

## The Parable of the Sower Mt.13:

### Introduction

We start a new series today on the parables of Jesus.

This is a good thing because Jesus taught predominantly with stories and parables.

But it is also problematic. Why?

Because by definition, stories, parables, need interpretation: you invariably wonder: “*what did he mean by that?*”

The truth is, it is easy to misinterpret the Bible; and that makes for a very dangerous enterprise, because

**misinterpreted texts** usually produce **misapplied** texts, and **misapplied texts** do to your soul what misapplied medicine does to your body.

The best thing about the parable I’m going to read is we know the interpretation, because Jesus gives it to us! God Himself in Christ provides the correct interpretation.

Before we get to the parable, we need to lay some foundation about parables in general.

Parables are stories standing for deeper truths. They are object lessons requiring reflection and thought. So Jesus said in Luke 8:18: “*Carefully consider how you listen.*”

Translated: parables interpret you.

How do people listen?

Basically only two kinds of listeners:

One, Those who believe they are autonomous in interpretation, they are the final authority on what it means. They stand over the bible.

Two, Those who submit to the bible as their external authority, they stand under it.

They are two kinds of these folks:

Those who want to understand the bible in order to gain some fashion of intellectual satisfaction.

Those who want to understand the bible so they can obey it.

Parables do not reinforce conventional wisdom as much as they introduce otherwise unknown truths about the kingdom of God. Virtually all of them refer to the Kingdom of God. God’s kingdom is a revelation of eternal realities, not innately obvious to fallen creatures.

Parables compare eternal realities to that which is familiar- making the unknown illumined by the known.

They are two types of parables:

1. **narrative**: they have a “once upon a time” quality
2. **similitudes**: a comparison made with a word story

Both types have universal appeal because they connect with our experience, and in one way or another lead us to a point of crisis or decision.

See if you detect in the parable I’m about to read

- \*a narrative
- \*comparing eternal realities to what is known
- \*designed to lead hearers to a point of decision.

Read the parable.

Here’s what’s obvious:

1. most people in his audience (it’s huge because many are so drawn to the notion of the reign of God breaking in) know something about the joys and struggles of farming
2. the drama is easily imagined; fields aren’t perfectly manicured, start with the road and move out into the good soil.
3. the focus is not on the sower but rather on the seed,
4. the focus of the seed is on where it falls- four types of soil, and correspondingly, four types of growth.

Remember, the best aspect of this parable? Jesus interprets it for us!

Before Jesus interprets the parable, he responds to a question from His disciples, the inner twelve handpicked for His mission. They ask a reasonable, expected question: *why do you teach in parables?*

We might have guessed that His answer would be something like this:

I’m a Jew; we think principally in terms of pictures, not like the Greeks, in propositions. In rabbi school, they taught us to be vivid, to be interesting, that stories are very effective means of communicating truth.

That would all be true. But that’s not how Jesus answers.

Jesus answers in terms the OT sets out. Is. Prophesied about the people of Jesus’ day, the Jews,

You’ll hear the message of the kingdom, but won’t get it.

V.15

That Jesus taught in parables reveals two things:

1) a judgment on the hardness of heart of the Jews of his generation. The elusiveness of parables, that you don't naturally get it, proves their hearts are hard. The parables function to crystallize opposition to Jesus already formed in their hearts.

2) It also proves election. None of us will ever get the kingdom unless God opens our eyes. Jesus taught the disciples plainly because he called them aside.

D.A. Carson summarizes: Jesus teaches in such a way as to harden those already hard of heart and offended by the gospel, and to enlighten his disciples.

Most people respond in two ways:

1) You may object and protest: wait a minute, I want to understand. Don't keep spiritual truth from me!

2) You may also humbly wonder: what must I be like in order to get the kingdom? To what kind of heart does the kingdom come? What should I ask God to do for me so I can embrace the king and his message?

Church Father Anselm: Faith is seeking understanding to embrace the truth.

That is exactly the question the parable answers. That's why it comes first for Mathew. This parable reveals the key to understanding all the parables. So Mark 4:13 says: "*Do you not understand this parable? And how will you understand all the parables?*"

Notice how the parable tacitly asks you not to be the sower, or the seed, but to come out in the field and watch the seed (message of the kingdom) be scattered, watch on what soil (heart) the seed lands, and wonder, is that what my heart is like?

Proud: Nobody tells me what to do or believe! I'm my own person! This is America; I have a right to my own opinion.

Fearful: If I believe that, what will happen to me?

Stubborn: If I believe that I'll have to stop certain things, and I can't give them up.

Humble: God is really the only one who can help me understand.

The parable is for everyone in this room; all of us have some contact with the kingdom of God. The most critical question you could ask yourself is: what is my heart's relationship to the message of the kingdom.

Is it advice: be a good person, or an announcement: God's accepted you!

Is Jesus a personal trainer, or is he salvation itself?

Here's Jesus' interpretation:

Read v.

There are, according to Jesus, four types of people who have contact with the kingdom of God:

**1. The casual**

Here are folks who in one way or another are exposed to the message. Because their hearts are stony the seed is plucked up by Satan. In Rabbinic literature birds were symbols of the devil. He hates it when we believe the truth. He always promotes death and lies.

Ultimately it isn't the fault of the devil; it's ones hard heart, there's no place for truth in it. No vacancy, packed to the gills with whatever.

**2. The Shallow**

Notice that there is a good start- received the word with joy. That's right! But the heat of trials reveals our motives: I was in it for me, to get God to serve me. Unless our roots go deep we'll find God unattractive, unfair.

**3. The Worldly**

These folks apparently begin to grow, but are deceived by wealth, pleasures and worries. Their hearts become divided. Psalmist says: Unite my heart to fear thy name. If I regard iniquity you won't hear. This person doesn't take the ravages of indwelling sin seriously enough. He stops the war with passions. You must ask constantly, what controls me?

**4. The Responsive**

The seed, the word of God, is alive, it comes in to the heart and the Spirit uses it to produce fruit. God looks upon the field of your labors for Christ and delights.

One last observation. The focus of the parable is on the ground. Look at your heart. But Jesus calls it the parable of the sower. Why not call it the parable of the soils, or the seed. Wouldn't those be more legitimate?

I'm guessing. He does so for at least two reasons.

- 1) the parable does illustrate the ministry of Jesus kingdom: the word of it is sown everywhere, and responses vary. Just because it doesn't take the world by storm doesn't mean it isn't true. The kingdom advances slowly.
- 2) The sower chooses the seed he sows. The seed is the word of the kingdom. What is that? It's the word of Christ's grace, his love which comes to the needy. The kingdom is the intervention of God in history, starting the renewal of the cosmos, reversing the effects of the curse. God starts with people.

A friend of mine, Fred Archer, put it this way:

Everything God is doing is to lead us to the light, not the woodshed.