heart. He has been working in the soil. The seed has fallen and now you want the root for the root is Jesus. You can abide in Him and bear fruit. I would love to talk with you and pray with you. I would love to meet with you but right now you can just meet with Jesus. You can say, “Jesus, this is a first day of a forever life. I confess I’m a sinner. I rejoice that Jesus died for my sins. Jesus, now that You’ve died for me and risen, I now have a strong and perfect plea. Jesus, I come to You.” I would love to talk with you about how you can now walk with Christ and be used of Christ that through you others would receive the Seed in their hearts. You may contact me here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200. Father, help us to give attention to the condition of our hearts. Help us to bear fruit by being good sowers of the good Seed. Help us to be a church that is worthy to be chosen by believers, not because we’re perfect but because we would be committed to lifting up the Sower, Christ and to keep growing in our understanding the Seed, His Word and to sow it inside and outside of Your church. Bring forth a harvest, kind Jesus for I pray in Your Name, Amen.

Power Point

THE PARABLE MINISTRY OF CHRIST

The Parable ministry of Jesus not only reveals that He is the Messiah, but also reveals the spiritual disposition of the hearer and then accelerates it.

ONE EXPLICIT PRINCIPLE FROM THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

The fate of the seed is determined by the condition of the soil.

LIFE TAKEAWAY

Since the impact of God’s Word proclaimed is based upon the condition of the hearer’s heart...

- I should pray for the hearts of those with whom I am sharing the Gospel.
- I should while give attention to the condition of my own heart to profit from God’s Word.

TWO EXPLICIT PRINCIPLES FROM THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

1. While the parable assumes the Seed, the Sowing and the Sower are true and authentic, we know this is not always the case in a fallen world.

LIFE TAKEAWAY - I need to not only “pay close attention to How I listen” to God’s Word, but also to Whom and to What I listen.

2. Good soil hearers not only receive good seed from good sowers to bear fruit, they also become good sowers of the good seed in order to bear fruit.

LIFE TAKEAWAY - I need to intentionally commit to a Gospel walk and Gospel talk that sows the good seed everywhere.