

Matthew 13:1–23

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[0 : 00] Matthew 13, verses 1-23. That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea, and great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down.

And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying, A sower went out to sow, and as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them.

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. But when the sun rose, they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered away.

Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

He who has ears, let him hear. Then the disciples came and said to him, Why do you speak to them in parables? 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.

[1 : 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. 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. Indeed, in their case, the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says, You will indeed hear, but never understand. And you will indeed see, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear. And their eyes have closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn.

And I would heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous people long to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Hear then the parable of the sower. 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.

[2 : 22] As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy. Yet he has no root in it himself, but endures for a while.

And when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. 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.

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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. There is an educational theory that makes special use of sensory learning.

The senses, the five senses. And the advocates for sensory learning hold that if you can engage sight, sound, touch, hearing, that you actually increase the learner's perception of the truth that's being communicated.

[3 : 59] That understanding is increased when one's senses are involved in the process. That comprehension is elevated in ways of making use of all the senses.

I was thinking this week then that Jesus must have been an early advocate for sensory learning.

It wasn't too long ago in the text that we saw him using sight, healing the blind in order to make the spiritual truth on seeing and perceiving.

Just a couple of weeks ago, we saw him heal a man who was mute, and suddenly he was able to speak forth sounds.

Today we see him emphasizing the ear, the auditory nature responsiveness of hearing in order to make a point.

[5 : 04] It seems that Matthew is disclosing to us that Jesus is communicating spiritual truths to us through these tangible sensory experiences of sight and sound.

speech. I don't know if you caught it, but just take a look. I mean, it's overwhelming in the verses that were just read, the sensory images of hearing.

Verse 9, He who has ears, let him hear. There it is again, verse 13. They do not see, and hearing, they do not hear.

Verse 14, You will indeed hear, but not understand. Verse 15, With their ears they can barely hear.

Verse 16, But blessed are you for your ears, and they hear.

Again, verse 17, There were others who wanted to hear what you hear and did not hear it. Verse

18, When anyone hears the word. Verse 20, This is the one who hears the word.

[6 : 22] Verse 22, The one who hears the word. Again, verse 23, This is the one who hears the word. Do I, Well, let me put it this way. Can you hear me now?

It's all about hearing. The textual emphasis of the story of the sower and the soils is shouting to you. And wanting you to hear. It's interesting then that this sensory aspect of what we hear when something is being communicated is attached in this text to a particular kind of discourse.

Don't let that scare you. There's a particular kind of speech where this hearing comes into play. You can see it right there, verse 3.

And he told them many things in parables. So parables are the choice kind of speech that would emphasize hearing.

[7 : 42] Even in this, Matthew is developing things. Chapter 5 through 7, there was a long discourse, but we actually call it the Sermon on the Mount. It was a sermon.

Sermons have a certain impact on listeners. Chapter 10, though, it moved from sermon material to speeches, to giving all these instructions.

A speech has a certain way of communicating to you. But now, in this third major movement in Matthew's Gospel, he moves away from sermonic material, from speeches that instruct, to parables or stories.

Because stories need to fall upon your ears. It's his method of choice. So what is a parable? What is a parable?

I was helped this week by listening to one of my colleagues, Kevin Walker, and an instruction he had given on parables. But it's defined something like this. It's a story that's drawn from the common fabric of daily life that is meant to arrest the mind of the hearer on a matter of spiritual significance.

[9 : 00] Let me break that down again. A parable is generally considered to be a story drawn from common everyday life that should arrest the hearer on a matter of spiritual significance.

That's what Jesus is doing in this chapter. That's what this sermon is meant to do for you. You're to hear something from God that has spiritual significance.

They're all present in this story, aren't they? One to nine could simply just be called the parable. It's a story. I love the way it just kind of rolls out in verse 3.

And he's saying, a sower went out to sow. It's a story. But it's a story drawn from the common fabric of daily life. This idea in the story of seeds that are falling on ground is really reminiscent of an agrarian culture that we're unfamiliar with, but that they in their day would have known.

