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Parables 02 The Sower and the Seed

Matthew 13:1-23

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Have you ever tried to share the gospel, or talk about the things of God with someone and they showed absolutely no interest at all? Have you ever seen someone who has enthusiastically embraced Christianity, gotten involved in the church, then for one reason or another became disinterested or even hostile to Christianity? Why is that? Jesus explained why people have different responses to the message of the kingdom in the parable of the Sower and the seed.

1.) Review-

- A parable is- a verbal picture that uses something familiar to the hearers to illustrate a spiritual truth. When we think of the use of parables our first thoughts are of those used by Jesus but there are also parables in the Old Testament.
- One Central Point (Not Allegories)- Unlike an allegory, every detail of a parable does not necessarily have a separate meaning. The details are only given to support the one main truth that is being taught.
- Context- The correct interpretation of any parable can only be understood by the immediate circumstances that prompted Jesus to give the parable in the first place.
- Not an actual event- The parables of Jesus were not actual events, but true to life stories that were made up to illustrate something He wanted to teach, or to hide what he was teaching from the disinterested multitudes that were following Him.

2.) The reason Jesus began speaking in parables- (Read Matthew 13:1-2)

- Chapter 13 begins with the words “that same day”. That’s because Jesus began telling these parables right after the events of chapter 12 where he was accused of breaking the Sabbath. Jesus and his disciples had gone through the grain fields picking some of the grain that was growing along the edges closest to the paths they were walking on. He wasn’t trampling some farmer’s crop, because that would have been unlawful any day of the week. Jesus and his disciples were picking the areas of the fields that was set aside in the Law of Moses as the gleanings for the travelers and the poor (Leviticus 19:9-10). The Pharisees criticized Jesus and his disciples because in their opinion they were breaking the Sabbath by working. Then Jesus corrected their misunderstanding about the Sabbath and told them about how David had eaten the consecrated bread from the temple which was unlawful on the Sabbath but was necessary, and appropriate in that circumstance (1 Samuel 21:6), and how the priests violate the Sabbath because that’s their busiest day of the week when it comes to work. Then on another Sabbath (cf. Luke 6:6) Jesus went into their synagogue and healed a crippled man’s hand in front of everyone to force a confrontation with the Pharisees. Many people then began following Jesus and he healed all of their sick (vs. 15). Then the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus (vs.14). When people began to wonder if this was the Messiah (the son of David vs.23) the Pharisees told the people that he was doing these miracles by the power of Beelzebub (Satan). Jesus responded to this rejection of the leaders of Israel by giving seven parables about the different aspects of the mystery form of the Kingdom of God.
- To hide the message from the uncommitted- Matthew 13:10-17 His disciples were puzzled by this new way that Jesus was teaching. Jesus began teaching in the same way that God told Isaiah to address the people in Isaiah chapter 6:9-10. Since the people had rejected God’s clear instruction in Isaiah’s time, God told them that they would hear His

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words but wouldn't understand them, and would see but not perceive the reality of what is taking place. Parables were given to people who had rejected God's clear teaching or were apathetic towards the word of God. Jesus also used hard sayings to chase off the uncommitted (cf. John 6:66 when Jesus said that He was the bread of life).

