

The Responses to the Gospel

Scripture: Matthew 13:3b–9, 18–23

Code: 2299

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson we begin an in-depth look at the parables of Matthew 13. We have learned that the parables were given by our Lord to describe the character of the Kingdom between His rejection and His return. These parables describe the Church Age--the mystery form of the Kingdom. Christ is the King, and His Kingdom is here now, but it's a form of the Kingdom that was not seen in the Old Testament. There is coming a day when He will return to establish His prophesied earthly Kingdom, but in the meantime, the mystery form of the Kingdom is here. We asked the question, "What will this period of time be like?" Our Lord answered that question for His disciples here in a series of seven parables. They clearly explain to us the very time in which we live.

We also learned that the Lord knew how to take the natural world and wield it as a weapon of great precision in giving instruction about spiritual truth. He was able to take something that people could understand, and lay it alongside something they did not understand so they could grasp the more difficult concept. That's what a parable is: It's a comparison. Each of the parables here is filled with profound spiritual truth. I have found that the longer you study them, the more rich and full they become. The amazing thing is that with all of the richness and wide-ranging ramifications of each parable, our Lord is able to tell each one in a simple, concise manner. He had the supernatural capability of using a bare minimum of terms and yet expressing incredible profundity.

I. THE INSTRUCTION OF THE PARABLE (vv. 3b-9)

A. The Explanation (vv. 3b-8)

1. The Sower (v. 3b)

"...Behold, a sower went forth to sow"

Because of the agricultural way of life in that part of the world, everybody understood the process of sowing seeds. Jesus spoke of something that everyone was familiar with. It may have been that as Jesus was teaching the multitude, there was in the distance a sower in his field.

When sowing seed, a sower would drape a bag over his shoulder that had an opening at the top. After the furrows had been prepared, the sower would take the seed from the bag and broadcast it. That was the original meaning of the English word broadcast. He would scatter the seed into the furrow as he walked along the furrow in a straight line with orderly steps. When he reached the end of one furrow, he would turn and start up the next furrow, never missing a step and still throwing the seed. That is how a field was sowed.

Jesus indicates that as the sower throws the seed, there are four kinds of soil that seed will fall on. Let's look at them:

2. The Soils (vv. 4-8)

a. The Wayside Soil (v. 4)"And when he sowed, some of the seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them."Palestine, in those days, was literally crisscrossed with fields. The fields were usually long, narrow strips, separated from other fields by paths. The paths between the fields were narrow--about three feet wide. They were used by the farmer to get to whatever field he wanted to reach. They were also used by the travelers who were going from one part of the country to another. In Matthew 12:1, we see the Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples walking through the fields

of grain, and no doubt they were walking on those little paths. There were no fences or walls around the fields, just those narrow paths for travelers and for the farmer to get around in his area. It was those paths that the Lord had in mind when He talked about the wayside. The dirt in those paths was packed down, uncultivated, and never loosened. The continual pounding of the dirt by men's feet and the dryness of that part of the world would compact the dirt to the point where it was like a road. It became as hard as pavement. As a result, if a farmer threw the seed and some of it went beyond the furrow only to land on that hard surface, it would never grow. It could not penetrate the ground. As the farmer was sowing the seed, there would be birds hovering above him, waiting for the opportunity to eat any seed that landed on the hard path. Whatever seed the birds did not eat would be trampled by the feet of men that were passing through the fields (Lk. 8:5).b. The Stony Soil (vv. 5-6)"Some [seed] fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth. And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away."Luke adds that the seed that landed upon the stony soil "lacked moisture" (8:6). There wasn't any root to capture the moisture. Now, Jesus is not talking about soil with rocks in it, because any farmer who cultivated a field would make sure all the rocks were out. But the land in Israel has strains of limestone bedrock running through it, and in many places this bedrock comes up to within inches of the soil surface. Farmers sometimes were unaware of where the bedrock was; consequently, those areas weren't broken up in the cultivating process. If the seed landed on that hard rock, it would germinate and try to grow its roots downward, but there was no place for the roots to go. Initially those seeds would spring up higher than the other grain (because they can only grow up, and not use their energy to send roots downward, like other seeds). But eventually they died from the heat of the summer, because the bedrock hindered their roots from finding any moisture.c. The Weedy Soil (v. 7)"And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up, and choked them."Initially, the weedy soil looks good: it's deep, it's rich, and it's cultivated. It looks ready for planting. But after the seeds are sown and they begin to germinate, weeds also begin to grow from the fibrous weed roots hidden in the ground. The weeds then choke the life out of the grain. Weeds are natural to that soil; they're at home there. Grain seeds are a foreign element in that soil. Because of that, the grain has to be cultivated. The weeds eventually choke the grain, and send out their leaves so that they take up the sun and the moisture. There's not enough room for both to share the nutrients of that soil. Thus, the good seed dies.d. The Good Soil (v. 8)"But other seeds fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold."The soil here is soft, deep, and clean. It's soft, unlike the hard wayside soil. It's deep, unlike the stony limestone ground. And it's clean, unlike the weed-infested soil. It's on that ground that the seed burst to life and bring forth a tremendous harvest, sometimes a hundredfold, or sixtyfold, or thirtyfold. By the way, the average yield would be 7.5- fold. A good crop would be tenfold. So, Jesus is talking about a tremendous, flourishing crop.The parable is very simple. A man goes out and throws seed. The seed falls onto four kinds of soils. Some fall on a hard path where they will never germinate. They're either picked up by birds or trampled under the feet of those who walk on the path. Some seeds fall onto rocky soil, and begin to grow. But the growth is all upward and the roots are very shallow, so the sun eventually scorches the plant because the roots cannot find moisture in the rock. There are seeds that fall on the weedy ground, which become strangled by the weeds that already live there and are natural to that place. Last, there are seeds that fall into good, clean, deep, rich, soft soil and produce a tremendous harvest.