And not only that, but the third characteristic of a parable is right there in verse 9. It's probably the most significant one. The story drawn from everyday life is meant to arrest your mind on something of spiritual significance.

[10 : 27] How do you know that? Look at verse 9. He who has ears, let him hear. This is strong language. I'm not just telling you a once upon a time thing for your entertainment.

No, I'm telling you something significant for your spiritual welfare. It's Jesus' preferred method, really.

Seven times in this chapter alone, there are parables. We're going to hit one today and six next week. It's his preferred method of disclosing and concealing truth.

Sixty times in Matthew, Mark, and Luke alone, people have indicated, oh, that's a parable. So Jesus was telling stories drawn from everyday life to impress on the hearer's mind something incredibly significant.

Why? Why parables? Why this kind of speech? Well, the disciples wondered it too. You can see it right there in verse 10. The disciples came to him and said to him, why do you speak to them in parables?

[11:39] Why parables? Why stories? Interestingly, why do you like preachers who tell stories? If I was to have opened with an illustration about one of my children, you would have probably listened with more rapt attention than me opening with a line on some educational theory.

If I had a dog and I don't, and I won't, but if I did, you could already see how you would come to me through the use of story.

Preachers use stories to illustrate truths. Preachers use stories so that we can be easily understood, so that the truths we convey find their way to a kitchen table.

What's really fascinating about Jesus' use of stories is it turns our contemporary use of them on its head. He doesn't always tell stories to be more easily understood.

I mean, that's what I take from his answer to the disciples. You can take a look at it yourself. Verse 11, he answered them, this is why, to you it's been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

[12:58] Verse 13, this is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Verse 16, but blessed are your eyes, for they see your ears, for they hear.

Truly, righteous people long to see what you see and didn't see it, long to hear what you hear and did not hear it. Evidently, according to Jesus, he uses parables because it is a form of speech that has the unique ability to showcase opposite outcomes.

That's why he did it. He did it because he wanted one form of speech that would fall upon people in two diametrically different ways.

In other words, he chose parables because they conceal things and reveal things. He chose parables because if you had the launch codes, you could uncover things of spiritual truth, but without the launch codes, it's just going to go by you and it'll be covered forever.

He chose parables to shroud truth, to put a veil on things, as well as to remove all doubt on things.

[14:17] He chose parables to withhold things from those who were rejecting him and hand over things to those who were accepting him.

I was trying to think of an illustration on this one thing that has two different things. Have you ever watched these, well, they're usually law shows.

I don't, there's probably a genre. And somebody is in a room being interviewed on whether or not they're going to be arrested and there's a mirror on the wall and you can see them looking at the mirror and they can see themselves and you, the viewer, know exactly this is a, what's called a one-way mirror or a two-way mirror.

You already know that the people that are in the show that are not in the room asking the questions are actually behind the mirror, but from them, it's like a window.

They can see into the room. So a one-way mirror is a singular object that demonstrates two very different outcomes.

[15:31] It's a mirror to some. They can't really perceive anything beyond themselves, but it's a window to others that opens up a world beyond them. That's what parables do.

They function like that mirror. They not only do that, but they have the power to assess understanding.

We just had a little teddy on the platform here. Infant. Most infants go through something at about the one-month mark. I think it's called something like an audiology assessment.

Let's put it this way. It's a hearing test. And you'll have the audiologist will put ear cups on the infant, and then they will attach sensors to the forehead and other places, and then there will be a small clicking sound that they'll play, and the senses will indicate whether the child has hearing or not.

That's what parables do. Parables. Parables, in a sense, are like that modern-day audiologist. It can diagnose your hearing.

[16:50] That's what I'm doing today in this sermon. This sermon will diagnose your hearing on matters of real spiritual significance.

So given all of that, I want you to hear me on this. Your willingness to listen to Jesus on the kingdom will determine determine the outcome of your life.

Listen to me. Our hearing affects our eternal outcome.

And the parable will, in and of itself, demonstrate opposite effects.

And you just thought you were coming to church. Which is why I want to spend the time on this parable itself. I mean, verses 1 to 9 gives us a parable.

