

# He Who Has Ears

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you have your Bible with you, please open it to Matthew chapter 13.

Matthew chapter 13. It's seeding time here in Davidson.

Well, it's really almost over. My latest intelligence report tells me that it's 85% done. Thanks, Rob, for that information.

Most are done. There's still a few that are out there finishing up. And you've got to know that the question that's probably on all of these farmers' minds is how will the seeds that I've planted in the ground do this year?

What kind of crop will they produce? And, of course, there's all kinds of factors that affect that. There's the moisture in the soil. There's just the weather in general.

[ 1 : 21 ] For those who have been having conversations with my neighbor, do I get hail insurance for my crop or do I not? Do I risk it this year?

There's all kinds of factors that affect the yield of the harvest. And this morning as we dig into some of the teachings of Jesus, one of the things I love about Jesus is that he takes from the ordinary stuff of life, like farming, to teach extraordinary truths about God and about us and about the kingdom of God.

For the next four Sundays, we're going to be talking about some of the parables that Jesus told. All of them are here in Matthew chapter 13.

And this series of titled Parables of the Kingdom. Because all of them have to do with the kingdom of God, revealing something about the kingdom of God.

Well, this morning, the parable that we're going to look at, Jesus addresses the question of what is not the only factor, but one of the big factors that affects the yield of the harvest.

[ 2 : 35 ] Let's read together, starting in verse 1. Scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

Some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow, but when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop, a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown.

Whoever has ears, let him hear. Now imagine that you're there standing on the shore, and you're listening to Jesus' voice cascading across the water to you, and you hear him speak this parable.

What are you thinking? I imagine that some in the crowd there were thinking, I came all the way out here to hear this?

[ 4 : 26 ] Like, tell me something I don't know, Jesus. This is common sense. The seed falls in different places, and depending on where it falls, it produces a crop. What's so special about that?

What do you mean, whoever has ears, let him hear? That's common sense. Well, apparently Jesus' closest followers, the disciples, they also didn't get it.

So in case we were wondering if Matthew forgot to include some context here that would make this all make sense, no, they didn't get it either. In verse 10, they say this, the disciples came to him and asked, why do you speak to the people in parables?

Luke tells us that they asked at the same time specifically, what's the meaning of this parable? Mark tells us that this conversation with the disciples happened while they were alone later.

Why do you speak to the people in parables? What does this mean? Why not just tell them directly what the meaning of the parable is?

[ 5 : 45 ] You want to be understood, don't you? Make it clear. Make it easy. Jesus goes on and answers their question in verse 11.

He replied, The reason I speak in parables is because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.

Whoever has will be given more and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.

This is why I speak to them in parables. Though seeing, they do not see. Though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah. You will be ever hearing, but never understanding. You will be ever seeing, but never perceiving.

[ 6 : 52 ] For this people's heart has become calloused. They hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn, and I would heal them. But blessed are your eyes, he says to his disciples, because they see, and your ears because they hear.

For truly, I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

This is Jesus' answer to the question, why do you speak in parables? It's interesting. There's a lot in there.

One of the first things that I notice is he talks a lot about hearing and seeing. That's how the parable ended, remember? He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

[ 8 : 02 ] Why do you speak to the crowds in parables? Why not just tell them directly? He says a lot about hearing and seeing. Jesus makes a distinction.

There are people who hear, and there are people who hear, who really hear, who understand.

There are people who see, and there are people who see, who really see, who perceive what's really going on.

So why parables? Why parables? Why not just tell them the meaning of these parables?

Jesus' answer is somewhat surprising. Verse 11, he says, because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.

What? That doesn't sound fair. Why? I mean, we are pretty awesome, but why?

[ 9 : 24 ] I mean, we don't know what the disciples were thinking here. We know later on, they were arguing about which of them was the greatest and who would have the most prominence in this coming kingdom. At the very least, though, it doesn't seem that the disciples are showing any signs of being humble and thankful.

Wow, it's been given to us, but not to them. This is strange. Why not to everyone? Why not?