B. The Exhortation (v. 9)

"Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

What does Jesus mean by that? He is saying, "If you understand this, then pay attention, because there is an important message here." You say, "Who is the one that can hear?" Verses 10-17 explain that the only people who can understand the parables are those who believe in the King--those who are redeemed. If you are in the Kingdom, the King promises to explain to you the meaning of what

He says. Becoming a Christian doesn't mean that you get instant wisdom so that you can understand everything on your own; it means that God promises to teach you the meaning of His Word.

The people who can't understand Jesus are those with the hard hearts and the deaf ears. In Matthew 13:14-15, Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10: "...for this people's heart is become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed..." (v. 15). The people who reject Jesus won't be able to understand what He is talking about. It's only those who believe in Jesus who will understand: "...blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear" (v. 16). The parables conceal from those who don't believe, and reveal to those who do believe. In Mark 4:10-20, Jesus was asked by the disciples the meaning of the parable of the sower and the seed, and He explained it to them apart from the multitude.

So, Jesus says, "You who are able to understand, hear what I say."

Then starting in verse 18, He explains the spiritual message He is trying to convey.

II. THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLE (vv. 18-23)

A. The Sower (v. 18)

"Hear, therefore, the parable of the sower."

Who is the sower? The sower in this parable is the Lord Jesus Christ. That is confirmed later on in the chapter as the Lord explains a different parable in which wheat was sown, and He tells His disciples, "...He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man" (v. 37b). The Lord is the original sower. He is the One who first puts the seed in the soil.

You say, "What is the seed?" In verse 19 we read, "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom...." The seed is the Word of God, and the first sower of the gospel was the Lord Himself. Anyone who sows what Jesus first sowed is also a sower! Mark 4:14 says, "The sower soweth the word." Those of us who love Christ, receive His message, and pass it on are sowers of the Word. The seed is the Word of God, and we are sowing the message of the Kingdom.

B. The Seed (v. 19a)

Verse 19 tells us that the seed is the Word of the Kingdom. It is God's revelation. Luke 8:11, a parallel passage giving the same parable, says, "...The seed is the word of God." The gospel is the message about the King and His Kingdom.

I would like to add something worthy of note: Seeds cannot be created. If we didn't have seeds, we could never grow things. We are dependent on what grows and produces more seeds because God originally created seeds and seeds reproduce themselves. We'd never be able to reproduce seeds. The same is true with the seed of the Word of God. The Lord does not call on us to create our own message. God says, "Take that which has already been sown and sow it again." We are not to produce a new supply of information; we are to build upon the revelation of the Word of God. We are utterly dependent, then, upon divine revelation--as much as we are dependent on God creating the seeds that reproduce themselves and bring us the fruit we eat today.