[18:11] Verses 10 to 17, of course, give us why parables. But the real deal for you and for me is what is the parable?

And that's verses 18 to 23. How are we supposed to hear this parable? Well, Jesus tells them, this is what he said. 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. I'm going to call this soil, the unyielding soil.

It's this hardened, beaten down path. Evidently, the seed in the parable was to signify the word on the kingdom.

that God's rule has now come in the person of Christ that required our repentance and belief. That the world that you and I live in is actually a world in which there are two kingdoms.

[19:25] There's the kingdom of the world and there's the kingdom of Christ. And Christ is actually the fulfillment of the promises who entered into the world so that the rule of God would break in and he would actually deliver you from the kingdom of darkness.

And so when that word comes forth from Jesus repent and believe in the gospel the kingdom of God is at hand the kingdom of heaven is here the soil the soil represents certain persons the soil possibly represents you.

the evil one comes and snatches it away an unyielding soil a beaten down path an impenetrable person I mean think of it think of the people that they are without the slightest bit of opening to receive a word on the rule of God coming in the person of Christ these people the surface of their soul is sealed off from any seeds that would bring forth life they will not allow the life of God to enter they're quite happy with life as they have it they are they are hardened they are encrusted they are like the desert that even turns back the rains from entrance can you hear me now what's the outcome for that person what what's the outcome for that man or that woman or that child who says I've been to church I've heard about Jesus listen I'm indifferent I've got no interest I'm not willing to consider it I'm not open minded what's the outcome you can see it right there the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart or in verse or the parallel in this parable itself some seeds fell along the path and the birds came and devoured them that's the outcome someone being devoured did you ever watch Hitchcock the birds I used to have all my children watch the Hitchcock films because I thought it taught you how to listen well to a sermon you think I'm joking but Hitchcock actually makes you walk along with them until something's actually revealed often when you're watching a Hitchcock film you're really wondering in suspense what is going to happen and in some ways sermons ought to do that too they ought to be building along the way not answering everything up front but what you had in that movie that terrifying glorious movie was birds suddenly acting inappropriately and devouring persons they were like large dark ravens who treated people as they would a corpse on a battlefield they suddenly begin to dive bomb they're in assault mode there's a plucking out even of the eyes and Satan is very much like a dark raven he's a wraith who roams the world seeking whom he can devour if you don't take time to at least listen to Jesus on the kingdom if you close yourself off this is your end devoured the second soil is not in a sense unyielding it's just unfit it's unfit to receive the word on the kingdom do you see it there you can see it in verse 20 as for what is sown on the rocky ground this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy 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 or she falls away across the column over in verse five these are like seeds that fell on rocky ground where they did not have much soil and immediately they sprang up since they had no depth of soil but when the sun rose they were scorched and since they had no root they withered away

[24:31] I just love the way that language soil not deep soil no root in them this rocky soil you start throwing seed on rocks you're scattering on ground that's unfit for growth that's why everybody who farms clears the field of rocks first I went to grad school in Boston and they had all those four foot high stone walls that marked property lines well they weren't just surveyors trying to mark out their property they were farmers trying to clear soil that would actually receive seed and in order for that to happen they had to remove the rocks but these individuals these men these women I pray no one in this room isn't just unyielding but there are other people that just unfit unfit what is it that makes someone unfit well pun intended it's people who like life on the rocks people who want to live

on the edge people that don't have much beneath them no root nothing tying you down you just want freedom freedom and for the person who just wants autonomy and freedom and the ability to go live and do what

I want and stand in the crevices of life well when things difficult come along guess what happens that sun beats down upon you like the difficulties of life and it begins to scorch you you see the unfit ones are scorched and they wither that's the result when trouble comes when trouble comes they're gone I think of the sweltering summer sun can you hear me now you don't want to be unfit you don't want to hear Jesus on the kingdom of God and go you know what it's a decent thing it's a joyful thing but I kind of like doing my thing I don't want to be tied down to that third soil is right there isn't it it's not unyielding or unfit it's uncultivated take a look at that as for what was sown among the thorns verse 22 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 or verse seven other seeds fell among the thorns and the thorns grew up and choked them see an uncultivated life is a life known by the the influx of thorns weeds the hallmark of this person is their unwillingness to cultivate their own life from the things in life that gain hold on them these are undisciplined men and women who hear the word of Jesus say that's great

