

The Parables of Jesus: Parable of the Sower by Faber McMullen © 2019



What is a parable? In Greek, a parable literally means something that is "cast alongside" something else. Jesus would "cast" a parable alongside a truth to illustrate that truth. It was a common way for rabbis to communicate a spiritual truth to their audience. It is a literary device that can be used as a teaching aid to clearly communicate a spiritual truth. Sometimes parables are referred to as 'earthly stories with heavenly meanings'.



There are basically 35 parables recorded in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). When Jesus began to use parables, his disciples were a little confused as to why He began speaking in such a manner (Matthew 13:10). In our text this morning, Jesus explained that speaking in parables served two purposes: (1) to reveal truth to those that truly

wanted to know the truth, and (2) to conceal truth from those who really had no desire to know the truth. In the prior chapter (Matthew 12), the Pharisees publicly rejected the truth that Jesus taught; thereby fulfilling the prophecies found in Isaiah 6:9-10. Isaiah had said concerning those who hear God's truth "Go, and tell this people: keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive." Israel's rejection of Jesus was due to her failure to hear and understand and her failure to see with real spiritual eyes and divine perspective.

The parable we will read in a moment is explained by Jesus. More often than not, the parables are not explained, but in the next couple of weeks we will be studying three basic tools of interpreting them. So without delay, please open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 13. Please stand and read along with me our key passage of this morning.

³ Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ⁶ But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. ⁷ And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up

and choked them. ⁸ But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ He who has ears to hear, let him hear! ” (Matthew 13:3-9, NKJV).



Please be seated. Jesus tells his disciples a lot in these few words. First, he tells them that there is a sower. This is a person that is the planter. The sower's job is to plant seeds. The seeds are truth. The sower is the gardener and teacher of truth. This gardener will plant the same seed, but it will have a different result depending on what type of soil it is planted in. If any of you have ever gardened, you will be able to relate to this parable immediately. If you are sowing seed in a garden, first, some of the seed you carry might end up on the paths of the garden. These paths are hard dirt that is packed down and not receptive to any seed. Since the seed never really ends up in the ground it is easy for birds to come and eat up the seed before they can even sprout. Jesus then talks about a second type of soil characterized by rocks and stony places. It has very superficial soil and there's just not enough soil for the tiny seed to grow roots. There's just enough to let a plant spring up, but with hardly any root system. Without that support of nourishment and water, the plant will wither in the sun as the day heats up. Thirdly, is seed that goes into pretty good ground and it has a pretty good root system. However, if that area of the garden is not weeded, fertilized, and tended to, it will not prosper. An unattended garden, is always eventually choked out by weeds. Lastly, the gardener will plant some seed in soil that is deep, rich in nutrition, watered, weeded, and tended. Soil that is cared for in this manner produces a plentiful crop.

Read along with me now in your Bibles as I start with verse 10.

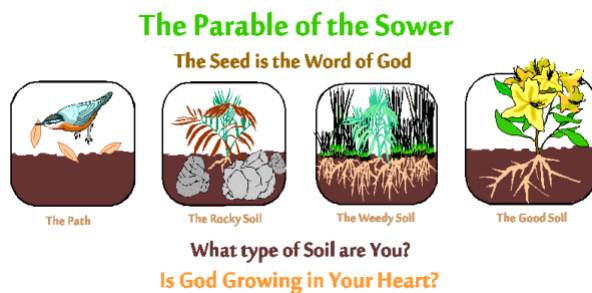
¹⁰ And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” ¹¹ He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.” ¹² For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. ¹³ Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. (Matthew 13:10-13, NKJV). Jesus then quoted the Isaiah passage which we started with a few minutes ago.

At first glance, this sounds like Jesus is trying to play hide the ball or something. It seems like he is keeping truth from people who need it, but that is not what this says. It is saying that when a person has a true appetite and hunger for the things of God, God will reveal His truth to that person. A person who is unwilling to open their ears to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit will be unable to hear the whisperings of God. Likewise, a person who is unwilling to open their eyes to the revelations of the Holy Spirit will be unable to perceive what the Holy Spirit is doing. God perceives a willing heart and rewards that heart with revealed divine truth.

Follow along now as I continue in verse as we listen to Jesus as He explains this parable.

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; ¹⁷ for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to

hear what you hear, and did not hear it.¹⁸ “Therefore hear the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. ²⁰ But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. ²² Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. ²³ But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” (Matthew 13:16-23, NKJV).



This parable is multilayered. First, it explains to us how and why people respond to the gospel differently. I will end today by clearly presenting the gospel and how we can be saved. Second, I think that those of us who are believers can use the parable as an opportunity to look at the condition of our hearts, and perhaps ask God to do a work in the soil of our hearts so that we might be prepared to receive

additional truth from God's Word. Let's look at Jesus' explanation for those who hear the gospel.

The first person who hears the gospel has a hard heart. It is a heart that is closed and tight. It is a heart that wants to find a problem and/or an argument with the things of God. The wicked one is vigilant and is engaged in creating and promoting spiritual blindness. Some hear the gospel but their hard hearts don't let the first hint of spiritual truth enter, and Satan snatches away the tiniest truth and the seed never even sprouts. This is a heart that desires more argument than agreement. It is a heart that longs to find additional objections instead of finding openings for God to work in one's heart and life.