The parable, then, is about preaching the gospel--the Word about the King and His Kingdom. It's about telling men that Jesus is the King and what He is like, that He will bring an earthly Kingdom and what that Kingdom will be like, and how to be in the King and the Kingdom. All of those things are involved in preaching.

C. The Soils (vv. 19-23)

1. The Receptiveness of the Soils

This is the main import of the parable: It shows how men will respond to the gospel. We've seen that there are four kinds of soils. All the soils are basically the same--the only difference is whether the dirt is hard, has rock underneath it, has weeds in it, or is good. The issue is not the soil; rather, it is the condition of the soil. That means that all men could receive the seed. All soil could receive the seed if it was broken up and cleaned of weeds. So, the key to the parable is that the response a person has to the gospel depends upon the condition of that person's heart. We know that the soil

refers to the heart because it says in verse 19, "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart...." The condition of the heart determines how receptive a person is to the gospel.

When the disciples saw that Jesus was rejected, they probably asked Him, "Lord, what is going to happen now? You've been blasphemed and rejected, and the Kingdom cannot come." Using the parable of the sower and the seed as an illustration, He says, "I'll tell you what's going to happen: You're going to go out just like I did and sow the seed, which is the Word of God. You're going to preach the same message about the same King and the same Kingdom." Jesus talked about the different soils in the parable to encourage the Apostles: "There will be the wayside soil, the stony soil, and the weedy soil, and you've got to know about that, or you could become disillusioned. But there will also be the good soil that will bring forth thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold." The parable was intended to help the Apostles approach the ministry with excitement and the anticipation that God was going to produce results.

Before we examine the four kinds of responses to the gospel, remember this: Salvation is manifested by fruit, not foliage. That is important to know, or the parable can become confusing. Keep in mind too that those four kinds of responses are characteristic of our day.

2. The Responses of the Soils

a. The Wayside Hearer (v. 19) "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside." In other words, the seed that fell on the wayside couldn't penetrate the ground, and birds hovered nearby waiting to snatch the seed when the farmer turned his back. Luke adds that any seeds the birds missed were trampled by men (Lk. 8:5). That illustrates the man who is hardhearted. The Old Testament would call this man stiff-necked. He is unresponsive and indifferent; the gospel message just hits him and bounces off. Satan, represented by the birds, comes and snatches that seed away. That confirms what the Lord said earlier: "...whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even what he hath" (v. 12b). This man's heart has been so pounded down by the mixed multitude of sins in his life that there's no sensitivity at all. His heart knows no repentance--no sorrow for sin, no guilt, no concern over the things that really matter. He allows his heart to be trampled down by sin day after day; it is never broken up or softened by conviction. 1) Beheld The fool in the book of Proverbs illustrates that kind of man. He despises wisdom (Prov. 1:7), hates instruction (Prov. 15:5), is stiff-necked and hardhearted (Prov. 27:22), will not listen (Prov. 23:9), and says in his heart that there is no God (Ps. 14:1). He does not want to be bothered with the message of the gospel; he says, "Leave me alone!" I'm sure we've all met people like him. We throw the seed, which just bounces, and then Satan comes and snatches it away. 2) Blinded

The wayside hearer is blinded by Satan, the god of this age, who "hath blinded the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Cor. 4:4). In other words, when someone does not respond to the gospel, Satan blinds that person to the true value of the gospel. There are many ways that Satan blinds people. One way he does that is by sending false teachers to those who have heard the gospel. Those false teachers tell people not to believe what they've heard. Another way Satan snatches the seed is by making a man fearful: People don't respond to the gospel because they're afraid they'll lose their reputation, be rejected by their friends, or be considered a religious fanatic. Sometimes Satan uses pride: There are people who don't want to admit they need help or that there are some things they don't know. Satan will use doubt, prejudice, stubbornness, a person's love of sin, and procrastination to snatch away the gospel. He will use whatever way he can or whatever combination of ways necessary to make a person forget that he ever heard the gospel message. I encourage you to examine yourself and see if you are one of the many people like that. Examine your heart and see if you are that dry, hard road on the edge of the field. You may be on the fringes of religion, but sins have just pounded down the dirt of your heart until it is utterly unproductive and unresponsive to

God. Jesus told us that we're to expect this: There will be people who are very close to the truth and yet remain shut to it. We're to expect that kind of response to the gospel.