I'm in but I'm not in letting him in my garden I'm not ridding my garden of things that are a life that's not in accord with that godliness this is the classic person who wants to have a foot in both worlds yeah I like Jesus and I won't admit it to you but I got some other things I like too and these things over here I'm not I'm not tending that soil I'm not fighting against that world I'm just gonna let them both grow up I'm gonna have Jesus and everything I want fascinating this uncultivated soil these are men and women who allow compromised pursuits to go uncontested got any of those got any of those in your life compromise pursuits that you allow to grow uncontested well what happens to that person well eventually the cares of life and the deceitfulness of riches strangle your garden your soul that would have flourished otherwise you become unfruitful the cares of life are the anxieties of life the anxieties of life the let me put it to you this way when you get in a really tough spot you're either gonna ask God to help you and you're gonna wait on him or you're gonna just make your own way out you're gonna resolve your anxieties by creating for yourself an outcome that's not necessarily in accord with

God's world you're gonna find yourself against the wall and you're gonna go there's nowhere for me to go but I'm gonna go there even though you know that that anxious pursuit is not in accordance with God's will for your life am I talking to anybody here this is what happens with the cares of life we begin to chart our own way we grab hold of the nettles and the thorns rather than uprooting them and resting in God we just allow those things to be the thing that anchors us holds us keeps us or the deceitfulness of riches if I could just get enough money it's gonna solve my problem you know I was in the store yesterday buying a bag of ice at the BP on Lake Park had a little party going last night needed to buy a big bag of ice one of my guests to have a cold drink when they arrived I went in the BP I got my big bag of ice and I looked over at the line and there were two checkouts and one of them had like nine people in it and the other didn't have anyone I thought what's going on is everyone getting in one line and then when they get to the front they can go to two different people and then the one that was all there by themselves waved me over and I went up and I realized I could buy my ice right away because you know what those nine people were waiting on lottery tickets now maybe you were in that line hey believe me I got family that plays the lottery I think they're crazy I don't I don't think you should but that's a talk for another time but let's back up off that example we do think do we not that if I just had enough money I could meet the anxieties and cares of life we do I still do we all fight it but what

[32 : 18] Jesus is saying is that if you think money is going to solve your issue you're in for a you're in for a real problem I know people that have all the money in the world that could solve any problem they want and their lives are off the rails it's no it's no end all to life it chokes you that's the outcome that's the word choked let me put it to you this way you suffer the effects of strangling it suffocates you it deprives you of air it constricts your ability to take in life from

God you end up suffering death by asphyxiation so those are the three can you hear me now how you hear affects your life outcome and when the word of the kingdom goes out all of these things are in play I'll be honest with you thank God that sometimes you can find yourself at one point in your life unyielding at another point in your life you moved to becoming unfit maybe a little later in your life you were uncultivated but maybe today maybe today you move and become a different soil

I don't want to consign you to the soil of your present condition that would have been no hope for any of us if we were all consigned to our present condition isn't that right friends isn't that right for all of us haven't we all been unyielding tell me who hasn't been unfit

I'm not talking to anyone who's not uncultivated but again now today we hear the word of the kingdom and we did it in a story a parable I mean Jesus is really fascinating I think he likes parables in some sense because they're so palatable I mean you haven't walked out on me or this text right you imagine if I had been like a different kind of speech not a parable but imagine if this was in apocalyptic language imagine if all these seeds of birds and rocks and strangling weeds well if you want that kind of shock value you got to read revelation revelation 19 the outcome for the unyielding all the birds these are not stories these are not sermons these are not speeches these are signs in revelation 19 the unyielding eventually will meet an end where the birds are called to gather for the great supper and they will eat the flesh of the kings and the flesh of captains and the flesh of mighty men both slave and free both small and great those who gather to make war against the king of kings or revelation 6 the outcome of the unfit soil those who try to hide themselves among the rocks of the mountains will one day call upon those same rocks to fall on them in the day of wrath or revelation 14 the outcome for the uncultivated the thorns the angel will come with a sickle in hand and he will clear the entire universe separate the wheat from the chaff