The second person likewise hears the gospel, and with great readiness they receive it. This person rejoices in their newfound salvation. This person goes to tell anyone and everyone that will listen about how their sins have been forgiven, and how Jesus has saved them. However, this person gives no time to the study of the Bible, time in prayer, or fellowship with other believers, and their joy is short lived. In a short time, we no longer see them in church, and they end up growing cold. That seed that sprouted in their hearts had no depth. It had no soil in which to grow deep roots. Jesus is making it clear that a heart with no depth will never produce abundant spiritual fruit. The need and blessing of a deep rooted faith is articulated well by the King Poet David in Psalm 1. *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.³ He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.* (Psalm 1:1-3, NKJV). A heart that is nurtured is planted by rivers of water.

Third is the person who hears the gospel, and they put down roots for the long haul, but they continue to walk the fence with the world. They just can't help being attracted and distracted over and over by the world. This is the heart that wants to walk in the Spirit and experience the deep truths of God, but at the same time can't quite tear itself away from the attractions of the world. In time, the "weeds of the world" (the details of life) take hold and begin to choke out the productive plant. This person is called by God to do certain works, but this heart keeps looking back and counting the material costs of following Jesus. This heart wants to love others, but it wants to do so at no real cost. Jesus is putting that struggle right into the parable to explain the tension that exists between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of this world. This doesn't mean that we should avoid business, investment, career advancement, income enhancement, etc. It *does* mean, however, that those things cannot be at the center of a Christ-filled, Spirit-directed life. In the end, the lack of vigilance against the ways of the world will take its toll, and the final result will be a weed patch taking residence in the poor believer's unproductive life.

Last, Jesus presents the ideal believer. This person has heard the gospel. They have received the gospel. They have allowed God to tend the garden of their hearts, and He has produced a great crop.

So, we now have a picture of four typical ways that people will respond to the gospel. The first example gives us an explanation of what happens when the gospel is totally rejected. The second two examples help us to understand some of the pitfalls that can come into our lives as we live out the gospel. The last example is a portrait of a spiritually well-lived life.

Remember when I said that I believe this applies not only to the initial hearing and receiving of the gospel, but also to the continuance of receiving divine truth. As I thought about this parable over the last couple of weeks, I remembered a verse out of the Book of Hosea that speaks to the condition of our hearts.

¹² Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you. (Hosea 10:12, KJV).

We need to want our hearts to be the kind of hearts into which God can sow spiritual truth. We've been talking for quite a while about getting ourselves off of the throne of our lives and allowing God to move back into that position of authority. This is really a continuation of that conversation. We can prepare our hearts to receive the seed which God desires to sow in each of us. We do this, of course, first by regeneration (being born again), and then by submitting our lives daily as a living sacrifice. We do this when we repeatedly repent, returning again and again back to the things of God.

Hosea is saying to break up the unproductive ground of your heart. Let me explain scripturally the first steps in doing this. What I am doing is now explaining what it meant when Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again." This is how a person is saved from eternal separation from God.

1. You must first recognize that you are a sinner. Scripture tells us in Romans 3:23 that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." This means that you, and I, and

everyone who has ever lived falls short of the glorious person that God intended for us to be. Hosea said that we are to "sow to ourselves righteousness," but you cannot be righteous enough to "sow to yourself righteousness." The prophet Isaiah said that all of the good deeds we can do are nothing spiritually but filthy rags in terms of us being truly righteous. It is only through Jesus that we can sow the perfect righteousness of God into our hearts. We have all sinned. There is none righteous, no not one.

2. We each must realize that the penalty for sin is eternal separation from God. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they created a spiritual divide between us and our Creator. The result of their sin was to experience death. They experienced not only physical death but also spiritual death. Paul wrote to the nascent church in Rome telling them, "The wages/payment/cost of sin is death" (Romans 6:23, author's paraphrase). You and I too are eternally separated from God due to the spiritually fallen DNA we received when we were born into this world.
3. The third verse, which is key, tells us that God loved us so much that even when we were still sinners, Messiah died for us. He died for each and every one of us in this room (Romans 5:8, author's paraphrase). When Jesus died for us, He paid for each of our sins on the cross. He was the substitution for a death that each of us deserved in payment for our sins. Jesus' resurrection proves that God accepted that sacrifice on the cross.
4. What is our response to what we have just heard? What is your response to what you have just heard? What must you and I do to be saved? Do you need to join a church to be saved? NO. Do you need to be baptized to be saved? NO. Do you need to do a certain number of mitzvot/good deeds to be saved? NO. Do you need to sing on the worship team to be saved? NO. Do you need to tithe all of your income to be saved? NO. There is one way that you can be saved and one way alone. In that same letter that the Apostle Paul sent to the little church in Rome he said, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). Have you confessed this? Have you believed this? If not, you are choosing to let the birds come and snatch up this seed that has just been sown. Instead of saying no, you can say this moment, "Oh God, I receive your free gift of Jesus. Sow my heart in righteousness. Plow up the fallow ground of my heart. Oh God, do a work in me!"

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.