

Title: The Parable of the Sower  
Date: October 25, 2020

Text: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23  
Curtis Froisland

## **The Parable of the Sower**

Why are some people completely unmoved when they hear the Gospel? Why do some make some start in the faith, but suddenly fall away? For that matter, when the people of Israel stood before their Messiah, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, why did so many reject him? And, why do others devote themselves to Jesus's kingdom even unto death? This passage goes a long way in helping us understand how this happens, more so it challenges us:

***We need to be absolutely sure we understand and rightly respond to the word of the Kingdom.***

We'll begin with that last part "the Kingdom as Jesus preaches and embodies it" because from there we can see the responses more clearly.

First,

**I. "The Word of the Kingdom" is the announcement that the kingdom Jesus brings is not like the kingdoms of the world.**

As Jesus tells his disciples the meaning of the parable, he begins in v. 19 telling them about the "word of the kingdom." That word is what the seed in the parable represents. This is a parable about hearing and responding to the word or message/announcement of the Kingdom. So if we are going to ask "am I rightly responding" to that announcement, we'll need to understand what the message of the Kingdom tells us.

***A. The Word of the Kingdom comes in an unexpected way***

*1. The Jews expected another worldly kingdom.*

As we have talked about throughout this sermon series, "the kingdom" is a theme that runs through the whole Bible beginning to end. The Kingdom is God's people living in God's place under his rule and blessing. It was there in Creation, lost in humanity's rebellion, glimpsed in the reign of King David and Solomon, but lost again in the exile to Babylon. The OT ends with unfulfilled hopes for the restoration of the Kingdom.

These weren't just Sunday school stories to the people on the shore that day. They were their real religious, political, and family history. When Jesus came onto the scene preaching "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," teaching them how to live as citizens of the Kingdom (in what we call the Sermon on the Mount), doing miracles and healings which picture the wholeness and flourishing of the kingdom, and telling them parables beginning "the kingdom of heaven is like..." They got it, Jesus came not to take people to heaven, but to bring the Kingdom of God to earth.

They assumed that meant freedom from their oppressive Roman rulers. They were heavily taxed and could be brutally treated at any time. When they thought of the Kingdom they expected God to reverse their fortunes and let them rule over the Gentile nations. They wanted Jesus to come and raise an army and kick out these Gentiles once and for all. For centuries on either side of Jesus this is exactly what would be Messiahs attempted.

But

## *2. Jesus brings an other-worldly kingdom*

He comes on the scene preaching the Kingdom of **heaven**. A kingdom no less real than the kingdoms of this world, but a kingdom that is not from earth. The kingdom of heaven because it unlike every earthly kingdom. Every earthly kingdom (even the best of them) relies on power, wealth, violence, and coercion to establish and hold it's power—in Jesus's day especially, but in ours as well.

But Jesus's kingdom is not marked by earthly forms of power. His kingdom belongs to the poor in spirit, the meek, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted (Matthew 5:1-12). Citizens of his kingdom root out any hate in their heart (Matthew 5:21-26), turn the other cheek (5:38-42), and love their enemies because that is what God is live (Matthew 5:43-48). He has authority over the sickness, the creation, and even demons (Matthew 8-9), and he doesn't use that authority to weasel into the halls of power so he can take control but to serve.

We could go on all through Matthew's Gospel showing how the Kingdom of Heaven is unlike the kingdoms of earth. But one author described the climactic and most emphatic proof this way:

As King of the universe he enters Jerusalem not on a warhorse or golden chariot but riding humbly on the foal of a donkey. As king of all he willingly rides into the city where iron nails will soon be used to hang him naked on a cross in the scorching sun.... The one who desires to save his life must in fact die. Such is the radical nature of the vision of the kingdom that Jesus gives.<sup>1</sup>

The kingdom of Jesus will neither be endangered nor advanced by who wins the White House in November. God has given government a good and limited role, but there is an awful lot of time, energy, words, and money devoted by Christians to get power—while the kingdom of God comes into the world through sacrificial love.

Not only that,

### ***B. The Word of the Kingdom comes to unexpected people***

We've already mentioned this kingdom is made up of the poor in spirit, the persecuted, the meek. But it is also for many other groups that don't seem the natural fit: the unclean, the leper, the child, the sick, the sinner.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan T. Pennington, "The Kingdom of Heaven in the Gospel of Matthew," SBTJ, February 2010, 48 available at [http://equip.sbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/sbjt\\_121\\_pennington.pdf](http://equip.sbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/sbjt_121_pennington.pdf)

Moreover, in Jesus's kingdom, the very people who oppressed the people of God—the Romans, the Gentiles—are invited to citizenship in the Kingdom. It is not until the Great Commission that Jesus states explicitly that his Kingdom is for the nations, but there have been hints all along.

Jesus's genealogy actually includes Gentiles. As we saw a few weeks back, the Roman Centurion had faith that amazed Jesus. And just one chapter before this parable in 12:18, 21, Matthew tells us that Jesus fulfills the words of the prophet Isaiah by "proclaiming justice to the Gentiles" and that he is the one in whom "the Gentiles hope."

The very people the Jewish people hated most, and understandably so, were to be invited into this other-worldly kingdom of Jesus.

Illustration:

The story of Jonah is a great illustration of Israel's disapproval of God's gracious heart toward the nations. The prophet Jonah is called to go to Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian empire—the Gentile empire that has been oppressing and harassing Israel. He doesn't want to go because he doesn't want to preach the good news of the grace of God toward these wicked Gentiles—and they really were wicked. So finally, even when he goes he preaches only that "In 40 days Nineveh will be destroyed" and the people repent. Jonah goes and sits and pouts under a tree bitter that God has extended grace to people who don't deserve it.

