

The Parables of Jesus

- The Sower and the Four Types of Soil

(Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23; Mark 4:3-8, 14-20;
Luke 8:5-8, 11-15)

The "Parable of the Sower and the Four Types of Soil" is one of the most well known of all of Jesus' parables. It is found in each of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). It was given by Jesus as He was teaching on the northwestern shore of the

Sea of Galilee. Mark and Matthew give us the detail that Jesus actually sat in a boat to give this teaching. All of His 12 disciples would have been there, as well as the crowds that followed Jesus from that area/region. The "time frame" for the giving of this parable would be somewhere towards the end of Jesus' first year of ministry and the beginning of His second year of ministry.

In each of the accounts Jesus presents the parable for all those present to hear. Later on, when He was alone with just His disciples we see that Jesus gives the explanation of this parable.

- The "Parable of the Sower and the Four Types of Soils" as found in 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."*
- The explanation given by Jesus of the parable as seen in 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."*

Before we go further in to this parable, we see that at the conclusion of this parable, Jesus uses of one of His favorite sayings, *"Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."* Jesus uses this expression, or something very similar, throughout His ministry. It is interesting to note that in the Book of Revelation, Jesus, as referred to by the angel speaking to John, uses this term at the conclusion of each letter to the seven churches. Therefore, we can say that this was an important phrase to grasp and understand. Let's take a brief aside and discuss this very important phrase used by Jesus.

In the Gospel accounts, Jesus would use this phrase usually at the conclusion of a parable or sometimes at the end of mentioning a specific fact that had deeper spiritual meaning. This phrase is also seen twice in the Jewish scriptures. In both instances it was used as an admonishment to the people concerning their rebellious attitudes and hearts. (Deuteronomy 29:4 and Ezekiel 12:2) It was an admonishment to let the people know that they were not hearing and seeing the things of God correctly. In other words the people's spiritual eyesight and their spiritual hearing were "dull."

In using this phrase, Jesus was giving a hint to those listening that there was truly something more in what He had just said then it may outwardly appear. Jesus was saying that, he who listens with a true desire to hear the truth will understand and grasp what He was truly saying. It is an exhortation to a person who has a "teachable spirit." It is an exhortation to the one who is not closed minded to their own views or man-

made laws and ways of tradition but rather is open to receive what is being taught as God's truth. It is an exhortation which infers, "Let the individual who is willing and has an open heart and mind to the true things of God, hear, accept and receive with true spiritual understanding what they just heard."

Many people have such closed minds that they will never receive or believe true "spiritual truths" regardless of the evidence that is produced and shown to them through the scriptures. The reason being is that they simply do not want to. They refuse because they are comfortable in thinking that they have it all "down pat" in a nice neat little package. They are fearful of getting outside their "comfort zone" of having everything in that "neat little box." This includes God and His ways. Jesus came to mess up these "neat little boxes" His listeners may have had. We all need to take a lesson from this. Sometimes, we have our own "nice, little neat boxes" of what we think are absolute truths and that we think are absolutely correct. When confronted with the possibility that we may be seeing or hearing the things of God incorrectly, we immediately reject it – just as the religious leaders did with Jesus. Hmmm...

Jesus gives a good definition of this saying in Matthew 13:14-16 as He quotes from the prophet Isaiah, *"Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of **this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.**"* The specific truth that would be "hidden" within the parable or teaching to some listening, would resound with a very distinct "sound" within a person whose attitude of heart was open to God's truth and is willing to put aside their own traditional, human logic and understanding.

When using this phrase, it would be as if Jesus was exhorting the listener to go beyond what they see, hear and know within the natural realm and desire and choose to see, hear and grasp things that go beyond their human logic and understanding. It would be a choice and a decision to walk humbly before God and choose not to be puffed up and prideful in thinking that "I have arrived" and know it all. Again, this is referring to a person whose heart is teachable and open to the truth – God's truth.

Jesus used this phrase after this parable, the Parable of Clean and Unclean Food and when He gave the analogy of salt. (Luke 14:35) Jesus also used this phrase after He stated a specific "spiritual" fact such as His identifying John the Baptist as the one who would come in the "spirit of Elijah" preparing the way of the Messiah (Matthew 11:14-15). If the people truly understood that John was that person, than they would be able to grasp the fact that Jesus was the One who John was "pointing" to as their Messiah.

The use of this "saying of Jesus" concerning having "ears to hear" is true for us today. Jesus, as mentioned previously, warned the Seven Churches in Revelation of many things as He uses the phrase, *"If anyone has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches."* (Revelation 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:29; 3:6; 3:13; 3:22) In every moment of our lives as born again children of God, we are never to allow ourselves to become "dull in hearing" by thinking that we have "arrived" and that we know it all. If we begin thinking this way and if we are not open to being teachable, we may find ourselves being in danger of becoming dull in our hearing of the truth and losing our "spiritual" ears to hear.

Getting back to our parable, we see that when Jesus was alone with His disciples they came and asked Him to explain the parable. In Luke's account, Jesus tells the disciples that they would come to know the things of the Kingdom but it would come "progressively." In Mark's account, Jesus goes on to say that if the disciples could not grasp the meaning of this parable how would they be able to grasp the meaning and truths of the other parables He would be bringing forth to them? By Jesus saying this, we can see that this is parable was a **very important parable** for His disciples to truly understand. Therefore, it is a very important parable for us, as the Jesus' disciples today to truly understand.

As we continue on with our discussion, let's take a look at the "characters" in this parable.

