

MORE TO THE STORY: The Sowerⁱ Matthew 13:1-23

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, church family. Welcome to those of you that are guests today. Thank you for entrusting us with your Sunday. It is our prayer that our church already feels like home to you.

We love with our guests. We would ask you to text the keyword, TBCMP, which stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you text that keyword to that number, you'll be sent a link back that will take you to a form to enter basic contact information. It then notifies us, and we have the privilege of following up with you.

Or you can stop by Guest Connect located in the lobby. We have a team that would like to meet you and give you a gift as a way of saying thank you for being with us this morning. I will make my way there as well and I look forward to shaking your hand this morning.

SERIES OVERVIEW:

I want to invite you to take your Bibles and turn with me to Matthew Chapter 13. Today we are launching a new teaching series we have called, "More to the Story." We are going to take the remainder of the summer and work our way through some of the parables of Jesus. Today we are looking at the Parable of the Sower. Probably best called the Parable of the Soils. You'll see in a minute.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: We love stories

But you know, we all love good stories. Stories can be epic, inspiring, powerful, love stories, suspenseful, and evening riveting. But our hearts are captured by stories. In fact, our culture leverages our love for story by using them in commercials. Think about it. The best and most compelling commercials are the ones that tell a story and communicate ways we can be a part of their story. Financial planning companies like Charles Schwab have capitalized on storytelling. Apple commercials tell stories. Even car commercials tell stories. The best Super Bowl commercials are great because the stories they tell. Hollywood is built on telling stories.

And one of the things that I love about the Bible is the fact that it is filled with the greatest stories ever told. There are action stories, epic stories, captivating

stories, and even love stories all in the Bible. The person that said that the Bible is not interesting hasn't read the Bible! I have heard preachers say that The Bible is God's love letter to us. And the story of Jesus is the most powerful love story of all.

And interestingly enough, when God became a man in the person of Jesus, God's Son came telling stories. These stories are known as parables. There are approximately 40 parables recorded in the gospels. In fact, these stories, these parables, make up 35% of Jesus' recorded teaching. More than a third of our Lord's teachings are wrapped in stories. And in each instance, there is always more to the story than just the story.

In this teaching series, we are going to look at some of the parables Jesus told and examine the meaning behind them. So, I hope that you will make plans to be a part of each week of this teaching series.

Today we are talking about the Parable of the Sower, which is often called the king of parables. This parable is recorded in all three, what are called, synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is the first of the parables and it is the only parable where Jesus explains every aspect. So, this morning, we are going to look at the parable, the point, and the practice, or the application, of the Parable of the Sower, also called the Parable of the Soils. That is where we are headed this morning.

MESSAGE:

So, with that background, let's look, first, at...

1) The Parable.

When thinking through the parable, I want us to look at a couple of overarching questions. Questions like, "What is a parable? Why did Jesus teach in parables?" And "What is this particular parable?" So, let's first talk through what a parable is.

When our Kids Ministry teaches on a parable, Alicia, our Kids Minister, tells them that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. I like that definition. But also, the word, "parable," is a compound word. The word, "para" means "close beside," and the other word meaning, "to cast."ⁱⁱ It is a teaching aid cast alongside the truth being taught. It is to place something that is unknown alongside something that is known.

The second question we need to answer is, “Why did Jesus use parables as a teaching method?” He answers that question in our passage of study. We are going to get to the parable itself and Jesus’ commentary in just a minute, but I think it’s important to discuss this as it sets up our teaching series.

So, skip ahead to verses 10 to 13 of Matthew chapter 13. *10Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” [They ask the same question.] 11And 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. 12For 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. 13This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.* Now, what is this about?

Well, Jesus says that one reason He teaches in parables is to reveal and yet conceal.ⁱⁱⁱ In other words, It’s a tangible way to deliver a spiritual revelation. But it requires The Holy Spirit to discern.

Jesus chose this method because He is teaching about the kingdom of heaven. The parables are about the reign and rule of Jesus. But by this point in His ministry, He was encountering opposition. The religious leaders of the day were on a smear campaign against Jesus. They refused to believe Him as Messiah. So, Jesus says in verse 11, “It has not been given to them to understand.” And that they can hear the story with their ears, but not hear it in their hearts. That is to say that Jesus’ true followers will understand because of the work of The Holy Spirit, but the unresponsive to Jesus, will not understand.

The Apostle Paul talks about this in 1 Corinthians 2. Beginning in verse 12. He says, *“12Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, **that we might understand** the things freely given us by God. 13And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom **but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths** to those who are spiritual. 14The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is **not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.**”* That’s true about the parables. And that’s why, Jesus says, He teaches with that method.

So, with that background, let’s look at the parable, the story itself. Verses 1 through 9 of Matthew 13.

1That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea [The Sea of Galilee]. 2And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. The crowds begin to form so He pushes out in a boat while they gathered on the beach. The beach of the Sea of Galilee slopes up from the water’s edge. This would have been a natural amphitheater, a perfect preaching opportunity.^{iv} Verse 3.

