

Matthew 13:18

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[0 : 00] We read together in the Gospel of Matthew and chapter 13 and verse 18. Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

This chapter marks something of a turning point in the Gospel of Matthew. For until this point in his Gospel, Matthew has pictured Jesus teaching in synagogues.

But here he speaks of Jesus as teaching on a beach. For we read that he went out of the house and sat by the seaside.

Great crowds gathered around him. So Jesus got into a boat. He sat down, which was the usual posture of teaching. And he began to teach while the people stood on the shore.

And when we come to this chapter in the Gospel of Matthew, we have seven parables recorded for us. And all seven parables have one theme.

[1 : 18] And that is the kingdom of God. And so they are called the parables of the kingdom. Four of them are only found in this Gospel.

Namely the parable of the weeds, the pearl, the hidden treasure and the net. The telling of parables formed an important part in the teaching of Jesus.

And to this day, his parables are well known. And by using this method of teaching in parables and using things in the parables that were well known to the people, Jesus stimulated his hearers to think about spiritual things.

Jesus used this method of parables so effectively, not only to illustrate and to clarify truth, but also to capture the imagination, to direct the will and to lead to obedience.

Now in the first set of four parables that we have here, that is the sower and the seed, the enemy who sows tares, the mustard seed and the yeast, Jesus speaks before the multitude, before the crowd.

[2 : 50] But in the second set of three parables, that is the hidden treasure, the fine pearl and the net, they are spoken before the disciples.

But this evening we shall consider the first parable, that of the sower, which we have also recorded for us in the Gospels of Mark and Luke.

From verse three to nine, we have the parable that Jesus told. And then from verse 18 to 23, we have the interpretation or the explanation of the parable, and that is given to us by Jesus himself.

And the parable presents to us three elements. We have, first of all, the sower, and we have the seed, and then we have the four different soils upon which the sower scatters the seed.

Now the sower here principally is Jesus himself. But it also includes everybody who proclaims the kingdom of God.

[4 : 12] The seed is the word of the kingdom, or the word of God, the gospel of the kingdom. It is the good news about God's kingdom.

However, the main emphasis of the parable is not so much upon the sower, but upon the seed and upon the four soils, which represents the hearts of the people, and the way in which people respond to the word of God, the way in which people respond to the gospel, whether they accept it or reject it.

It shows us that not everyone is receptive to the word of God. Each soil represents a different condition of the heart.

It represents a different response to the gospel, a different response to the word of God. And only one of the four ever bears good spiritual fruit.

Now before we come to look at the parable in more detail, let us remember that like all the parables, the parables of the soil, or the parable of the sower, it's such as our hearts.

[5 : 51] As Jesus talks about the different kinds of soil, and the different spiritual condition that they represent, we recognise that we are all in this parable somewhere.

Somewhere in the parable speaks of me and you. Every one of us is to be found somewhere in the parable.

And that should cause us to ask some serious questions. How am I responding to the word of God?

How am I responding to the gospel? Which of the soils represent my heart? Is my heart like the wayside, hardened to the gospel?

Or like the stony places, shallow ground, where the word never finds root? Or like the thorny soil, where the word gets choked?

[7 : 02] Or is it like the good soil, who is deeply rooted in the grace of God, and therefore bear fruit?

Our lives in relation to God's word fits into one of the four categories. And so we read then, After he spake many things unto them in parables, behold, a sower went forth to sow.

And when he sowed some seed, fell by the wayside, and the fowls of the year came, and devoured them up.

Verse 19. When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in the heart.

This is he which receives seed by the wayside. Here Jesus draws on a common experience, for the land was not fenced off in those days, and footpaths often cut across the fields.

[8 : 23] In the previous chapter, it begins with Jesus and his disciples going through the corn, and the disciples being hungry, began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat.

And Jesus and the disciples would have been making their way on one of those pathways that went through the fields. And because so many people trampled over the ground, it would become very hard.

And because the soil was hard, the seed that fell upon it lies on the path, and it doesn't sink into the soil. And the bird immediately snatches the seed away.

And Jesus points out that the same thing happens when the word of God falls on the heart of a hardened sinner. It never penetrates the mind.

It never penetrates the understanding. It never touches the conscience. It never touches the heart. It just seems to go in one ear and out the other.

[9 : 38] And before it has the chance of doing any spiritual good, the devil, like a bird, swoops down and snatches the word away.

You may ask, well, why compare God's word to seed? Well, God's word is different to the word of any man.

The writer to the Hebrews describes it in this way, for the word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow and as a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Also, the word of God has life in it and it imparts that life to all who believe the word.

Jesus, in this part of the parable, explains why some people can hear the gospel many times without the gospel ever making any impression on them.

