

Parable of the Sower

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear."

The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables:

"Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.
For this people's heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.'

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away

what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

Matt 13:1-23

How to read a parable

- Parables are short stories to illustrate a point. "Earthly stories with a heavenly meaning."
 - They were spoken, not written, and were meant to give an image or make an impression upon the listener. They were not intended to be examined word-by-word.
 - Jesus spoke parables to agrarian communities so the stories often feature harvests, seeds, vineyards, etc.
- Parables usually convey a single main idea.
 - In an allegory, every detail has meaning and significance. The parables, in contrast, generally have one main point that's being illustrated.
 - The Parable of the Sower has four seed illustrations making four points and can be seen as 4 parables in one.
- Parables are not always (or even often) obvious. They are meant to challenge hearers to think over them continuously.
 - To the faithful and persistent, they yield truth
 - To the lazy and uncaring, they conceal the secrets of the kingdom

Context

- Fields in the region Jesus lived were long strips of land separated by common walking paths. The paths were packed down and hard. When throwing out seed in a field, some seed would end up on these paths but the packed soil would prevent this seed from growing.
- In this region, there were often limestone shelves that were covered with a thin layer of soil. A seed landing in this "rocky soil" would germinate and grow quickly since the thin soil would warm quickly in the sun, but once the roots hit the stone below, the plant would wither.
- After tilling a field for sowing, the field can appear clean and fertile but weeds that have been tilled but not removed can quickly spring back up and choke out other plants.

Large Group Notes

There are four responses to the Word of God in the parable.

1. Lost opportunity - Someone could be open to hearing the gospel but
2. Persecution - Many people still face persecution for their faith, especially in other countries. We often feel persecution when our lives look different because of what God's done in them.
3. Fruitlessness - Some people may not actually reject the gospel and live an outwardly Christian life while not actually being transformed inwardly. If inwardly we still treasure worldly things, we won't bear fruit.
4. Bearing fruit - Seed goes deep into the soil producing fruit many times over.

In the parable, we see that we are dealing with Satan, persecution and adversity, and the cares of this world. None of these can be eliminated but they can be overcome if we:

1. Seek God daily
2. Find fellowship

Questions

- Why did Jesus teach in parables?
- How could worries and wealth cause faith to be unfruitful?
- What are the roots that help sustain our faith? How can we grow them deeper?
- Can you give an example of what each seed would look like today?
- The person represented by the last seed hears and understands the word that was sown. What is it that they understand? What is it that the others do not understand?
- How weed and cultivate the soil in our lives so that it's fertile for the message of the kingdom?