

## The Sower - Matthew 13:1-23

**Introduction:** One Sunday, the preacher decided to add emphasis to his sermon, so he put four worms in four separate jars. One was put into a jar of beer. The second worm was put into a jar of cigarette smoke. The third worm was put into a jar of chocolate syrup. The fourth worm was put into a jar of good clean soil.

At the end of his sermon, the preacher showed the people that the first worm in the jar of beer was dead; the second worm in cigarette smoke was dead; the third worm in chocolate syrup was dead, but the fourth worm in the good clean soil was alive.

So the preacher asked, *“What can we learn from this demonstration?”* A little old lady stood and said, *“As long as you drink, smoke, and eat chocolate, you won’t have worms!”* I guess some folks are just not going to get it no matter what, right?

Well, apparently, there were some folks in Jesus’ day who just were not going to get it no matter what Jesus said or what He did. So, that is why Jesus now turns to a different style of teaching. In Matthew 13, we come to the first mention of parables in the book. Parables were very important storytelling devices for Jesus. He used them quite frequently in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. 14% of Matthew is composed of parables, 7% of Mark is parables, and 18% of Luke is parables.

Now the way to grab people’s attention in teaching is by using a simple story or an object lesson. By the same token, if Jesus wanted to reveal some deep truth to His followers, He’d do it through a parable. He made the message of salvation and the message of the kingdom of heaven simple yet profound through the use of parables.

But not everyone understood them. Jesus tried to make things very easy to understand, but still there were people who did not have a clue. In vs. 10-17 of our text, Jesus reveals why some people did not understand parables. We’ll talk more about that in a moment. But first, let’s try to understand the setting for this first parable in Matthew’s gospel – the Parable of the Sower.

Vs. 1 begins by telling us that the events in chapter 13 took place *“That same day”* as the events in chapter 12. What events? Well, that same day Jesus and His disciples picked the grain on the Sabbath day, and the Pharisees jumped on Him and accused them of breaking the Sabbath laws. That same day Jesus delivered the blind demoniac from his demons and restored his sight. That same day Jesus accused the Pharisees of coming close to committing the unforgivable sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. That same day, Jesus refused to give the Pharisees another sign of His Messiahship. And that same day, Jesus called everyone who would follow

Him His family.

It had been a full day, but Jesus wasn't ready to retire for the evening yet. On that same day Jesus "*went out of the house*" where He had been teaching and walked down to the lake. And because "*such large crowds gathered around Him*" Jesus "*got into a boat and sat in it*" and began to teach in parables.

This would be a good time to define the word "*parable*." "*Parable*" is from *parabole*, which is a compound word. "*Para* means "*alongside*" and *ballo* means "*to throw or place*." So, a parable is a story that is placed alongside a biblical truth or principle for comparison, to shed light and understanding. The classic definition for a parable is: "*An earthly story with a heavenly meaning*." Today, we preachers would call them illustrations. First, let's look at:

### **1. The Presentation of the Parable (3-9).**

Jesus tells them in vs. 3 that "*a farmer went out to sow his seeds*." A common sight in Galilee was a man with a bag of seed slung over his shoulder broadcasting them by hand in the fields. In fact, as Jesus was in the boat looking out over the shore, He may have very well spotted a farmer broadcasting his seeds on his field and used him for His story. But the main part of the story was the different types of ground on which the seeds fell. First, He says that some seed fell onto:

**A. Hard Ground (3-4).** The "*path*" is a description of the roads and trails that crossed the fields. These were the paths that people would walk on. Because the ground on the "*path*" would be packed down and hardened by the traffic, the seed could not penetrate the soil, but lay exposed so that "*birds came and ate it up*." Then Jesus said that some of the seed fell upon:

**B. Rocky Ground (5-6).** These "*rocky places*" which Jesus referred to was not like my front yard – a little dirt and a lot of rocks which seem to grow! Jesus was talking about sections of the field which looked good on the surface, but had a limestone bed underneath. There was enough soil to plow and plant but there was not enough depth for plants to take root. Seeds that fell on the "*rocky places*" where they "*did not have much soil*" often "*sprang up quickly*" but then they'd wither away and die under a scorching sun because they "*had no root*." Jesus also said that some of the seed fell upon:

**C. Thorny Ground (7).** Sometimes these fields were lined with thorn bushes which became natural fences that kept animals out of the crops. He said that some of the seeds "*fell among thorns*." There was good soil there so the seed would grow, but before they could produce a crop, the thorns would choke them out. Finally, Jesus also said that some of the seed fell upon:

**D. Good Ground (8-9).** This "good ground" was in the middle of the field away from the hardened "path;" away from the "rocky places" and away from the "thorns." Because the seed fell on "good soil" and were not hindered, they "produced a crop" which Jesus said would be 30, 60, to 100 times what was sown. When the seeds landed on the good ground, there was an abundant harvest.

Jesus then said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" In other words, "If you want to understand what I'm talking about, you will. If you don't want to learn, you won't. If you want to believe that I'm just giving you a lesson in agriculture, that's all you'll get. But if you want to see the principle behind the prose, then put on your spiritual ears." Jesus was inviting those who wanted to know more to approach Him personally. Like a commander about to lead his men on a mission, who asks them to step forward if they are with him, Jesus calls for mission minded disciples to step up and learn the principle of the parable. This leads us to the second point:

## **2. The Purpose of Parables (10-17).**

Jesus' disciples did approach Him. Apparently they wanted to know more. They were like those truckers on the interstate who are asked by other CB's "Have you got your ears on?" They had their spiritual ears on. They approached Jesus with a question, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" They were probably wondering, "Why don't you just say what you mean, so everyone can understand?" Well, Jesus proceeds to tell the purpose for teaching in parables. Here it is:

Jesus told parables to reveal God's truth to believers and confuse the unbelievers. In v. 11, Jesus says that He wants the disciples to have "the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven." Now, when Jesus talks about "secrets," He's not referring to mysterious riddles that must be deciphered. He's talking about simple truths of God that are befuddling to folks who are not in tune with God.