- The "seed" - This represents the Word of God, but more importantly the message of salvation through Jesus, as well as it represents the Word of God concerning restoration of the relationship between God and man. It is the Gospel, the Good News, concerning Jesus Christ the Messiah, the Lord and Savior, who brings salvation in which, through Him, restores the breach in the relationship between God and man. In other words it represents Jesus who is the Word of God.
- The "Sower" - This many times is thought to represent Jesus who is the One who came to earth to "sow" the seed of the Good News of salvation found in Him. This is not necessarily incorrect. However, I believe that it could also represent God, the Father, who has been "sowing the seeds" of salvation through the prophets and all of the Jewish scriptures that point to Jesus. It is the Father who "sows" His Son and gives everyone the opportunity to receive Him and "grow" in becoming a "new creature in Christ," a "born again child of God," for the purpose of bringing forth "fruit."
- The "fowl/ birds" – These fowl/birds come to "devour the seed" that was sown. (Matthew 13:4) Jesus compares these birds/fowl to "the wicked one." He tells His disciples in Matthew 13:19, "... *the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.*" In other words it is referring to the enemy, the devil, who comes to steal the truth of the Word. He comes to try to keep people away from Jesus. The enemy also tries to do this by perverting the Truth with false teachings, etc.
- The "Four Soils" represent the "Four Types of Heart Conditions" that are found in people
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 God or 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. We see that the devil (represented by 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 is mean, nasty, harsh nor ornery. This heart can come in many different "packages." It can come in a heart 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." It can be a heart that simply believes that they are okay without 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, their heart is revealed and 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 various "buttons" to push for this type of heart. According to Jesus, these "buttons" all involve the "cares and concerns of this world." This could mean things such as: the thoughts of gain or wealth, looking for a mate, fame, honor, position or anything else that becomes the priority of the individual heart instead of God. Actually, it simply reveals that this was always the priority in that person's heart. The devil just knows how to expose it. The result, again, is a decision 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. How is an individual's

heart prepared for the Good News of Jesus? It starts with an individual who is truly "poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3). The individual truly recognizes their need for God. They hear 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 and recognize their need for God (poor in spirit).

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. Without realizing it, this "type of heart" had been truly "preparing the way" for the presence of the Jesus, the Savior and 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 recognizes their need for a Savior to save them from their sin and its fate. It brings them to a place that when they hear the truth and way of salvation, they cry out and receive the Good News with a joyful and prepared heart that is ready for Jesus. A continual heart of repentance within the believer prepares the way to experience the manifest, tangible presence of the Lord continually within their life.

- The "thirty, sixty and hundred fold fruit" – This refers to the "fruit of the Spirit" as found in Galatians 2:24 being seen within the believer's character and lifestyle. It also refers to the believer's lifestyle and message of Jesus to others that will bring forth more "fruit" in the form of more new disciples.

One thing that is so very important but yet seems to get lost in the understanding of this parable 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. In this parable we see the "Sower," spreading the "seed" of the Good News of salvation **everywhere and to everyone**. In other words, He desires to give **everyone** the opportunity to hear the Good News of salvation and being restored back into relationship with the Father. It then becomes up to the individual and the condition of their heart. This is what will be the deciding factor concerning what the individual actually will 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 receive, **truly receive** the Good News in the way that it will take root and not wither away but grow to bring forth "much fruit."

Remember, we are not just talking about getting people to say a prayer and thinking that makes them saved. This unfortunately, can be seen in this parable. Many receive the "seed" of the Good News gladly. They "say a prayer." However, their heart is truly not in the place of truly being "poor in spirit" when they hear the Good News nor when they "say the prayer." That is why, I believe, we see many people who "say the prayer" but never truly turn their hearts and lives over to becoming a true disciple of Jesus seem to "fall away." We must be careful in this. We have a tendency to count numbers of "souls who said the prayer." However, how many of those truly did it with a heart that was truly "good soil."

The individual's heart must be prepared. They must recognize their need for God. They truly desire to have their relationship with their God restored. They understand and recognize their need to accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. How will we know 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 expressing and continue to grow in expressing the lifestyle and character of Jesus - some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold and some hundredfold. There will be "movement" towards a changing of their lifestyle. In others words – "fruit."

As we can see, the main message of this parable concerns a person's heart in receiving and accepting the Word of God that reveals the Good News, the gift of salvation 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. Jesus told His disciples that it was vital for them to grasp and understand the truths brought forth in this parable. Therefore, He gave a comprehensive explanation of the parable to them and therefore, to each of us, today.

If the disciples were going to succeed in bringing the Good News of the Kingdom to the "uttermost parts of the earth," then understanding this parable was fundamental. This was the key for His disciples in "making disciples." This parable goes hand in hand with "The Great Commission" as found in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8. Did the disciples "get it" after He expounded on it? One would hope so. Actually, His disciples were perfect examples of this parable. Their hearts were "good soil" – all except one whose heart was not truly "prepped." They may not have known their hearts were "good soil" but Jesus did. I believe they did ultimately "get it" when they received the Holy Spirit who revealed the truth of this parable along with all the other teachings of Jesus. I believe they were very successful in making true disciples who brought forth even more fruit. Each one of us as true disciples of Jesus, are a result of those first disciples "getting it."

This parable, as Jesus explains, also stresses the importance of the Gospel and the Word of God going forth to **everyone**. The Good News is to be told to **everyone**. It is then up to each individual and their **willingness of heart** to receive or not receive this Good News. It all begins with a heart that has prepared itself by being "poor in spirit" and recognizing its need for God. It is a heart that is sincerely "seeking the truth." If a person is truly seeking the truth, they will have "ears to hear" and they will hear. The truth will resonate within their heart as the Truth. They will receive it with a heart that is "good soil" and it will bring forth much fruit.

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 preaching the Good News. He was telling His disciples through this parable that it was just as important that the "hearts of the people" be prepared and ready to receive their message as the very message itself that they were bringing.

"He who hath ears to hear, let him hear."