[10 : 55] And the problem does not lie in the seed. It doesn't lie in the word itself or the way it is presented, but in the hearts of those who hear it.

How often we find people and when you ask them about a sermon, they say, well, it wasn't presented in a very good way.

But you see, the problem is not the way that the seed was scattered. It's not the way in which the gospel was presented. It is because of the hardness of their own heart.

And there are many things that can cause a person to harden their hearts against the gospel. Maybe a bitter experience in life where in their hearts there rises an unjustified prejudice against God.

Maybe they blame God. Or maybe there's an unwillingness to turn away from their sin. Or perhaps simply a cold indifference to spiritual truth.

[12 : 12] A careless, thoughtless, an unconcerned spirit hardens the heart.

Whatever the reason, God's word never gets into their lives. And they also have someone working against them as Mark tells us in his gospel that Satan cometh immediately and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.

He comes and he will do all within his power to keep them from thinking about God's word. He may bring distractions.

Something that catches your attention and draws your mind away. Or he'll put something into your thoughts and you'll start thinking about these things.

Perhaps what you're going to do tomorrow and so on. He'll draw your attention away from the word of God. And Luke tells us that Satan does this in order that they may not believe and be saved.

[13 : 25] That's his purpose in distracting you away from the gospel. From listening to the gospel so that you may not believe and be saved.

J.C. Ryle in his comments on this part of the parable writes this. He says nowhere does he that is Satan labour so hard to prevent men and women being saved.

From him come wandering thoughts. from him come listless minds and dull memories sleepy eyes and fidgety nares.

I wonder if that fits your description tonight. He goes on and he says weary ears and distracted attention.

in all these things Satan has a great hand. People wonder why they come from and marvel how it is that they find sermons so dull and remember them so badly.

[14 : 46] They forget the parable of the sower. They forget the devil. Well does this soil represent your own heart tonight?

Does this soil represent how you stand in your relationship to the word of God? Maybe tonight you have sleepy eyes.

Maybe tonight your attention is distracted. Maybe you have weary ears or fidgety nerves moving around. Maybe you have wondrous thoughts.

Maybe the word just goes in one ear and out the other. Maybe you just don't give any time to consider what is being said.

And then we read that some fell upon stony places where they had not much earth and forthwith they sprung up because they had no deepness of earth.

[15 : 58] Verse 20 But he that received the seed into stony places the same is he that hearth the word and anon with joy receiveth it yet hath he not wrote in himself but do for a while for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word by and by he is offended.

This too was a problem for Palestinian farmers in many places they had only a few inches of soil to work with before they reached the bedrock.

A plant may grow in such conditions very very quickly but because it is not deeply rooted it will not survive because the soil is not deep enough to sustain life.

The plant cannot get any moisture so when the hot sun comes out the plant withers and dies. This type of soil represents to us those who gladly and joyfully and willingly and with such great enthusiasm hear the gospel and at first there seems to be such a promising beginning for the world seems to give them life but then we are told that when the sun was up they were scorched and because they had no root they withered away they withered away this does not mean that the plant withered the day after the seed was sown the reference is rather to hot days that came very early in the plant's life in verse three or in verse five

I should say it says there some fell upon stony places for they had not much earth and forthwith they sprung up because they had no deepness of earth they had no deepness of earth in verse four I should sorry I should say verse six it says there that they had no root and they withered away having no depth of earth the roots cannot develop therefore when the sun keeps beating down upon them they wither away it represents to us the hearer who although enjoys the gospel and is filled with enthusiasm regarding the gospel but who has no depth of conviction regarding the gospel who can be a willing enthusiastic hearer of the gospel and yet who has no depth of conviction regarding the gospel they do not like to hear about sin they do not like to hear about the wrath of

[19 : 39] God and hell they do not like to hear that they are sinners that they are hell deserving in verse 21 we're told there that they endureth for a while it is temporary they seem to have some kind of faith in some sense they seem to believe in Christ at least for a little while they seem to be full of joy but as soon as tribulation and persecution comes they are offended they are offended just as quick as they were to spring up the time of testing exposes what their profession of faith truly was for as soon as trouble comes their lack of loyalty and commitment is found out they are the fair weather believers there is no depth whatsoever in their beliefs again

J.C. Ryle in his comments on this part says it is quite possible to feel great pleasure or deep alarm under the preaching of the gospel and yet be utterly destitute of the grace of God that is a very solemn position to be in finding great pleasure under the preaching of the gospel or being deeply alarmed under the preaching of the gospel and yet to be destitute of the grace of God the tears of some hearers of sermons and the extravagant delight of others are no certain marks of conversion we may be warm admirers or favourite preachers and yet remain nothing better than stony ground hearers nothing should content us but a deep humbling self mortifying work of the