The Parable of the Sower was a simple story of what it will be like for those who are obedient in spreading the gospel of Christ – some will receive it but the majority won't.

There's no great mystery here, but you have to have spiritual insight to see it. Jesus was saying that to those who believe in Him, they are given understanding. Those who reject Him, they won't understand. To them it will seem foolish to only reap 25% of what you sow. To them, it seems silly to give the first 10% of your income to God. To them, it's crazy to walk a second mile for someone who makes you walk the first mile, when you've been slapped on one cheek or to turn the other one.

Jesus uses the words of Isaiah (6:9-10) to describe the unbelievers, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. 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” Matthew 13:14-15 (NIV).*

Why couldn't they see or hear or understand? Well, they had made the choice not too. Jesus had already confronted these unbelievers in chapter 12, for their rejection and blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. So since they had rejected their Messiah, the result was that they had closed their eyes and ears to the truth. Their hearts had become hardened and could not understand. Without the Holy Spirit the secret things of the Bible make no sense.

But the parables reveal God's secrets to the believers. Jesus says in vs. 16 that the believer's "eyes" and "ears" are blessed. Why? Because they have the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide them. **1 Cor. 2:9-10 (NIV)** says, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God."

At the end of these parables, Jesus asked His disciples, in v. 51, "Have you understood all these things?" They said, "Yes" not because they were smarter, but because they were Spirit-led. They wanted to learn the deeper spiritual truths. Finally, let's look at:

### **3. The Parallel of the Parable (18-23).**

Jesus explains the meaning of this parable for the disciples. He doesn't explicitly say it, but it should be obvious that the sower is Jesus Himself. He does explain in Luke 8:11 that "the seed is the Word of God." But the parallel of this parable is that the faithful Christian is also a sower who is spreading the gospel message of salvation – the wonderful Words of Life to a lost and dying world. So in the broader sense, anyone who proclaims the message of God is a sower. First, Jesus explains the meaning of:

#### **A. The Seed on the Hard Ground (18-19).**

The reason someone "does not understand" the word is because he or she doesn't want to understand. Like the hard path that no seed will penetrate, the unbeliever has hardened his or her heart to the gospel so much so that Satan can easily snatch away the message intended to be "sown in his heart."

Just as the "path" was hardened by traffic, Satan uses the continual traffic of busyness, materialism, bitterness, anger, unforgiveness, and intellectualism to harden people's hearts to the gospel message. And when the heart is hardened, it can't receive the word of God.

Satan can even snatch away truth from believers. Believers can become hardened so much, they can read the Bible and not get anything from it. They can attend a church and not truly worship. Satan can't take your

salvation from you, but he can certainly exert enough negative influence on you to where you feel like you're not saved. Next, Jesus explains the meaning of:

**B. The Seed on the Rocky Ground (20-21).**

The "*rocky places*" represent the heart that is shallow. Though this person at first receives the word with joy, it only lasts for a short time because there was no real root to dig into the soil of God's grace.

Because of some trouble this person "*quickly falls away.*" How many times have you seen someone make a profession of faith spring up and work hard for a little while only to fade away? Why do they do this? More often than not, their decision was only based on emotion. Their faith was planted in shallow soil. It had nothing to take root in because it was planted in rocky ground. Then Jesus explains the meaning of:

**C. The Seed on the Thorny Ground (22).**

Like the seed choked out by the "*thorns,*" some people hear the gospel, are intrigued by Christ, but are choked out by "*the worries of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth.*"

Such was the case of the rich, young ruler. He was interested, but he let other things get in the way. He wanted to be saved, but he wanted the other things more. He wanted Jesus as his Savior, but not his Lord, so his faith was choked out, and he was unfruitful. Then finally, Jesus explains the meaning of:

**D. The Seed on Good Ground (23).**

The person who is "*good soil*" for spiritual seeds responds in three ways: he "*hears the word,*" "*understands it*" (he does not reject it), and "*produces a crop.*" His faith is evidenced by his life. What kind of crop does this person produce? It's the kind of spiritual fruit found in **Gal. 5:22-25**. Love, joy, peace, patience, faithfulness, goodness, gentleness, kindness, and self-control. **Conclusion:** In closing, I'm going to explain this parable of the Sower with a modern day parable.

One morning following a storm, a man was walking along the seashore. The storm had washed up thousands of starfish onto the beach. He knew they could not survive for very long out in the hot sun, so he began to pick up starfish, one by one and throw them back into the life-giving water.

A young man was watching the old man from a distance. After a while of watching him sweat and toil, he approached the old man and said, "*Man, don't you know you're wasting your time. There are thousands of starfish on this beach. You can't possibly save them all. What difference can you possibly make?*"

The old man just ignored him and picked up another starfish. Throwing the starfish into the ocean, he turned to the younger man and said, "*It made a difference for that one didn't it?*"

To some, the truth will make a difference. To all it's a matter of life and death, and that makes all the difference in the world.

The truth of this parable is that Jesus' message is for everyone, but not everyone will hear it, receive it or accept it. But this should not keep us from spreading the seeds. Sure, some will reject it. Some will only be pretenders. Some may not ever take root, but thank God, some will. And that is the Parable of the Sower.