3And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. 4And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. 5Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, 6but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. 7Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. 8Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9He who has ears, let him hear.” In reality, this is not the parable of the Sower as much as it is the parable of the Soil.^v The key thing we see here is not that the seed changed, nor did the Sower change, but the soil is what changed and it yielded differing results. The soil is the focus.

So, that’s the Parable. The second thing we want to look at today is...

2) The Point.

What is Jesus’ point in sharing this parable. Well, like I mentioned earlier, we have Jesus’ commentary that tells us the point of the story. Let’s look at His explanation in verses 18 to 23.

18Hear then the parable of the sower: 19When 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. 20As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, 21yet 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. 22As 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. 23As 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 point Jesus is making is that the condition of your heart is more important than the intelligence of your head.^{vi} And there are 4 heart responses that Jesus lays out for us. They are the 4 types of hearts, represented by the 4 different soils, that respond to the word of God. It is the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, that the enemy wants to snatch up and prevent people from hearing and it taking root. So, let's examine each heart response.

First, **the hard heart**. Jesus says in verse 19 that this kind of heart is represented by the soil on the pathways.

Fields in Jesus' day were set out in long, narrow strips, and the farmers would use the ground between the strips for pathways. Travelers would also use the paths as shortcuts getting from one place to another.^{vii} And just like when we spread fertilizer on our lawns, some of what was being scattered fell on the path or the sidewalk. The path was so hard-packed that the seed was not going to be implanted. And because it would just sit on top of the ground, birds would swoop in and eat up the seed. And Jesus says that is symbolic of the evil one, the devil, snatching away what had been broadcast. So, we have the pathway showing us the response of a hardened heart toward the Word of God.

Secondly, **the shallow heart**. Jesus refers to this as the rocky ground. In Galilee, there were many places that had a thin layer of topsoil and underneath that thin layer was limestone.^{viii} In that area, the seed would produce a crop, but the problem was the inability for the roots to grow into the limestone. That resulted in a crop that would dry up as soon as the sun came out. The problem wasn't its sudden growth, but the lack of depth. So, we have the hard heart and the shallow heart.

Thirdly, **the divided heart**. This is the soil that had thorns that Jesus was talking about. This was really good soil, but thorns grew up along with the crop and those thorns robbed the crop from nourishment. That resulted in the crop dying and the thorns thriving. Like the ivy in my azaleas at my house have just about choked them out, so does the cares of this world choke us spiritually. We have the hard heart, the shallow heart and the divided heart.

Finally, **the fruitful heart**. This is represented by the good soil. It not only received the seed, but the crop it produced flourished. Jesus went further to say that it yielded a crop 30, 60, or 100 times that what was sown. In first century, Palestine, the average ratio of harvest to seeds was less than 8

times.^{ix} So, just 10 times would have been considered a phenomenal crop yield. But Jesus said, no, the good soil produces way more than phenomenal results. It yields God-sized results.

So, Jesus' point is the heart is what matters when it comes to receiving God's Word. That's His point. So, we've looked at the parable and the point. Now, let's examine...

3) The Practice.

How does this parable apply to our lives? What are we to make of Jesus' teaching in this story today? I want to take a couple of angles that I think are presented in this story.

First, **the Sower**. Jesus doesn't identify who the Sower is. We know what the seed is, the word of the kingdom, or the Word of God. Some might say that this is strictly related to the gospel, and I definitely think that is a component here. But in Luke's account of this same parable, Luke 8, he identifies the seed as simply the Word of God. The Bible is the Word of God. Jesus himself, John chapter 1, is The Word that became flesh. So, I think this can apply to anyone that is preaching the gospel AND proclaiming God's Word. That's the Sowers. Our call as believers of Jesus is to be a Sower.

When you share the Gospel with a co-worker, you are sowing. When you lead a small group, you are sowing. When I preach God's Word, I am sowing. So, in my view, any believer who teaches and preaches God's Word is a Sower.

Now, the further point that I want to mention here is the encouragement to keep broadcasting seed, to keep sowing, to keep preaching. It is easy to get discouraged and focus on just the seed thrown on the path. But the encouragement of this passage is some of the seed we cast will fall on fertile soil. We need to pray for God to till the soil of the people around us that when we have opportunity to share Jesus, the truth we share might fall on good soil.

One of my favorite Bible verses is Galatians 6:9. It says, *"**And let us not grow weary of doing good** [and sharing the Word of God is doing good], **for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.**"* Beloved, keep sowing.

But the second point of application is **which of the soils are we?** What is our heart response to the sharing of God's Word? How do we receive God's Word?

Are we like the path? Do we have a hard heart when it comes to receiving God's Word? This could be those that have rejected the gospel; rejected Jesus as Lord as revealed in the Scriptures. The danger of taking that position is the longer you wait to consider the claims of Christ, the more hardened your heart becomes. You become susceptible to the enemy's deception and his blinding of your heart.