I don't want to spend too much time on this question of why parables. It's a big question. But a few things that we notice from what Jesus says. When it comes to these parables, I speak in parables, and it seems that there's a couple different things going on here.

There's a couple different reasons. One of those reasons seems to be to, at least a little bit, to veil the truth of the kingdom.

So that people need to press in to understand they need to humble themselves. They need to, like the disciples did, come to Jesus and ask, well, what does this mean?

[ 10 : 49 ] There's a little bit of a sense here, perhaps, in verse 15, the reason why it's veiled like this is because some people have a heart that's calloused, that's hard.

they have hardened their hearts towards God. It says, they have closed their eyes, Jesus says.

Perhaps a little bit of just punishment here.

They have closed their eyes, they don't want to see, they don't want to hear, and so I'm going to veil the truth so that those who will understand it will be those who truly press in and seek to understand and humble themselves before me and come to me.

That seems to be one purpose here. And of course, the other purpose is a blessing to some. God wants to give the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven to some.

Blessed are your eyes because they see and your ears because they hear. Well, why us? Because we're awesome?

[ 12 : 13 ] Well, no, not really. Because we were somehow more sensitive to God before? I'm not sure about that. Jesus says, God is going to give this knowledge to you.

And so I'm going to explain to you afterwards what all these parables mean. I'm just going to tell you. There's a bit of a dual purpose behind the parables, it seems.

In a nutshell, Jesus speaks in parables to veil the truth of the kingdom, the good news of the kingdom so that those who hear will be accountable for what they have heard.

They'll be on the hook for what they have heard, but they will also be responsible to press in and seek and understand and respond to what they have heard.

And then there's a sense of he's saying these parables to reveal the truth of God about the kingdom. It's a parable, it all comes back to this issue of hearing and seeing and this kind of strikes to the heart of what this parable is all about.

[ 13 : 41 ] If anyone has ears, let him hear, is what Jesus said at the end of the parable. And then Jesus goes on to give an explanation to his disciples about what the parable means, and that's really what we want to look at with most of our time this morning.

So let's look at what Jesus says in verse 18. He says, listen then to what the parable of the sower means. When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart.

This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on the rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.

But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

[ 15 : 05 ] But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown.

The first thing to notice in this explanation, Jesus calls this the parable of the sower. That's his own words. But he doesn't really tell us what the sower refers to.

Who is the sower? What he does tell us, though, is what the seed represents. In verse 19, he says, when anyone hears the message about the kingdom or the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown.

What was sown? The seed. What's the seed? The word of the kingdom. The message of the kingdom. Matthew is the only one who records Jesus saying this very specific thing of what the seed is, that it's the word of the kingdom.

Mark and Luke both kind of are more general. The seed refers to the word or the word of God. I got thinking about this. Why so specific?

[ 16 : 30 ] The word of the kingdom, the message about the kingdom. What's so significant about that? Many people as they've read this parable are very quick to kind of draw the line and say, well, the seed represents the gospel, the good news.

Is the seed the gospel? Yes, it is. God but what I find really interesting is what Mark says about the gospel, about the good news of Jesus.

As Jesus first begins to preach, Mark says this, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God. And what was it in a nutshell? Mark says this is what it was.

The time has come, Jesus said. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news. Now, if I was to ask you, what's our main message?

I hope you would say, the gospel, the good news of Jesus. What's the gospel? I think most of us would say, I would say, that Jesus died on the cross so that we could be forgiven of our sins.

[ 17 : 56 ] And that is, there's a little bit of that here. He says, repent and believe. Well, the implication is that if we repent to God of our sins, he will forgive us of our sins.

And the cross is the way that that happens. But what just really struck a chord in me this week is, what's the first thing that Jesus says is the good news, the message of the good news?

the kingdom of God has come near. In fact, in Mark, back in Matthew, sorry, chapter 4, he says that Jesus went into Galilee preaching the good news of the kingdom.