b) The Stony Hearer (vv. 20-21)

1) The Immediate Thrill (v. 20) "But he that received the seed in stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and immediately with joy receiveth it" This is the person who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. There isn't a lot of thought involved; it's just a quick response, like an emotional, instant excitement that doesn't count the cost of following Christ or understand the significance of the gospel. There's a good feeling within this person and a lot of joy; he really seems to be growing. But it's all external because there hasn't been any true repentance or brokenness over sin, as indicated by the bedrock of resistance still under the soft surface of the ground. There are people like that today. They never deal with the real issues. They just jump on the Jesus bandwagon because it looks so good. Those kind of people seem to be growing faster than everyone else. They appear to have real joy and real tears. But three months later, they are gone. They were just excited over all the euphoria. Perhaps they said they were Christians just to be able to get married to Christians. They may've been trying to deal with a deep problem, and reached out to Christianity in an attempt to find an instant solution. They thought, "Now I've got God on my side!" They may've been the recipients of inadequate evangelism: They were told that everything would be wonderful, happy, and joyful if they just accepted Jesus. But the soil underneath was never really plowed with the conviction of sin. They're like the man who built his house on the sand (Mt. 7:26-27). The religious structure is there, but there's nothing but superficial joy holding it up. Now, when you look at the field of growing grain, you notice that those people stick out because they're taller than everyone else. You're excited because their growth seems to be real. However, when you come back in the heat of the summer, when the moisture is very limited, those people are dead. Verse 21 explains why that is:

2) The Imminent Trouble (v. 21)

a) The Adversity (v. 21a) "Yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution [Gk. *thlipsis*] ariseth because of the word..." (1) Explained This person has never been redeemed; he's never really been a genuine believer. He endures for a while, and then falls away when tribulation and persecution come along. He faces suffering because he appears to belong to Christ, and experiences pressure from the expectation of living the Christian life. He feels overwhelmed by those who want to get him into a Bible study, prayer meeting, or a discipling relationship. He experiences persecution because people criticize him for becoming a Christian. Because there is no root in this person, he won't survive the persecution. The nonreality of his initial response to the gospel will become evident. This information is very helpful because it tells us to expect that to happen. When I pray with someone to receive Jesus Christ, I know that he might be that kind of person. When you see someone give an immediate, euphoric response to the gospel, keep in mind that he might still be rocky soil. There may not have been a sense of brokenness, and a counting of the costs of following Christ (Mt. 16:24). William Arnot said in 1896, "If the law of God has never rent the 'stony heart' and made it contrite, that is, bruised it small, you may, by receiving the gospel on some temporary, superficial softness of nature, obtain your religion more easily and quickly than others who have been more deeply exercised; but you may not retain it. He that endureth to the end shall be saved, but he that fails in the middle shall not" (The Parables of Our Lord [London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1869]).

(2) Expected

Second Timothy 3:12 says that all who live godly in this present age "shall suffer persecution." We are to expect that there will be those who will leave when persecution and pressure comes. I've dealt with such people, baptizing them, praying with them, and discipling them, but I can't tell their superficiality until the persecution comes.

b) The Apostasy (v. 21b) "...he is offended." This means that he is trapped or caught by the persecution, and will fall away. So, watch for the conversion that's all smiles and cheers and lacks remorse, conviction, and repentance, such as that described in the Beatitudes (Mt. 5:1-12). We are to watch for that superficial kind of response to the gospel in cases where the person professed to become a Christian as a result of a superficial presentation of the gospel given on television or by other means. Trouble and persecution, then, are

very important to the Kingdom of God, for two reasons. First, trouble and persecution will make false believers fall away from the church. Second, trouble and persecution will strengthen true believers. First Peter 5:10 tells us that after we have suffered, the Lord will make us perfect. We should desire trouble and persecution because they discourage false believers and strengthen true believers. If your confession of Christ does not come from a deep, inner conviction of your sin; does not include a tremendous desire for the Lord to purify and lead you; and does not involve self-sacrifice and a willingness to suffer for His sake, then you have no root. It will only be a matter of time before persecution comes along and you'll fall away. You won't endure the persecution because you're not willing to take up the cross and follow Him (Mt. 16:24). If you don't take up the cross, you're not worthy to be His disciple. If you've got a stony heart, only God can break it. You'll need to pray and ask the Lord to do for you what He promised to do for Israel in Ezekiel 36:26: "...I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."