Or it could even be that we've allowed the distance from our conversion to result in an attitude of, "Oh, I've heard this all before." That is a posture of hardness that makes it difficult for you to receive God's prompting in your heart. Just like the pathways in Jesus' day were worn out by walking on them. Maybe you've allowed the years since your salvation experience to walk on your heart. Maybe you've grown bitter because you've experienced some kind of church hurt. Listen, don't harden your heart. Don't allow the doings of others to callous your heart. Remain sensitive to God's leadership and His prompting in your life.

Maybe you find yourself with a shallow heart. This is the result of only an inch deep soil on top of hard limestone. When Jesus got ahold of your life, man you grew fast. But then times got hard, and you began to wonder where God is. Maybe you've fallen away from church and neglected your faith. Maybe you're here today, in church, for the first time in a long time. Reality has marred your relationship with Jesus.

Listen, coming to Jesus doesn't mean a life of ease and comfort. No, that comes later in glory. In fact, Jesus said, "In this world, you will have trouble. That we can take heart, though, because He overcame the world."

What we need in times of difficulty are deep seeded roots. We need to see to the nourishment and depth of our faith. Sometimes we tend to think about this in terms of trees and their roots. Truth is that a tree's root system is typically shallow and wide. So, I want you to think about this in terms of an iceberg. Only 10% of an iceberg is above water. 90% of it is deep below the water's surface. I think God wants us to give such attention to our spiritual depth so that we can endure life's storms. This speaks to the necessity of discipleship in our lives.

Are you the hard heart? Do you have a shallow heart? Maybe, if you're honest, you have a divided heart. This is the heart represented by soil that has thorns that choke out the growth of the seed. It is a heart distracted.

In verse 22, Jesus says there are a couple of things that can choke us, distract us from spiritual investment. He says, "*22As 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 [literally crowds the word], and it proves unfruitful.*"

Do you get distracted by the cares of the world? Where anxiety leads to anguish. Maybe you're distracted by financial pursuits, the deceitfulness of riches, Jesus says. I know my heart here. It is so easy to allow possession to possess us. We get sidetracked because we seek the security of salary. And we often invest in those uncertain things at the expense of spiritual investment. And when those things go south, and they can, then we find our faith has been suffocated.

Do you have a hard heart? A shallow heart? A divided heart? Or do you have a fruitful heart?

The fruitful heart is represented by the good soil. This is the person that allows God's Word to invade their soul, and it changes them. God's Word is powerful and active, Scripture says, able to pierce our souls. And when you and I allow God's word to pierce us, it produces spiritual fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. That's how you know if you have a fruitful heart.

CONCLUSION:

I trust that the preaching of God's Word has stirred your heart this morning. I want to encourage you to reflect on which heart you have and allow God to do heart surgery. For some of you here today, that means coming to Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life for the first time. God is stirring in your heart, revealing to you that you are a sinner in need of a Savior. Have you been born again unto a relationship with Jesus Christ? If not, today can be the day of salvation for you.

For others, you're convicted by which soil you identify with. You need The Lord to till the soil of your heart that you can be sensitive to The Lord's lead in your life. That comes from repentance. Allow us to pray that for you.

Others of you are distracted by the cares of this world and you're in need of prayer this morning....

ENDNOTES:

ⁱ Works consulted in preparation for this message: David E. Garland, *"The NIV Application Commentary: Mark,"* Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1996; David Platt, "Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Matthew," Holman: Brentwood, 2013; John MacArthur, *"The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 8-15,"* Moody Publishers: Chicago, 1987; David Guzik, *"Enduring Word Commentary: Matthew 13 – The Kingdom Parables,"* published by Enduring Word Ministries, accessed online: <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/matthew-13/>; Mark A. Copeland, "The Parables of Jesus: The Sower [The Four Soils]," published by Executable Outlines, accessed online: https://executableoutlines.com/topical_series/parables-of-jesus/pa_03.html; Jack Graham, "Hearing with Your Heart," sermon preached at Prestonwood Baptist Church, published by Sermons.love, accessed online: <https://sermons.love/jack-graham/10857-jack-graham-hearing-with-your-heart.html>; Ray Fowler, "The Parable of the Sower," published by Ray Fowler.org, accessed online: <https://www.rayfowler.org/sermons/matthew/parable-of-the-sower/>; Nate Heitzig, *"Finding Happily Ever After in the Garden of God,"* sermon preached at Calvary Albuquerque, June 5, 2022, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/teachings/#/>.

ⁱⁱ Strong's Concordance, 3850, parable.

ⁱⁱⁱ Taken from Jack Graham.

^{iv} Pointed out by Fowler.

^v Platt, page 177.

^{vi} Quip taken from J.D. Greear.

^{vii} MacArthur, page 346.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Ibid, page 347.

^x Strong's Concordance, 4846, sumpnigó.