

Access Granted
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Matthew 13:1-13

Opening discussion: “Once upon a time...” when we were preschool children (before iPads; cable tv; and video games) parents read their kids short little stories. **What were some favorites? Many of these stories weren’t just to entertain us or even to put us to sleep, what was their “hidden” purpose? Why did ancient people begin using this practice with children?**

In His earthly ministry, Jesus was the greatest teacher and a master storyteller. His “stories” are known as parables. Jesus’ parables used common circumstances to communicate truth in a way the people could grasp. It’s been said: “Jesus used parables to turn people’s ears into eyes. What they heard formed mental pictures they could see.”¹ But this wasn’t just a clever communication technique. The parables of Jesus had a deeper purpose.

The big idea: There are secrets of Jesus’ kingdom He only reveals to His followers. He used parables to assure these secrets were only revealed to true followers; those who “have ears to hear.”

Matthew 13:1–13 (ESV)

The Parable of the Sower

13 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.”

- In chapter twelve we saw that tension was mounting between Jesus and the religious establishment. In fact, they were plotting to kill Him. Still, He was drawing large crowds. This crowd was so large He sat in a boat to teach, no doubt because they were pressing in on Him.
- Here in chapter thirteen, because of the increasing friction; He began to teach in a new way. He taught in parables.
- This first parable about a sower, seed, and soil, is really about parables.
- Look at verses three through nine we just read. **If the crowd heard just those verses, how would they have likely reacted?**
- Jesus' twelve disciples were also confused but they didn't want to show it.
- Mark's version of this event tells us that later when they were alone with Jesus, the disciples asked what the parable meant (Mark 8:9). Jesus explained it beginning in verse nineteen.

Matthew 13:19–23 (ESV)

The Parable of the Sower Explained

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.”

- Most copies of the Bible call this the parable of the sower. **Does it really describe the sower? What does it describe?**
- Here we have the same sower; the same seed; but four different soils.

- Jesus says the seed is the “word of the kingdom.” More specifically, the message of the gospel. **So, what does the soil represent?**
- Four different conditions of soil to receive the seed; four different conditions of the heart to receive the saving message of the gospel.
- John MacArthur has written a great book on the Parables of Jesus and I’ve tapped into its wisdom greatly in preparing this lesson.²
- Verse nineteen: Within the field there were paths for the farmer to walk between the crops. **What would the “path soil” be like?**
- **What would make someone’s heart like packed down, hard soil?**
- MacArthur writes: “Unbelief and a love of sin have made the heart a dense, rocklike environment where truth cannot possibly penetrate, much less take root... The clear implication is that such people have deliberately hardened their own hearts. “They have stiffened their necks that they might not hear My words” (Jer. 19:15)... Indifference, insensibility, and a love for sin have made this person’s heart dense, dry, and impenetrable.
What’s interesting here is that Jesus is not describing atheists. ...the hardest of all hearts in His audience this day are the religious aristocracy—the top scribes and Pharisees...”³
- We don’t have to wonder about the birds. Jesus said they represent **Satan. How does Satan snatch the gospel from the hearts of people?**
- Illustration: if your toddler was crawling toward a knife you dropped.
- Verse twenty: Soil in “rocky places.” I’ve always pictured rocks in the soil. But MacArthur says no self-respecting farmer would plow and not pick out the rocks. He describes soil that looks rich but just below the depth of the plow there is a layer of rock. The roots can’t grow deep.
- **In verses 20 and 21: What is Jesus describing?**
- MacArthur: “They are the polar opposite of the hard-hearted hearers. They seem receptive. They show a keen interest. The new disciple’s faith will eventually be put to the test under the threat of persecution, by one of life’s calamities, or by the sheer

difficulty of maintaining the pretense of deep, abiding belief...if it's a shallow conviction with no real root, that person will eventually fall away...it proves definitively that in spite of all that apparent joy and zeal, the person never truly believed in the first place."