c. The Weedy Hearer (v. 22) "He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this age, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful." 1) The Preoccupation Depicted The phrase "the care of this age" refers to worldliness, and the phrase "the deceitfulness of riches" refers to the fact that the world's riches are deceptive. In other words, it is the mundane things of the world--your career, house, car, wardrobe, prestige, looks, and riches--that are deceitful. In 1 Timothy 6:9-10 it says, "...they that will be rich fall into a temptation and a snare...for the love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." 2) The Purification Demanded Jesus is saying here that there will be those who listen, but never clean out the soil. The things of the world are still in the person's heart. That's why Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and money" (Mt. 6:24). John said, "...If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 Jn. 2:15b). You can't be a double-minded man. The soil that is going to produce fruit must be cleansed of worldliness. That's why true salvation only occurs when there's a willingness to deal with sin in one's life. True salvation is a marvelous and gracious work of God. I know there are people who say, "You don't have to do anything to be saved. Just believe and that's it." The soil may look good, but it's impure. That is an example of someone trying to hold on to everything: He wants the Word of God and everything else at the same time. Now, worldliness is indigenous to the heart, just as weeds are indigenous to soil. When you introduce a seed that is foreign to that soil (just as you would introduce the gospel to the heart), it has to be cared for; otherwise, it won't survive. The ground has only so much nourishment. If the ground is busy nourishing all the weeds, it won't be able to help the seed survive. There is nothing wrong with the sower, seed, or soil here. The condition of the soil is the problem. People who profess to be saved aren't saved if their hearts are still occupied with the things of the world. In that case, worldly things choke out the gospel. The hearers so far leave us with a negative feeling: there are going to be people who totally resist, people who appear to grow quickly, and people who try to hold on to both worldliness and God at the same time. There are those who come to church but never become committed. There is the person who says that he is a Christian, but isn't faithful in his marriage relationship. There is the person who lives his whole life for personal gain, prestige, and money. Those people allow the seed to germinate, but eventually it gets choked out. We've all seen people like that. The Lord says we're going to have to expect those kinds of responses. What Jesus said here was all prophetic--that is exactly what we see in the Church Age today. You say, "Maybe those people lost their salvation." Jesus, however, is saying that those people were never saved. The mark of salvation in this parable is that the seed bear fruit. In John 15:2, 6 it says that if you don't bear fruit, God cuts you from the Vine (Christ) and sends you to hell. A true believer will manifest fruit--that's the mark of salvation. That takes us to the last soil...d. The Fruitful Hearer (v. 23) "But he that received seed in the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it ["receive it," Mark 4:20; "hold it fast," Luke 8:15; NASB] , who also beareth fruit, and

bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."1) The Promise That is very productive soil. It is bearing three thousand percent, six thousand percent, and ten thousand percent yield on the seed. The soil here is like the rest of the soil, but it is good because of its preparation--no weeds, no rocks, and no hard surface. That is the climax of the whole parable: The Lord is telling the disciples that there is good soil out there. Isn't that a wonderful promise? We have all met hardhearted people, and it's easy to become discouraged by them. Sometimes we'll meet the person who initially appears to be growing fast, but when we see him fall away, we become frustrated. Other times we'll invest our lives in someone who never let the world go, and when we see him fade away, we wonder if it's worth it to share the gospel. But the Lord promises here that there is good soil out there. We're just to be faithful and keep sharing the gospel.2) The Producta) Manifest The ultimate mark of salvation is fruitfulness. What is fruit? It's evidence of the divine life. Paul said that the fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, [and] self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). In other words, when you look at a person who is saved, you will see all of those attitudes manifest on a continuous basis. In Paul's writings to the Colossians, Thessalonians, and Philipians, we learn that a saved person is to have the fruit of righteous behavior--the right kind of attitudes and deeds. Paul tells us in Romans that fruit is winning people to Jesus Christ: "...I purposed to come unto you...that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles" (Rom. 1:13). Fruit is God producing spiritual reality in a person's life, and is manifest in the attitudes and actions of a person. You show me a person who has no manifestation of fruit, and I'll show you somebody who's going to die out. Fruit is the issue. Psalm 1 says that a true believer is "like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth its fruit in its season" (v. 3). Fruit is always the mark of true faith. In John 15, where Jesus speaks of Himself as the Vine and those in Him as the branches, only the true branches brought forth fruit (v. 5). In Ephesians 2:10, Paul says you are created "unto good works." God already ordained that you produce those works. Now, just because you're to produce fruit doesn't mean you'll never do something wrong; it means that you'll have a consuming desire to be productive--to let God produce through your life. A true believer, when he fails God, will have a great brokenness of heart over the failure because his desire is to see God at work in his life.b) Multiplied Notice that Jesus said there will be some who bring a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold. This indicates that not everybody is equally productive. God uses people in different ways. There are also some Christians who go through life yielding thirtyfold, when they could be yielding sixtyfold or a hundredfold. Not all Christians will be as fruitful as they could be. When a Christian is disobedient, he restricts the fruitfulness of his life. I must add, too, that in this parable, Jesus starts at thirtyfold, and that is three times the normal fruitfulness of grain. That tells us that you don't have to scrounge around looking behind the leaves to find a piece of fruit hanging somewhere. A true believer is one whose fruit is multiplied and manifest. The parable shows that a true believer will at least have tremendous and obvious fruit (yielding thirtyfold), and is capable of producing fruit beyond comprehension (yielding a hundredfold). True believers, according to God's plan, are to produce fruit. What is the Lord teaching in this parable? There are some lessons here for us. First, He is saying, "Go preach the gospel. Realize that as you preach, you'll encounter those who resist, those who appear to be converts but will fall away, and those who are double-minded and can't let go of the world. But you're also going to get true converts. Remember that while you preach, you're going to have an enemy. He is 'the wicked one [Gk. ho poneros=Satan (v. 19)].' He's going to do everything he can to keep people from becoming converted." Second, in verse 21, He says that there will be people who won't be able to bear the tribulation and persecution of being a Christian. They'd rather be comfortable without any complications in their lives. They're not willing to make the sacrifice required in becoming a Christian. The flesh is an enemy to the gospel. Finally, in verse 22, He says that "the care of this age, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word." Thus, there are three constant enemies of the gospel: the devil, the flesh, and the world. They will be trying to stop you as you sow the seed.

CONCLUSION

There are two basic lessons we can learn in conclusion:

A. The Requirement for Self-Examination

What kind of soil are you? That's the key question Christ is posing here. God help you to be the good ground! If you're the hard ground that the birds snatch the seed from, ask God to plow your heart. If you're the rocky soil underneath a soft, superficial exterior, ask God to plow deeper into your heart. If you're the weedy soil, ask the Lord to clean you so you can receive the gospel with purity. Christ is asking you to look at your own life, and see what kind of ground you are.

B. The Requirement for Self-confidence

The second lesson is this: The issue in the parable is not the talent of the sower. Suppose a little barefoot kid, five years old, wanted to go out and sow a field with his father. His father is able to sow beautifully--he throws the seed with precision. The inexperienced kid is just throwing seed all over the place. Now, the kid may not have as much of his seed hit the good soil as the father's seed, but when the seed hits the good soil, it doesn't matter who threw it. It's going to grow. The response of the soil does not depend on the talent of the sower.

Some people say, "I'd like to preach the gospel and witness for the Lord, but I'm not very talented." That isn't the issue: If you have the seed (the Word of God), then just throw it! I'm always amazed to hear people say, "If so-and-so ever became saved, he could be a great soul winner!" However, Jesus teaches here that it's not the talent of the sower, but the nature of the soil that matters. The more seed you throw, the better the chance you're going to hit some good soil. Don't just let out a seed or two a year. Keep slinging the seed, and you'll be amazed at how much good soil is lying around--no matter how incapable a sower you are!

Remember this, too: Sometimes the Lord will plow up the ground that didn't receive the seed when it was first thrown. In fact, in Palestine, sometimes the farmer would throw the seed first, then plow it under afterwards. In the same way, sometimes you'll throw the seed, and before the birds can eat it, the Holy Spirit will plow it under. Hard soil, rocky soil, and weedy soil may not always stay hard, rocky, or weedy. Be faithful and keep throwing the seed in the same field, because God, in His grace, may someday do some tilling in that soil.