It got me thinking. I wonder if we have tried to define or distill the gospel too narrowly. Jesus, of course, is the substitute that took our place for our sins to be forgiven.

heaven. He is the ransom that was paid for us. But part of the good news, at least from what I'm catching here from Matthew and from Mark, from Jesus, is that he is those things, but he is also the king.

[ 19 : 32 ] He is the king of this kingdom of heaven that God is bringing, who has come to rule, has come to reign.

When's the last time you shared the gospel, the good news, with someone and said, the good news is this, Jesus is the king who is coming, who has come and who is coming again to rule and to reign and to establish the kingdom of God.

And yet, that seems to be the leading edge, the leading emphasis that Jesus has as he declares the good news.

It's the good news of the kingdom. And so, what is our main message? This should be at the core of who we are as Christians, at the core of our church, at the core of the gospel that we preach.

Not just that we have a sacrifice for our sins, but that we have a king who is bringing the kingdom of God.

[ 20 : 48 ] He is Jesus Christ. And Christ is not just his last name. As my daughter said when I asked her, what's Jesus' last name?

It's Christ. Christ is not his last name. It's a title. It comes from the original Greek word which means anointed one, which means more, but not less, than king.

He is Jesus' king. Jesus the king who brings the kingdom of God and establishes his rule and reign here on earth.

And that's the good news. That's part of it. I wonder if we've separated that too much though. The kingdom of God, that's a future thing. And salvation, that's the present thing.

That's the thing that we're most focused on. That's what Matthew describes as what Jesus said is the seed.

[ 22 : 03 ] It's the word of the kingdom, the message about the kingdom. kingdom. And what's interesting is that as the seed is sown, it falls on four different places.

And there's four different outcomes. But in every case, the same seed fell on each of those places. In every case, Jesus says this. In the first case, on the path, when anyone hears the message about the kingdom, they heard the message.

And the rocky seed, the rocky ground, the seed falling on the rocky ground, verse 20, refers to someone who hears the word. Verse 22, the seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word.

Verse 23, the seed falling on the good soil refers to someone who hears the word. In every case, it refers to people who hear the word, who heard the message about the kingdom, the good news of Jesus Christ.

[ 23 : 11 ] But even though they all hear it, not everyone hears it and understands it.

What makes the difference? What makes the difference? Let's consider for a moment the outcomes. Four different outcomes. the first, the seed lands on the path.

It sits there until a bird comes and snatches it away. I would say that's zero yield. Didn't even go into the ground.

In the second instance, the seed goes into the ground, but not too much later, after it's sprouted up, the sun scorches the plant, and the plant withers and dies.

That's zero yield. In the third case, the seed goes into the ground, the weeds grow up around it and choke it out such that it's essentially zero yield.

[ 24 : 15 ] maybe it ekes out its existence after that as a poor, skimpy little thing, but it's unfruitful, Jesus says.

Only in the case of the good soil is there any yield. This is the one, Jesus says, who produces a crop, and there's a variety of yields, 160 or 30 times what was sown.

So there's essentially two outcomes. There's zero yield and there's some yield. What makes the difference?

What makes the difference between those who hear the word of the kingdom and there's something that comes out of that? There's a harvest harvest and those who hear it and it's nothing.

It does nothing for them. The simple answer is the soil is the difference. That's the big factor that changes the yield in all of these cases.

[ 25 : 35 ] The soil is the difference. What does the soil represent? Jesus actually tells us in the way that he explains the parable. The soil represents the heart of the people who are listening, who are hearing.

Do you see that in verse 19? He says, when anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown where?

in their heart. In each of these cases, the difference between hearing and really hearing and understanding is the condition of the soil.

It's the condition of the heart. There are some who have a hard heart. Jesus talks about the seed falling on the path.

The seed sits on top. The path is packed hard. It doesn't even go in. It doesn't penetrate. The barrier is up.

[ 26 : 52 ] I'm telling you about the God of the Bible, Jesus, the King. And I don't know if I hear what you're saying, but I'm not hearing what you're saying.

The firewall is up. My heart is hard towards that. It might go into my head.