- **How can we help a new believer not to wither this way?**
- I have great fear of "false conversions" giving a false sense of security. We need to be sure those we lead to Christ understand the gospel fully.
- Jesus said in John 8:31 (ESV): "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples...." We need to help young Christians to learn to abide in Christ.
- In verse 22, "weeds or thorns." The Greek word is the same one used in the description of the crown of thorns inflicted on Jesus at the cross.
- **What does Jesus say the thorns or weeds represent?**
- The cares of the world and the love of money speak to a person who is so obsessed with earthly things they can't loosen their grasp on them.
- **Bible scholars: can you think of a New Testament example of a man who had this problem (Matt. 19:16–30)? What was his story?**
- MacArthur: "Nothing is more hostile to the truth of the gospel than love for the riches and pleasures of this world...Don't miss the point. Material wealth is not inherently evil, nor is pleasure. When properly prioritized, wealth and pleasure should be received with thanksgiving as gracious gifts from the hand of God, who is generous with such blessings."⁴
- The final soil in verse 23 is the simply the good soil that bears fruit.
- **How can you spot a real follower of Christ based on the four soils?**
- A soft heart that is truly seeking for answers; a follower that goes beyond emotion and enthusiasm to grow deep roots; a follower that is learning to abide; a follower who keeps the world's "goods and cares" in right priority.
- Finally, the sower is throwing seed all over the ground. **Why would the farmer sow seed in what seems like a haphazard fashion?** If you've ever planted grass you might have used a spreader. **What kind?**

- “The arc of dispersal might have looked indiscriminate, and to a large degree it certainly was, but the method had the advantage of covering large areas of ground with evenly scattered seed.”⁵
- Since the seed here represents the gospel, **what is the lesson for us?**
- Sharing the good news of the gospel isn’t about the talent of the sower. It’s about the condition of the soil. The key is sharing the perfect, pure seed of God’s word.
- Now that Jesus has explained this parable. Let’s go back up to verse ten to understand the purpose of parables.

¹⁰ Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” ¹¹ And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ¹³ 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.

- Quoting MacArthur again: “While the parables do illustrate and clarify truth for those with ears to hear, they have precisely the opposite effect on those who oppose and reject Christ... It was a divine judgment against those who met His teaching with scorn, unbelief, or apathy... In short, Jesus’ parables had a clear twofold purpose: They hid the truth from self-righteous or self-satisfied people who fancied themselves too sophisticated to learn from Him, while the same parables revealed truth to eager souls with childlike faith—those who were hungering and thirsting for righteousness.”⁶
- Back in verse nine Jesus said simply: “He who has ears, let him hear.”
- That statement reminds me of an old quote about reading: “The man who does not read has no advantage over the man who cannot read.”⁷
- Put simply, refusing to read is as bad as not being able to read.
- Jesus was saying, if you shut your ears to the gospel you might as well not even have ears.
- There’s not enough time in a Sunday School lesson to unpack all the theological implications of why God in His sovereignty

chose to only reveal the mysteries of His kingdom the way He does. **Other thoughts?**

- Here's a simple statement that I KNOW is true: God reveals truth to those who sincerely seek it because their heart has been prepared and their ears opened by His Holy Spirit.
- That not only refers to unbelievers who need to hear the gospel. I believe it also applies to those of us who are followers of Christ, and our on-going growth as disciples. Illustration: Craving more carbs – craving more truth!
- If I don't read and obey God's word I might as well not own a Bible. Are you a Bible student or just a Bible owner?
- If I'm so distracted by life that thirty minutes after I leave church on Sunday morning I couldn't tell you what I was taught, I'm TOO DISTRACTED by life. I might as well just leave my ears at home and let them "sleep in."

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Farmers pray for rain and we need rain for the crops to grow.
- Jesus told us to pray for more farmers to bring in the crops.
- It strikes me that those of us who are followers of Christ need to pray for good soil. You and I cannot create good soil. Only the Holy Spirit does that. But we can pray for Him to prepare good soil for the seed we sow.
- I don't believe this passage is only about evangelizing the unsaved.
- As for those of us who are followers who need to grow in Christ, I just gave you that takeaway. We need to get our fingers out of our ears, our eyes off the world, and on to the truth of scripture.
- Let those of us who brought our ears to church this morning hear what Jesus said.
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¹ Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore the Bible Adult Leader Commentary Session 13 Explore the Bible Adult Leader Commentary Session 13 Explore the Bible Commentary*.

² <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00WDJSX1Y/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?ie=UTF8&btkr=1>

³ The Parables of Jesus – John MacArthur – Nelson Books © 2015

⁴ ibid

⁵ ibid

⁶ ibid

⁷ <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2012/12/11/cannot-read/>