Holy Ghost and a heart union with Christ well does that description fit yourself tonight in verse 7 we read that fell among thorns and the thorns sprung up and choked them verse 22 he also that received seed among the thorns to see that hear the word and the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and he becometh unfruitful Jesus here is moving on to the seed that fell among thorns and this side represents a person who truly listens to the word this person is not a hardened rejecter of the gospel like the hardened pathway nor is this person a shallow enthusiast of the word like the stony ground hearer here is a person who is very attentive upon the word this person truly listens he heareth the word but the thorns grow up and the thorns choke the word and

Jesus mentions two thorns that so much preoccupies this person's mind and heart that they choke off any spiritual growth or good whatsoever and one of the thorns is the care of the world or the worry of the world now the cares of this world is one thing that we can all sympathise with and that we can all understand worry is one of the conditions that we all carry for we live in a world that is so fast moving and a world that is changing all the time so the cares of this world or the worry of this world is one thing that is natural belongs to us to the care of the world is that the cares of this world the cares of life are so distracting that a person forgets to nurture the life of the soul as

Jesus says they choke the seed they choke the word because this person is so distracted with the cares and the worries of this world that it distracts him or her from commitment from nurturing the life of the soul is that a picture of yourself tonight does the cares of this world distract you distract your mind away from the gospel maybe you hear the gospel with great delight but the cares of this world distract your mind away so much that you are not willing to commit yourself to Jesus Christ although the gospel tells you believe and be saved yet the cares of this world distracts your mind and your attention so much that you are not willing to commit yourself to

[26 : 12] Jesus Christ is that you tonight but Jesus did not stop there he went on to say that there is another thorn that chokes the word and that is the deceitfulness of riches you see the good things in life can be just as distracting us the bad things we too may hear the word of God but we become so preoccupied with the cares of life that we allow them to get in the way of any spiritual commitment to Christ but so also the rich man rich may find themselves caught up in the pursuit of more wealth and they end on a treadmill rich but never rich enough you look for something you want to get something and you get it but that's not enough you want something more that's the deceitfulness of riches rich but never rich enough you want to have something and you receive it and then you want something better you want something more and so it takes up your mind we make time for everything else except developing a deeper relationship with

Jesus Christ we're so bent on getting this and that and I even after receiving it getting more that it distracts us away from developing a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ it chokes the word it chokes the gospel again J.C.

Ryle in his comments here says the things of this life form one of the greatest dangers which beset a Christian path the money the pleasures the daily business of the world are so many traps to catch souls thousands of things which in themselves are innocent become when followed to excess little better than soul poisons and helps to hell open sin is not the only thing that ruins souls in the midst of our families and in the pursuit of lawful callings we have need to be on our guard except we watch and pray these temporal things may rob us of heaven and smother every sermon we hear we may live and die thorny ground hearers well what is it in your own life you may hear the sermon hear the gospel delight in the gospel and yet afterwards something there is extinguishing that gospel from your mind from your heart what is it what is it is it the pleasures of this world is it money is it the daily business of this world there are many things that can choke the gospel for you well does that fit you tonight and finally we read but other fell into good ground and brought forth some hundredfold some sixtyfold some thirtyfold verse twenty three but he that received seed into the good ground to see that hear the word and understandeth it which also beareth fruit and bringeth forth some one hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Well, this is a heart that holds on to God's word. This is a heart that holds on to God's word.

Believing what it says about sin and salvation and living in obedience to the commands of the word. This heart is an honest heart, one that is sincere in its desire to grow.

[31 : 08] Because this soil represents a person who heareth the word and understandeth it. This is a person who is not a careless and unheating person.

This person is not so hardened by sin that Satan can snatch away the good seed of God's word. This person is not so shallow that the seed withers in the heat of problems and troubles and challenges.

This person is not so distracted by other considerations that the seed gets choked off by life's trouble and life's pleasures and so on.

Instead, it stays rooted in the word of God. And as a result, it's going to bear harvest.

This is a person who holds on to God's word, who reads God's word regularly, who feeds upon God's word.

[32 : 12] This is a heart that has that sincere desire to grow in the knowledge of God.

It is a good heart, one that has been made good by the grace of God. It is a heart that perseveres through life's trials without giving up on God.

Such a heart will always bear good fruit. Because it is planted in a good heart. Some bringeth forth some hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

There are various comments as to what is meant by these figures. But I think it is suffice for us to say that what they bring forth for us is an abundant harvest.

That an abundant harvest has been produced. The good soil represents the person who holds on to the word of God.

[33 : 19] And it is not just a Sunday experience. Maybe the word for God for you is just a Sunday experience, a Sunday evening experience.