Jonah actually gets how radical God's gracious offer of the Kingdom is—God really is ready to receive back the most wicked and idolatrous sinners.

God extends his grace to anyone who will turn from their sinful independence and pride, and return to him and trust in Christ as their Savior-King. Anyone is welcome in God's kingdom, but there's only way in. You have to lay down sin, self, and all the stuff of the kingdoms of this world and receive God's grace through Jesus the crucified and risen savior King.

**"The Word of the Kingdom" is the announcement that the kingdom Jesus brings is not like the kingdoms of the world.**

Now we can see what the parable is all about, having heard of this kingdom--

**II. The Soils represent different reactions God's kingdom.**

And the question hanging in the air is, how will you respond?

When people hear the word of the Kingdom, that he is the Savior King, bringing God's kingdom into the world in an unexpected, upside down way, to unexpected people. That the power in his kingdom is found in his sacrificial love, and by his disciples taking up their own crosses. This message, embodied in Jesus, and pictured in his teaching and parables, brings different responses. Jesus identifies four.

A. First he says,

***19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.***

When Jesus says, “does not understand it,” it is not because the parables are intellectually hard to figure out. He has already explained to his disciples in v. 13-15 that this lack of understanding stems from a hard heart, a heart that has intentionally dulled itself to conscience, to perceiving God as the Creator, and most of all from hearing (and understanding) God’s word. In fact, Jesus says he speaks in parables to confirm the hardness of their hearts.

So, the first soil warns us of having a hard heart. That’s a pretty common piece of Christian-ese or Church lingo. To have a hard heart is to be completely unwilling to hear anything God has to say, to assume that you know better than him, and to be resolutely opposed to God’s ways.

Illustration:

Have you ever been trying to do something, and it is just not working, you can’t figure it out—and someone comes along and says, “Did you try...” And, even though, it might actually be a good idea, you kind of want to stay in that frustration and anger? That’s a little picture of being “hard hearted.” Except in this case you’re hard hearted toward God—You won’t listen to reason, even if you’re making a disaster of your life, you will keep thinking you know better and not be able to hear the word of the Kingdom.

The second soil too stands as a warning, against a shallow faith

*B. The Danger of loving the gifts more than the Giver.*

Jesus tells us:

***20 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy,<sup>21</sup> yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.***

Some hear the Gospel of the Kingdom, “immediately” respond with joy to the Gospel, and yet when persecution or tribulation comes, they also “immediately” fall away. The contrast between receiving with joy, and falling away when hard times comes suggests to me one who loves what Christ can do for them, not Christ himself. Someone who wants God to bless them, to make them successful, or even just feel

better about themselves, but anything outside of what they want or think Jesus should do for them—they're done, they fall away.

*Illustration:*

Recently there a prominent social media activist and advocate for youth mental health issues who died suddenly. His family claimed to be people who believe in God. But when he passed, his wife's announcement on Instagram read "My whole world is gone. There is no God."

I'm not trying to pile on, and I'm not judging her, I pray that she will come around to see the truth about Jesus and his Kingdom. But isn't that a stark illustration of the second soil? There are many who claim to be Christians, until trial, or tribulation, or death, or persecution come.

Oh that we could say with Paul

### **Romans 5:3-5**

***<sup>3</sup>Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup>and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.***

The onslaught of persecution and trials—even just living in a broken world—will reveal who has truly received the word of the kingdom, of Christ—and who has received it only for some lesser benefit God may give.

The third soil reveals another warning, against:

C. The danger of the cares of this world or the deceitfulness of riches choking our faith.

***<sup>22</sup>As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.***

"The cares of the world" are the ordinary responsibilities and cares of life: what you'll wear, what you'll eat, your family, your career. These are important but not ultimate things, and if you're aren't watchful the cares of the world will fill up your schedule, your thought life, and your affections—and before you know they will choke out your allegiance to Jesus.

And riches are deceitful aren't they, we constantly hear of people who are fabulously wealthy, and many of them are miserable or depressed or worse. Wealth is fleeting, moth and rust will destroy—which is like the ancient version of "you can't take it with you." Oh, but we all believe somewhere deep down that more money is the answer

to all of our problems. How much money is enough money? Like John D. Rockefeller once said, "*Just a little bit more.*"

If you have trusted in Christ's life, death, and resurrection and been changed by his grace you've been brought into an eternal Kingdom. And this frees you up to use your time, energy, and money to serve and bless others—to use worldly things for eternal goals. But some would be disciples will be mastered by worldly concerns and miss out on the eternal kingdom.

Finally we come to who we *want* to be,

D. Good Soil bears fruit

**<sup>23</sup> As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."**

Good soil is soil in which the word takes root and bears fruit.<sup>2</sup> This is always the witness of the New Testament, we receive the Gospel and God's grace changes our hearts and produces in us a change of character and life.

But it matters whether the soil is hospitable to the seed. The word of the Kingdom comes to us—not on the basis of works, or status, or anything innate within us, but purely by God's sovereign grace. Citizenship in this Kingdom and all the blessings that come with it are offered to you by grace to be received by faith, the Kingdom comes to unexpected people.

Yet we must be careful that we receive the word of the kingdom, not the word of how we think His Kingdom ought to be. And if we have received the word of the Kingdom, we must bear the fruit of the kingdom, following in the footsteps of our King's suffering love.

Because the farmer cares about the fruit.

---

<sup>2</sup> This answers our questions about whether those second two types of soil/people are "saved." It matters far more to the farmer that a plant produces fruit than that it sprouts—we see the same here. So the people in soil 1-3 to not exhibit true faith—though under God's grace we pray they will!