The lessons to be learned from this parable are very clear: Examine your life, and see what kind of soil you are; and make sure that you're following the Lord Jesus and sowing the seed.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Describe the supernatural capability Jesus had in telling parables.
2. Describe how a sower went about sowing a field in Jesus' time.
3. What are the four kinds of soil that a seed can fall on?
4. What two purposes did the narrow paths between the fields serve? How do the paths fit in into the parable?
5. Describe the wayside soil. What two things can happened to the seed that landed on this soil?
6. Describe the stony soil. What initially happened to the seed that landed on this soil? What ultimately happened?
7. What was deceptive about the weedy soil? Why did the weeds grow so readily? Why must grain be cultivated? What happened to the grain in weedy soil?
8. Describe the good soil. What did good soil normally yield? What kind of crop is indicated by the hundredfold, sixtyfold, and thirtyfold yields?
9. What did Jesus mean when He said, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear"?
10. Who does the sower represent in the parable of the sower? Where do we find support for that answer?
11. What does the seed represent in that parable? If we receive and pass on Christ's message, what

does that make us?

12. What would happen if we didn't have any seeds? Why? What are we to do with the seed (the Word of God) that has been given to us?
13. Are the soils described in the parable basically the same? Explain.
14. What does the soil refer to?
15. How did Jesus want the Apostles to approach the ministry?
16. How is salvation manifested?
17. Describe the attitude of the wayside hearer to the gospel. According to Proverbs and Psalms, what are the characteristics of a man like the wayside hearer?
18. How does Satan blind people?
19. What is the immediate response to the gospel by the stony hearer? Is that an external or internal response? Explain.
20. What causes the stony hearer to fall away? How can that come about?
21. What two effects do trouble and persecution have on the church?
22. What do the weeds depict in the heart of the weedy hearer? Can someone hold on to both Christ and the things of the world? Use Scripture to support your answer.
23. By mentioning the good soil, what is the Lord telling the disciples?
24. What is fruit? In what ways is it manifest in a person's life?
25. Does the fact that we're to bear fruit mean that we will never do anything wrong in our lives? If so, why, and if not, what does it mean?
26. What is implied by the differences in yields in verse 23? How can we restrict our yield?
27. What are the three enemies we will face as we sow the gospel?
28. The issue of the parable is not the talent of the sower. What is the issue? What does that tell us?

Pondering the Principles

1. The parable of the sower and the seed describes soil in four different conditions. Although the parable talks about whether a person receives or rejects Christ, let's carry the idea of the different soil conditions a little further. As a Christian, are you still the soft, clean, deep soil that you were when you accepted Christ? Or, have you recently been allowing your heart to become calloused? Do you find yourself giving in to sin more frequently? Have you been slowly decreasing the amount of time you spend with the Lord in your daily devotion? Have you noticed a decrease in your desire to learn from the Lord's Word? If you have noticed any evidence of your heart becoming more calloused, examine your life and see if your heart needs to be softened. Ask God to give you the desire to be more obedient and to cultivate a deeper relationship with Him through prayer and study of the Word.
2. The stony hearer, who immediately and externally receives the gospel with joy, will fall away when persecution and trouble arises. Second Timothy 3:12 says that all those who are true Christians "shall suffer persecution." Read James 1:2-4. According to verse 2, what should be our reaction to trials? According to verse 3, what does the testing of our faith produce? If we allow ourselves to be tested by trials, what will be the ultimate result (v. 4)? Just as stringent exercise produces strong muscles, so trials produce strong Christians. Whenever you find yourself under pressure from a trial, thank God for what He is doing in your life, and remember that He is allowing you to go through it for the purpose of making you a mature Christian!
3. Anyone who receives Christ's message (becomes a believer) and passes it on becomes a sower. What kind of a sower are you? Do you take advantage of every opportunity God gives you to share the gospel? Or, are you the kind of person that is reluctant to share the message of Christ? Read the following verses: Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:46-48; and Acts 1:8. Jesus commanded the Apostles to preach the gospel to every person. In turn, those who accepted Christ through the preaching of the Apostles preached to others. Are we today any less responsible to continue the work that Christ first

delegated to the Apostles? Write down the names of the non-Christians you meet on a regular basis. Pick one or two people out of that list, and ask God to help you make a concentrated effort to take advantage of each opportunity to say something about Christ to those people.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2026 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).