



*"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."*  
 - Matthew 28:18-20 (KJV)

*"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."* - Mark 16:15-16 (KJV)

As Christians we have all heard the words of Jesus that we commonly refer to as the Great Commission." It is found in Matthew 28:18-20 as well as in Mark 16:15,16. Jesus called us to "Go ye..." We, as Christians should all be a bunch of "Ye's..." We are all called to go forth and preach the Good news of salvation to anyone and everyone we come in contact with. We see as Jesus "commissions" His disciples, He tells them to teach, preach, and baptize those that choose to believe the message of the Good News of Salvation through Jesus.

Throughout the last 2000 years, we as well meaning Christians, have gone forth and tried to fulfill this mandate of the Lord. We have tried to fulfill this commission in many ways. Some of these ways were through force, tyranny and fear tactics such as the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition. In times past, some used the "fire and brimstone" approach. Over the last 150 years there has been the "sinner's prayer" movement where the person just says a prayer concerning Jesus and their desire to go to heaven instead of hell and that person would be "saved." Today, there is the "inclusion movement," which simply says that everyone is saved no matter who you are or what you believe or what you do because Jesus died for all sin and there is no such thing as hell anymore so everyone is saved and goes to heaven.

There is no doubt that Jesus "commissions" His disciples to "Go ye..." However, we must also remember that Jesus was with His 12 disciples for 3½ years in which He taught, trained and disciplined them so that when the time came for Him to give them this "commission" that we read of in Matthew 28 and Mark 16, they would be prepared with the correct approach and understanding concerning what truly makes a sinner into a disciple of Jesus.

One thing I would like to address before we continue is that Jesus never taught or mentioned anything concerning making "converts." Actually, there is no such usage of this word found within the scriptures. The only use of the words "convert" or "converted" are when they are used as "verbs," not nouns. The Hebrew and Greek words that are translated into English as "convert," "converts" or "converted" are words of actions, not a person or a group of people. Both the Hebrew words (*haphak; shuwb*) and the Greek word (*epistrephō*) mean the exact same thing - "to turn away from something and turn towards something else, to turn towards to love and obey." Although not the same words it does sound as if these action words translated to the word "convert" is very similar to the action word that is known as "repent." Hmmm.....

Jesus called His twelve disciples who became the Apostles, to make disciples. The word "disciple" means to be a pupil, a student, a follower, **one who changes their lifestyle to that of the one they are choosing to follow**. In other words Jesus is calling His disciples, both at that time and those of us today, that we are to, "Go ye," into all the world and make disciples - those that would choose to change their lifestyle, their character, their manner of behavior to that of the One that they are choosing to follow after - the lifestyle role-modeled by Jesus.

One of the teaching methods that Jesus used to teach and "disciple" His disciples was the use of parables. Concerning bringing the Good News of salvation to the world, Jesus used parables to give His disciples a clear understanding concerning the "heart" of those that they would encounter in their journeys. One such parable is known as the "Parable of the Sower and the Four Soils," which is found in Matthew 13:3-9; Mark 4:3-8; and Luke 8:5-8. For our discussion we will use the account in Matthew 13:3-9, although all three say the same thing.

Matthew 13:3-9 - *"And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung 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. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."*

In each of the accounts Jesus first gives the parable publicly for all to hear. At the conclusion, Jesus uses one of His favorite sayings, *"Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."* Later in the day, when Jesus was alone with His disciples, they came to Him and asked Him to explain the parable. Jesus goes on to tell them that if they could not grasp the meaning of this parable, how would they be able to grasp the meaning of the other parables? By Jesus saying this, we can see that this is a very important parable for His disciples to truly understand. Therefore, its meaning and teaching is of the utmost importance for us, today. Because of the importance for them to grasp the understanding of this parable, Jesus then proceeds to explain the parable to His disciples, as well as for us, today. His explanation is found in Matthew 13:18-23; Mark 4:14-20 and Luke 8: 11-15. Again for our discussion we will use the account in Matthew.