It might even sit there in my short term memory for a while. But just like a bird comes and snatches that seed off the path for breakfast, the devil comes and takes away what was sown.

Zero yield. There are some whose hearts are hard. heart. And that's why they don't hear.

Why they don't understand and perceive. There are some, and I'm going to call this by a little bit of a different name, there are some whose heart is a fair weather heart.

[ 28 : 03 ] heart. I don't know if you've had one of those friends, fair weather friend, person who's happy to be with you and spend time with you when things are good, but as soon as you're in a jam or in a bind or things aren't going well, it's, oh, he's not doing so good.

That's negative energy there. I don't want to be around that. I like to call that a fair weather friend. Well, there are some who have a fair weather heart. The word of the kingdom, the word of Jesus, the king, they hear that.

That sounds good. I like that. What Jesus is promising, what Jesus is offering, I want that. That kingdom sounds good.

I want to be a part of that. until the going gets tough. Maintaining loyalty to this king draws some fire from some people, some opposition, and in some cases, fierce opposition, and then, well, I don't know if it's for me.

I don't know if I want to have anything to do with Jesus anymore. Jesus says, the sun comes and scorches the plant, and that refers to trouble or persecution.

[ 29 : 24 ] Trouble. Even just the difficulty of following Christ, of having him as our king, of submitting our lives to him. Sounds like a lot of trouble.

Sounds difficult. And they fall away. They don't persevere. The reason why, Jesus says, is because the soil is shallow.

The seed, it goes in, but beneath the shallow soil is rocky. Rocks. It's rocky soil.

The roots can't get down into there. There's something there that they're not allowing those roots to go deep.

Some people have a fair weather heart when they hear the word of God. Some people have a distracted heart as they listen to the word of God.

[ 30 : 33 ] The third place that the seed falls is among thorns or weeds. Jesus describes how the weeds, they grow up around it, and they choke out the plant.

They steal from the plant all of the water and the nutrients that it needs to live and to thrive, and the plant, it loses the battle.

What are the weeds? Jesus names two here in Matthew's telling of the story. the first is the worries of this life.

The general cares and concerns of this life can be like weeds. We get so preoccupied and focused on the things of life, the concerns of life.

We get anxious about it. Our time and our attention is monopolized by all of the stuff that we have going on in life, all of the things we need to do to make sure this is, make sure that is, and there's no time and attention left to listen and hear what God has said, the word of the kingdom, to be a participant in the kingdom, choked out by the worries of this life.

[ 32 : 08 ] And this kind of goes back to what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. That's why he said to his disciples, do not worry about your life. Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or drink or what you will wear.

Is not life more than food and the body more than clothes? What should you do? Seek first his kingdom.

And all these things will be given to you as well. Don't let the cares of this life, the concerns of life, steal your time and attention so much that you fail to respond and to hear what God has said.

The second weed that Jesus mentions is the deceitfulness of wealth. It's another of those weeds that chokes the word out. The deceitfulness of wealth.

If I can just get fill in the blank, then I will be fill in the blank. we strive for, we chase after, and we put our time and attention into researching that upgraded version of that thing that we have.

[ 33 : 39 ] Not because there's anything wrong with this, but maybe one day this thing will break and then I'm going to need to know which one I'm going to buy. We spend all of our time and attention chasing after these things.

And Jesus just calls it what it is right off the bat. It's the deceitfulness of wealth. It's a lie. It can't fulfill you. It can't make you happy.

It's a mirage. So what if you get the next new thing? Oh, if I could just get that number in my retirement account, if I could just get into this fund, if I could just know that I'll be secure, that things will be going well for me?

It's a lie. That's just a weed. It's something that just sucks your time and your energy and your attention and distracts you from really hearing the word of the kingdom, the word of God, from really participating and being involved in the kingdom.

there's the hard heart, there's the fair weather heart, there's the distracted heart, and then there's the good soil, says Jesus.

[ 35 : 07 ] The seed falling on the good soil refers to someone who hears the word like everyone else and understands it. They get it. They listen to it, which implies that they respond.

