Parable of The Sower Matthew 13:1-23

Introduction: Parables have been described as "Earthly stories with heavenly meanings." The longer Biblical dictionary meaning is, "*a somewhat lengthy utterance or narrative drawn from nature or human circumstances, the object of which is to set forth a spiritual lesson.*" It denotes a placing beside, to throw or lay beside, to compare. It signifies a placing one thing beside another with a view to comparison.

Jesus was a supremely gifted teacher. Accustomed to preaching to a crowd with a wide range of understanding and attitudes, he based each parable on the common, everyday events that made up first-century life—lost money, sheep, and shepherds, cruel creditors. Both Christ's teaching and his parables focus on the issue of kingdom. Kingdom in the gospels does not have to do with territory or realm ruled over but with the rule or authority itself—God's rule on earth in the person of Christ.

Parables brilliantly illustrate important truths about Christ's kingdom, truths which demand a response. But the sad fact is that our rebellion and sin often close our minds and hinder our response. Thus, the brilliance of the illustration may only cause some people to persist more deeply in error. In our first parable we will get a chance to look at this sad fact.

This Bible Study introduces you to several of Jesus's parables and their application for today. It is my prayer that you will be captivated and challenged by the parables, that you have <u>"ears to hear"</u> what the Lord is saying to you through them.

Observation, Interpretation, and Application are three keys that unlock the treasures of Scripture.

Let's begin!

Have you ever wondered why the same book, or the same sermon will produce strikingly different results in different people? How is it, for instance, that some people seem unable to grasp the simplest and most obvious spiritual truths while others are transformed by them? In the parable of the sower, Jesus talks about different types of soil in order to tell why this happens.

Think about it. Think about a first-hand experience—serious or humorous--you have had with farming or with caring for plants in some way. I would think that most of us would agree that the condition of the soil can make a huge difference in the plant's ability to thrive.

Personal Reflection. We all have areas of our hearts and minds where our "soil" is soft and receptive to God, as well as areas where our "soil" is hard and areas where you would like God to make you more receptive to his love and his will in your life.

Turn to Matthew 13.

The parable of the Sower is Jesus' most important parable because it provides more clues than any other parable as to the nature of parables and how they should be interpreted. The parable is followed by Christ's own interpretation and discussion of its contents. It is an excellent place to begin our study of the parables.

This parable has three parts: 1) Jesus gives the parable (**vv.3b-9**), 2) He explains the purpose of speaking in parables (**vv.10-17**), and 3) Jesus interprets the parable (**vv.18-23**).

Discussion:

- 1. Image you are a farmer or a farmer's child at the time of Jesus listening to this story with the rest of the crowd. Based on what you knew about images of seeds and soils, in your mind you could identify with and relate to what Jesus was saying. No doubt he would have captured your attention because you would be familiar with the subject matter.
 - **a.** There may have also been some curiosity as to why Jesus, seemingly out of nowhere, started speaking about soil and seeds.
- **2.** In **verse 10**, the disciples asked Jesus, "Why do you speak to the people in parables? On the surface, you would think that Jesus would want everybody to understand every parable.
 - a. The seven parables in Matthew 13 called by the Lord "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven"(v.11), taken together, describe the result of the presence of the Gospel in the world during the present age, that is the time of seed-sowing which began with our Lord's personal ministry and ends with the "harvest."
 - **i.** A "mystery" in Scriptures is a previously hidden truth, now revealed, but in which a supernatural element still remains despite the revelation.
 - ii. Some other mysteries are, the mystery of Israel's blindness in this age (Rom.11:25); the translation of living saints at the end of this age (1Cor. 15:51,52); the New Testament church as one body composed of Jew and Gentile (Eph. 3:1-11; Rom. 16:25; Eph.6:19); and the church as the bride of Christ (Eph.5:28-32).
 - b. God sovereignly uses the parables either to harden a person's heart so that he or she will be unable to respond (v.15) or to elicit the positive response of coming to Jesus, asking for an explanation, and accepting his message (v.10). The disciples had a positive response and wanted to know more. People are at different stages of readiness.
 - **c.** At His discretion, God gives even more understanding to those that have more, and takes away from others the little understanding they have. (**v.12**). This phrase means that we are responsible to use well what we have. When people reject Jesus, their hardness of heart drives away or renders useless even the little understanding they had.
- **3.** In **verses 18-23** Jesus explains the meaning of this parable to his disciples. The seed is the message of the kingdom. The Sower or farmer is those that teach, preach, and lead others. The soil represents those unto whom the seed is scattered or the four types of responses.
- 4. The wicked one destroyed the value of God's Word for the first group of people.a. All the seeds are good if they are the Word of God. The soils are different.

- **b.** The first group represents soil that is hardened and cannot receive the word. It is quickly snatched away. It remains on the surface and can't get in.
- **5.** To help people understand God's message we have to know it for ourselves and be persistent in sharing it. We also have to pray for God to open and soften hearts that are closed and stony. We also need to be living epistles before them.
- 6. Verses 20-21 describe the kind of person referred to as stony or rocky soil. These are those that receive the word with gladness, but the word doesn't go down deep within. An example would be a person who is inconsistent in their spiritual walk, up and down on a regular basis. It is the type of person that has no spiritual root, so the gospel bears no fruit in their lives.
 - a. To avoid this in our own lives and discourage it in the lives of others we need to seek God for a deeper understanding of His Word. We must receive the Word with a purpose of application, asking the Lord to show us how to apply it to our lives.
- 7. The third type described in **verse 22**, the ground is contaminated with the "weeds" of the cares the cares and worries of life, and the deceitfulness of riches that choke out the word. The seed in this soil is also unfruitful.
 - **a.** To avoid being this type of soil and be the type that Jesus mentions in **verse 23**, one has to have a heart prepared to receive the gospel and yielding an abundant harvest according to the individual's God given potential.
 - **b.** To avoid being choked out by thorns and the deceitfulness of riches one has to have a relationship with the Lord, knowing that he cares for you and will supply one's needs. Also, a person needs to seek God's Kingdom first.
- 8. Which of the four kinds of soil do you identify with? Think about some practical ways we can become "good soil" (v.23).

Prayer: Thank God for ways he has opened your heart and mind to his message of love. Invite him to continue to work the soil of your life and to help you be more and more receptive to his love.

Now or Later

In a time of quite ask God to show you places in your heart and mind where he wants to till, soften, and prepare you to hear his Word. Write a prayer in response to what you sense God is showing you.

Homework: Read The "Lost" Parables, Luke 15:1-32