Matthew 13:18-23 - *"Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. 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 way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."*

Let's first take a look at the "characters" in this parable.

1. The "seed" - This represents the Word of God but more importantly the message of salvation through Jesus. It represents the Word of God concerning restoration between God and man. It is the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ the Messiah, the Lord and Savior.
2. The "sower" - This represents Jesus who is the One who "sows" the seed of the Good News of salvation in Him. It also represents God, the Father, who has been "sowing the seeds" of salvation through the prophets and all of the Jewish scriptures
3. The "Four Soils" represent the "Four Types of Heart Conditions" that are found within people's hearts
  - Soil #1 - The "wayside heart" - This is a heart that has become hardened to the Good News of salvation through Jesus. It is a heart that is in total rebellion against God. It is a heart that totally denies anything to do with Jesus as the Messiah. It is a heart that is not at all open to receiving anything concerning God's love, forgiveness, grace, mercy or peace. The devil (the fowls of the air) comes immediately to take any hint of the Word away so that the individual will stay in their darkness and deception. It is important to remember that this does not mean that the person with

this "heart condition" is mean, nasty, harsh or ornery. This heart can come in many different "packages." It can come in a mindset that is deceived in believing in other gods. It can come in a heart of an atheist. It can come in a heart that believes they are their own "god." The bottom line is that it is a heart that is hardened to the truth of God's Word and salvation through Jesus.

- Soil #2 - The "rocky heart" - This is a heart that when it first hears the message of the Gospel it thinks it sounds wonderful. Their ears "receive" it but yet their heart is not truly prepared to fully receive it. Their faith in the truth is very shallow and when the "heat of persecution" comes for being a follower of Christ they immediately walk away from it.
- Soil #3 - The "thorny heart" - This is a heart that when it first hears the message of the Gospel it also thinks it sounds wonderful. Their ears "receive" it but again, their heart was never truly prepared to fully receive it. The devil knows the buttons to push for this individual which would be the cares and concerns of this world. This could mean the thoughts of gain, wealth, looking for a mate, position or anything else that becomes the priority of the individual heart. Actually, it just reveals that this was always the priority in that person's heart. The devil just knows how to expose it. The result, again, is to walk away from the Good News of salvation in Jesus.
- Soil #4 - The "good soil heart" - This is a heart that is prepared and ready to receive the Good News of salvation through Jesus. They receive it with joy. It is real and it is steadfast.

What does it mean that this person's heart is "good soil" and was prepared for the Good News of Jesus? How does this happen? It goes back to the message of John the Baptist who said, "*Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand.*" He was sent to "*prepare the way of the Lord.*" John's baptism represented and expressed a heart that would be "fertile ground," prepared through a heart of true repentance in recognizing their sin and wickedness.

This "fertile heart" is "prepped and ready" for when the true presence of God would come and manifest itself in the form of Jesus. The person's heart would be open in receiving Jesus as their Messiah, their King, their only hope of true salvation. It was truly, preparing the way for the presence of the Lord to come into their midst and into their heart.

John's baptism of repentance was a "preparing of the way" for Messiah's first coming on this earth. A heart of true repentance prepares the way within the individual's heart. It is a heart that is truly repentant, that truly desires to **turn away** from the wickedness of their sinful nature and lifestyle and **turns towards** God. That individual recognizes their need for God. They are at the place where they cry out to God for their salvation.

This is the concept that Jesus presented in the "Sermon on the Mount" found in Matthew 5, 6, 7. The very first "step" to salvation is becoming "poor in spirit." (Matthew 5:3) It is recognizing your need for God to get you out of the "pit" of sin and its bondage. It is recognizing your need for help and the only one who can give you the help you need is God, the Father, through His Son, Jesus.