They take it seriously. They obey it. They prioritize the word of the kingdom above the concerns of life, the wealth and getting that.

They remain loyal to the king and to the kingdom. Even when it gets tough, they persevere. their hearts, I guess a way to describe this would be the soft heart, the heart that is soft towards God and towards what he has said.

Not the good heart. The Bible is clear, Jesus is clear. We don't have good hearts, that's why we need him. Our hearts are evil. But the soft heart, the heart that humbly comes to God and says, I value what you have said and I don't understand it.

Help me understand it. That's the good soil. The word gets into there and it produces a crop.

[ 36 : 37 ] And there are varying yields. Sometimes it's an amazing yield. A hundred times what was sown. Sometimes it's a really, really good yield.

Sixty times what was sown. And sometimes it's just a good yield. Thirty times what was sown. And I think some of the implication there is the better the soil, the better the yield.

The softer your heart before God, the more humbly you come to him and listen and seek and cry out for understanding.

As Solomon said in Proverbs, he will speak to you. He will reveal to you. He will help you to understand.

You will get it. He will make you wise. He will make you wise. So where do we go with this?

[ 37 : 42 ] I think there's a warning here. You've got three different soils and all of them zero yield and only one where a harvest comes, where there is some yield.

There's a bit of a warning there. In the past, we've been quick to take this parable and say, well, this is all about evangelism. this is all about how can we expect people to respond to the message when we share it with them and absolutely it is.

I think that's part of why Jesus gave it to us, to his disciples. But I think that the first place that Jesus wants us to go with this parable is to ask the question, which soil am I?

what kind of soil is my heart today? Is there some hardness there towards God?

Is there some rocks beneath the surface? weeds? Are there some weeds? Some things that are distracting me and I know it, but I haven't done anything about it yet.

[ 39 : 11 ] What kind of soil is your heart today? What kind of harvest do you want to have from your life? as you think of your life, you standing before God when the king returns to bring his kingdom, what kind of yield do you want to have?

It all comes down to here, to your heart. You could be somebody who comes to church every Sunday without fail and hears somebody preaching from the Bible.

but whether you hear and understand or whether you just hear and it doesn't make a dent, that comes down to your heart.

You could be someone who opens your Bible every day and reads a little bit, but whether or not this has an impact on you comes down to your heart.

is it soft? Is it humble before the Lord to hear what he has said? The Pharisees, they had the whole Old Testament memorized and Jesus says, you know the scriptures, but you've missed the whole thing.

[ 40 : 38 ] you've missed it completely. There is that danger. There is a warning, but I think there's also an invitation. I think Jesus intends for us as we hear this parable of the soils to do a soil test, to open our hearts to him and say, where am I at?

And to take that, to admit and acknowledge, Lord, this is where I'm at. I don't think Jesus gave this parable to just tell us that, well, there's four different kinds of people.

Some of them are doomed and some of them are good soil. And those will be the ones that will, I think what he wants is for us to respond, to look at our lives, our hearts, in light of this parable.

Which soil am I? And we're all going to realize, myself included, that there's weeds, that there's hardness, that there's rocky rocks beneath the surface, preventing the roots from growing deep.

And once we come to own that and admit that to God, the good news is this, God can change the human heart.

[ 42 : 13 ] this whole book is full of examples of God changing people's hearts. We read about one of them this morning. I love what God says through Ezekiel, the prophet.

I will give you, this is to his people, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh.

So don't be afraid to admit to the Lord where you're truly at today and call out to him and ask him to change, to break up the rocks that are beneath the surface, to bring the herbicide of heaven to bear on those weeds and knock them out.

because at the end of the day, we're powerless to change ourselves, our own hearts. Some of those weeds have very deep roots, but the Lord can take care of all of that and make us good soil.

He who has ears, let him hear. Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for these words.

[ 43 : 45 ] Don't let us hear them this morning and do nothing with them and let them just sit on the surface until the devil comes and snatches them away.

Don't let that be the case for us today, Lord. Convict us by your spirit and bring us to that place where we respond, where we truly hear.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.