Maybe for the rest of the week you don't look at the word of God. You don't consider the word of God. You don't think of the word of God. You don't think of the gospel that has been presented to you.

Maybe you go on Monday to Saturday without ever thinking of your soul. Without ever thinking of your eternal destiny. Without ever thinking of the gospel that is presented to you.

And the salvation that is presented to you by Christ through the gospel. Maybe the word of God for you is just a Sunday night experience.

Well this person that this good soil represents is a person who holds on to the word of God.

[34 : 22] Who regularly attends to the word of God. This person believes everything that the word says. This person is convicted by the word.

And convinced by the word. Fully persuaded by the word. That only in Jesus Christ is salvation. And this person endeavors to live in obedience to the commands of the word of God.

This person bears fruit. And this fruit is well pleasing to God. The fruit here speaks of the fruit of the spirit. This fruit speaks of repentance tells God.

And faith tells the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples. I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go forth and bring forth fruit.

And that your fruit should remain. This parable teaches us. That not everybody will listen to the gospel.

- [35 : 32] Wherever there is an assembly of people. And where the gospel is presented. We know that not everybody will listen to the gospel. Not everybody here tonight is listening to the gospel.
- Some of you have already closed your ears long before now. To what has been preached. Close your ears to the gospel.
- Maybe as we already noted. Your minds have been here there everywhere. And we know through this parable.
- That not everybody will believe. We know from this parable. That it all depends on where the word falls.
- That if it is to grow and bring forth a harvest. It depends on where it falls. And some people would not even listen to Jesus himself.
- [36 : 38] So it should not surprise us if they do not listen to us either. Nevertheless, although we know that not everybody will listen to the gospel.
- And although we know that not everybody will commit themselves to Jesus Christ. That not everybody will believe. That not everybody sees their need of God's salvation in Jesus Christ.
- Although we know that not everybody will listen to Jesus Christ. And we are to call to sow the seed.
- To sow the word. To share the word of God. and we must not be deterred by difficulties and discouragements.
- In the book of Ecclesiastes we have these words He that observes the wind shall not sow and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap as thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all in the morning sow thy seed and in the evening withhold not thine hand for thou knowest not what shall prosper either this or that or whether they both shall be alike good.
- [38 : 11] Spurgeon preaching on this parable said We are bound to preach the gospel whether men will hear it or whether they will forbear Let man's heart be what they may I am not loosed from my obligation to sow the seed on the rock as well as in the furrow on the highway as well as in the ploughed field.
- The sower may be aware of hardened hearts He may be aware of hostile responses He may be aware of the coldness and indifference among the hearers When we look at this parable this sower he lost his crop three times Yet he must continue to sow the seed and in the end he reaps a great harvest So we must continue to sow the seed of the word convinced of its inherent power the inherent power that belongs to God's word and we know that it shall not return to him empty So we've got to go out like this sower and sow the seed whether it falls by the wayside or on stony places or among thorns still we've got to sow the seed
- The parable ends with the good news that as we sow the gospel some people will believe and some people will bear fruit What about yourself?
- What is your relationship to the gospel tonight? What keeps the sower going? What keeps the preacher of the gospel going?
- That God is faithful to his word and in the end God will have his harvest Verse 9 Who have ears to hear?

[40 : 29] Let him hear Well, how do you hear? What effect has the word of God got upon you? Indeed the words of James should be heeded For he says But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only deceiving your own selves For if any be a hearer of the word and not a doer he is likened to a man beholding his natural face in a glass or in a mirror For he beholdeth himself and goeth his way and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continue therein he be not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work this man shall be blessed in his deed So let you not be merely a hearer of the word but a doer of the word and the word that comes to you tonight the word that comes and tells you that salvation is in Christ alone believe and be saved however you have heard these words but you've never done it you're a hearer of the word but sadly not a doer of the word well may that change tonight may tonight be the night that all that changes that you're a hearer of the word and a doer of the word believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved

Here it says Who hath heirs to hear let him hear In Mark chapter 4 it says Take heed what you hear and in Luke it says Take heed how you hear It is important that we hear God's word for faith cometh by hearing and hearing the word of God But this parable tonight We are somewhere in this parable tonight I am there and you are there And you know where you are And you know which part of this parable fits your situation and circumstance tonight And that is between yourself And your God There was surely one soil That brought forth

A harvest to God Only one soil Brought forth An abundant harvest Because the seed Because the seed Sank into the soil And it got rooted In the soil And it grew up To bring forth The harvest May the word of God Tonight then May it sink into your heart And may it be rooted In your heart And may it bring forth A harvest To the Lord Jesus Christ May the Lord bless Your thoughts Let us pray Amen Amen