I mean that's not nearly as palatable as the parable but believe me what Jesus is saying here by way of spiritual significance is totally in line with the signs that come in revelation it's totally in line with the sermon he preached that you are either going to build your house on a sand or you're going to build it on a rock it's entirely consistent with his speeches and his instructions that would tell you there are two ways to live it's all the same it's just that the story might get through when the others didn't or the story just demonstrates the outcome and reveals the true state of your soul hear me hear me can you hear me can you actually put those four words out on a piece of paper unyielding unfit uncultivated and unimaginably fruitful and assign your place with honesty your auditory response to the kingdom of heaven will determine your life whether you're going to be fruitful in life or not and me we're in this together which brings us to that fourth soil and then I'll take my seat and I hope I preach to everybody here verse 23 as for what was sown on good soil this is the one who hears the word understands it he indeed bears fruit and yields in one case a hundred fold in another sixty and in another thirty the unimaginably fruitful soil oh man come on this is the one this is the door you want to choose please choose this door be unimaginably fruitful in your life which means what what's the characteristic of good soil well they're not unyielding they've been they've been turned over willing to receive something they're not unfit they've decided to take the impediments out of the way they're not uncultivated they're willing to do the work of uprooting things along the way and as a result they're good they hear the word they understand the word they bear fruit and it's unimaginable fruit right

I mean a hundred fold another sixty another thirty I don't know first century agrarian stuff at all but from what I've read a really good harvest a seed would produce seven fold which is an indication that what Jesus is trying to say here if you will cultivate your life if you will tether yourself to his word if you will receive Jesus as the one who can actually transform you and make you fruitful your fruitfulness in life has the possibility of extending a hundred fold anybody want that I don't know what kind of fruit we're even talking about but I'll take it you may not like peaches but man you get a hundred of them you can at least go sell them and do something with them I want to be fruitful love joy I want peace I need patience Lord how about kindness gentleness self-control how about self-control tell me how about self-control how about the fruitfulness of other lives that get introduced to the kingdom how about being able to introduce somebody else to Jesus whose soul has been turned over by the Holy

[40 : 22] Spirit to receive spiritual truth how about how about a family how about a whole family that begins to follow Jesus because you began to follow Jesus how about a friend how about a neighbor who you say you know I'm actually following Jesus and all of a sudden they go well maybe I ought to start thinking about that I've been unyielded I've been unfit I've been uncultivated I've been there done that I want something unimaginably fruitful how about lineage how about heritage I know you can't take it all with you when you die but the people that you influence are still going to be here in your wake in your wake there can be fruit bearing long after you're gone Jesus is a ruler that requires your repentance and your ability to begin following him and if you do you will be fruitful you will be tilled cleared well tended you will be as the psalmist says like a tree planted by streams of water yielding fruit when in season and out of season 2002

Verizon and now you know I'm winding up because I'm giving a stupid illustration 2002 Verizon runs an ad campaign one of the most successful ones in modern history can you hear me now can you hear me now can you hear me now I'm standing on your soul unyielding can you hear me now unfit don't want any root can you hear me now uncultivated not willing to do the hard work of clearing out the weeds can you hear me now unimaginably fruitful listen up hear me hear me our heavenly father

Lord we we all know with internal perception that these soils represent our soul but Lord by the power of your Holy Spirit who can take a word and transfer somebody even in this very moment from hardness to health we ask that you would do it help people to repent help all of us to say Lord no more do I want to be unyielding I want to be unimaginably fruitful no more do I want to be unfit just go where I want and hide where I am able I want to be unimaginably fruitful Lord I want to cultivate a life of health and happiness rather than something that gets strangled and choked out oh Lord may we not be playing church today may we be coming to you as you draw near to us in Jesus name Amen Amen