- 3.) The kingdom of heaven- The Jews were anticipating the Messiah who would establish an earthly Kingdom where the knowledge of the Lord would cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (**Isaiah 11:9**), and would rule the nations with a rod of iron (**Psalms 2:9**) in an everlasting kingdom (**Daniel 2:44 & 7:27**). Although this phrase "kingdom of heaven" is not found in the Old Testament they certainly had to have had some understanding of the idea that Jesus was trying to communicate to them. So what did Jesus mean by the term "The Kingdom of heaven" It is clear that Jesus is not referring to heaven itself or the coming millennial kingdom that he will establish on earth for 1000 years because sin and the opposition of Satan will not be present in either of these two places. The Idea of a kingdom does not primarily refer to territory. A kingdom is only such when a royal authority is recognized. France was once a kingdom but is now a republic. The borders haven't changed and the same people still live there. It is not a kingdom any more simply because the people no longer acknowledge the sovereign authority of a king. Jesus said that the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed outwardly, but is within His subjects (**Luke 17:20-21**). We can see by Jesus' own usage of this term in **Matthew 16:13-19** what he meant. He told Peter "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." A key is something that gives someone the authority to open something for the purpose of gaining access. Jesus did not give Peter the keys to the church as some Roman Catholics have suggested. Peter was not the leader of the early church or even the spokesman for the Apostles in Jerusalem, James was (**Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:18, Gal. 2:9**). Neither did He give him the keys to heaven itself. The keys that Peter was given was based on his recognition of Jesus as the Messiah and it was that message that was the key that Peter was given. These keys were a delegated authority. Jesus gave Peter the privilege of opening the door of the kingdom with this message to the Jews first (Acts 2:14-41) and then to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1-48) by allowing him to be the first to proclaim the kingdom message. Once those doors were opened, they remain open to this day. **The kingdom of heaven is the sphere of Christian profession where the sovereignty and authority of Christ is acknowledged by people during this church age.** That is this age between Christ's ascension and his return to the earth to set up His 1000 year kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is NOT the Church.

The Mystery Form of the Kingdom: In Matthew 13:11 Jesus introduces the mystery form of the Kingdom through parables. The Greek word that is translated "mystery" or, as it is translated in the NIV "secret", means a truth that had been previously hidden but is now revealed. The present church age is something that was not made perfectly clear to the prophets in the Old Testament. The Church is not a continuation of the old covenant that was made to the Jewish people through Moses, but is something new, made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers. This mystery form of the kingdom of God is clarified in the letters to the churches in the New Testament (Ephesians 3:3-6 & 9).

- 4.) The Parable itself- (READ Matthew 13:3-9) The people that Jesus was speaking to were familiar with farming. They were around it all the time. A farmer would hang a sack of seeds around his neck and he would scatter a handful at a time as he walked across his field. Since the seeds were not precisely planted, they would have been scattered on ground that he had prepared as well as places that were not conducive to growing a healthy crop.
- a.) The path- These were the foot paths that separated the fields. They were legitimate thoroughfares for anyone who was traveling. Over the years these paths became packed hard as concrete because of all of the foot traffic. Jesus and his disciples went through the grain fields on one of these paths (Matt. 12:1). Seed that landed on these paths were then picked up by the birds that would flock after the farmer while he was planting.
- b.) The rocky places- This refers to large areas, or slabs, of bedrock just under the surface of