Another interesting aspect we see is that the "sower" in this parable would not be considered by many farmers to be a very good farmer. Seed was very precious and the farmer would always make sure they planted it in soil that would produce the most crops. However, in this parable we see the "sower," Jesus, spreading the "seed" of the Good News of salvation everywhere and to everyone. In other words, He gives everyone the opportunity to hear the message of salvation. It then becomes up to the individual and the condition of their heart that will be the deciding factor in what they actually do with that "seed."

Unfortunately, Jesus gives us a bleak outlook concerning this "sowing" of the Good News of salvation. One out of four (25%) will truly receive the Good News and take root. Remember, we are not just talking

about getting people to say a prayer and that makes them "saved." The individual's heart must be prepared, recognizing their need for God, desiring to have that relationship with God restored through the acceptance of Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. Their heart must be "prepared (a heart of true repentance) for the Kingdom of God (salvation through Jesus) is at hand (is now available to that person)."

How would we be able to recognize those individuals whose heart was truly prepared and truly received Jesus as their Messiah, their Lord and Savior? We will know because their lifestyle will begin to express the lifestyle and character of Jesus - some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold and some one hundred fold. It is a growing process, but there will be some movement into that new lifestyle that was role-modeled by Jesus.

This is one of the few parables that we do get an explanation straight from the Teacher, Himself. Therefore, this must be an important message as well as a fundamental teaching to His twelve "would be" Apostles, if they were going to be used as vehicles in His "Great Commission" in bringing His Kingdom to the "uttermost parts of the earth." Jesus declared, *"He that has ears to hear, let Him hear."* Did the disciples "get it" after He explained the parable? One would hope so. However, they were a "work in progress."

The message of the parable is a simple one but yet so vital. The central theme of this parable concerns the "condition" of a person's heart in receiving and accepting the gift of salvation, the Good News, through believing in who Jesus is - the Son of God, the Messiah, the Lord of lords, the King of kings, the Savior of the world. Yes, we are all sent... (Matthew 28:28) Yes, we need the laborers to go forth... (Matthew 9:38) Yes, how will the lost "hear" unless they are told... (Romans 10:14-17) However, it is the condition of the "hearer's heart" that is central to that person's salvation.

If a person's heart is a heart that is truly prepared and recognizes their need for God with a heart that is repentant (being "poor in spirit"); If a person's heart is a heart that is truly ready for and knows that they need the truth of God's Word (His precepts and His ways); If a person's heart is a heart that believes in the "Messenger of the Covenant," the Messiah, Jesus...  
... then that kind of heart will be open to receive the Truth. It is that person who will progressively grow, inwardly (thirty, sixty and one hundred fold), as a true disciple of Jesus. The "fruit" that will be manifested is a lifestyle that follows after the abundant lifestyle of Jesus.

Jesus was saying that this is the correct understanding in bringing the Good News of salvation to the world. It is not about "how many people we got saved today." We cannot save anyone. All we are called to do is, "Go ye..."

This parable shows the importance of the Gospel and the Word of God going forth to **everyone**. The Good News is to be told to everyone. That is the disciple's responsibility. It is the responsibility of anyone who hears the Good News to have the **willingness of heart** to receive this Good News. If they do, then they enter into the wonderful world of being a "disciple" of Jesus. The process of the lifestyle change starts here.

It is no coincidence that we see in Luke 9 and in Mark 6:7, Jesus then sends the disciples out two by two to "get their feet wet" in bringing forth the Kingdom of God and the Good News. This time of being sent was just so they could get a "taste" of what it would be like when He would leave them and "commission" them with the responsibility to go and make disciples.

Through this parable, Jesus was telling His twelve disciples/Apostles, as well as His disciples today, that it was just as important that the "hearts of the people" they preach the Good News to be prepared and ready to receive their message as the very message itself that they were bringing. There needs to be a "forerunner spirit" that goes forth in this hour just as John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. The "forerunner" message is the message of repentance which prepares the way for the Lord in a person's heart. *"He that has ears to hear, let Him hear."*