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- the soil. There is a lot of limestone in Palestine. Most of the buildings are made from it. There are no trees or thorns and thistles in a field like this. The heat of the sun is absorbed by the rock through the thin layer of soil causing any seed that may land there to sprout very quickly. But when the soil dries out in the early summer months everything dies and there is no evidence of life left in that soil.
- c.) The thorns- This is soil in which the prior residents have not been removed. These prior residents will be in competition with the seed for the nutrients and moisture in the soil and never allow the soil to become fruitful.
- d.) The good soil- This is the type of soil that was properly prepared to receive the seed.
- 5.) The Interpretation- (READ Matthew 13:18-23) This is one of those rare occasions where Jesus gave the interpretation of a parable that he told.
- a.) The Sower- The parable doesn't focus on the one doing the sowing. Hardly anything is said about the sower other than the fact that that he sowed the seed.
- b.) The Seed- which is the message of the Kingdom is the same in all four cases. In **1 Peter 1:23** it says that we have been born again by the imperishable seed of the word of God. The seed contains life. **Heb. 4:12** says that the word of God is alive and active. The key to the different responses is the type of soil the seed is sown in which is described as the human heart (vs.19). The vast majority of the people who hear the word of God will not receive the good news of the Kingdom (the gospel) into their hearts (**Matt.7:13-14** Enter through the narrow gate...)
- c.) The Hard Soil- This soil represents a person's heart that has become hardened, unresponsive, and impenetrable. Every time a person hears the gospel they make a decision. A decision to accept it or reject it. Paul describes these people as having their consciences seared as with a branding iron (**1 Tim.4:2**). Their hearts have been hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (**Heb.3:13**). Jesus said that men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil (**John 3:19-20**) and will not come to the light because their deeds will be exposed.
- d.) The Shallow Soil- The one who received the seed in the rocky places represents the superficial hearer. The growth is only temporary. The emotions have been moved but the conscience has not been searched. There is a lack of depth. The word was received with joy, not repentance or brokenness over sin. There is unbroken bedrock which refuses to yield to the seed. When the baking heat of trouble or persecution comes up, any evidence of life in the seed disappears. Like the burning rays of the sun, the scorching effects of difficulty will either cause someone's roots to go deeper or it will destroy them. All Christians will suffer persecution. Jesus told his disciples in **Matthew 5:44** to pray for those who persecute you. In **John 15:18-20** he said if they have persecuted me they will also persecute you. In **2 Timothy 3:12** Paul said that everyone who wants to live godly will be persecuted.
- Arthur Pink writes in his book "The Prophetic Parables of Matthew 13" "...there is a natural "joy" but no deep conviction or true repentance. When a Divine work of grace is wrought in a soul, the first effects of the Word upon it are not to produce peace and joy, but contrition, humility, and sorrow. The sad thing is that today almost everything connected with modern evangelistic effort is calculated to produce just this very type of hearer. The "bright singing," the sentimentality of the hymns, the preacher's appeals to the emotions, the demand of the churches for visible and quick "results", produce nothing but superficial returns. Sinners are urged to make a prompt "decision", are rushed to the "penitent form", and then assured that all is well with them; and the poor deluded soul leaves with a false and evanescent "joy." And the deplorable thing is that many of the Lord's own people are supporting and fellowshipping this Christ-dishonoring and soul-deceiving burlesque of true Gospel ministry."
- e.) The Half Hearted- This is a heart that is crowded with competing forces described as the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of riches. In the parallel passage in **Luke 8:14** we find that Jesus also included "the pleasures of this life" to the list of things preventing people becoming disciples of His. It is soil that has not been properly

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prepared. It is a heart that has been unwilling to let loose of the things of this world and commit their life to Jesus. Some people come to Christianity for physical healing or to improve their quality of life. Others for the social aspect of a desirable moral standard for themselves or their children. Jesus said that you can't serve two masters (**Matt.6:24**). The problem is not with the world or it's riches but how we relate to them (**James 4:4**). Christianity is being born into God's family by faith in Jesus Christ, and having a relationship with God that has been broken by sin, restored. Just to say that you believe in Jesus as a historical figure won't get your sins forgiven. It's not just the words that save us because the devils also believe and tremble (**James 2:19**). The tragic thing is that these people don't realize the danger that they're in. True children of God will not live extended lifestyles of unfruitfulness. The only scriptural evidence of someone who has truly been born again is the outward manifestation of that relationship with God which is the fruit, or the natural outworking of the life that is in them. Some references to fruit in the bible are;

- **John 15:4**- Nobody can bear fruit unless they abide in Christ (obedience).
- **Romans 1:13**- The fruit of winning souls to Christ.
- **Romans 7:4**- The rejection of sinful impulses (Phil. 1:11- fruit of righteousness).
- **Romans 15:27**- Financial giving is referred to as fruit.
- **Galatians 5:22-23**- Fruit of the Spirit (Christ-like character).
- **Hebrews 13:15**- The fruit of our lips (praise).

f.) The Whole Hearted- This is the person who is receptive to the word of God and is prepared to allow it to produce growth in his life. There are differing degrees of fruitfulness that Jesus described (vs. 23) as some producing one hundred fold, some sixty, and some thirty. Each of us has a spiritual gift that we use to differing degrees of faithfulness. It is important to remember that we will be rewarded based on our faithfulness to the responsibilities we've been given (**1Cor.3:10-15**) not on our productivity. Some believers with less public gifts may be more faithful than those who get a lot of the public recognition.

6.) Conclusion- Whenever we share the gospel we will encounter people represented by one of these four types of soil. Jesus told this parable so that we wouldn't be discouraged by the results. Even Jesus Himself encountered rejection and a lack of commitment during His earthly ministry.

While there may be times that we have sown the seed in a way that wasn't conducive to producing growth, the seed of God's word will still accomplish a purpose (**Isaiah 55:11**). There is nothing wrong with the seed. The problem is in the heart of man.