

Session 42

MATTHEW 13

Matthew 13:1-23

Memory Verse

“But the one sown on the good ground—this is one who hears and understands the word, who does produce fruit and yields: some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty times what was sown.”

– MATTHEW 13:23, CSB



Matthew 13


THEOLOGICAL THEME: Jesus told a parable to teach the importance of the condition of our hearts toward spiritual things by comparing the message of the gospel to seed scattered across different types of soil.

CALL TO ACTION: Examine your heart. Where are you in relation to renewal and commitment to the gospel?

Whether you have a green thumb or not, you have likely attempted to grow something new or keep a plant of some kind alive. Some people intuitively know what different plants need to flourish though these needs vary widely. There are desert plants that will die if you give them too much water. Others are tropical plants that desperately need humid heat to produce their flowers or fruit. For those who struggle to maintain plant life, there are also artificial options available.

No matter your experience, placing plants into good soil is key to starting a seedling off right. You may not know the right size of container the plant needs, but you likely recognize sticking a seed into a pile of rocks will not yield the desired result. Good soil is crucial in cultivating healthy growth in plant life. Today, we are studying how Jesus used a parable to teach a lesson about the spiritual soil of our lives.

 Would you say you have a green thumb or not? Why?

 is something that you wish you could grow in abundance?

Session Summary

Jesus often used parables, short stories with a spiritual point, as a teaching tool. In today's parable, Jesus compared a farmer sowing seed to the gospel being spread and the various ways that truth is received.

1. The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-9)

Crowds gathered around Jesus and He took the opportunity to teach them many things. As the people stood along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus got into a boat and spoke to them. This would have given Him the necessary distance so more people could see and hear what He had to say. Matthew said Jesus taught the people many things through parables. A parable is a story with a spiritual point; it has been said that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

? What are some parables you are familiar with? How familiar are you with the parable we are looking at today?

Using agricultural imagery, Jesus described a farmer sowing seeds. This was a natural and familiar custom of the day that most in the crowd could relate to. Seed was scattered across the ground and then plowed into the soil. As Jesus spoke, listeners could picture the image His words painted in their minds. But this was not just a story about agriculture, in this story, the seed was the message of the gospel.

? In what ways is the gospel message to be scattered about the earth? What is God's role in this? What is our role?

Jesus spoke of a farmer who sowed the seed and then He described the different types of ground or soil the seed fell onto. Anyone who has ever planted knows the type of soil you put the seed into matters a great deal. Those in the crowd that day would have also identified with this aspect of the parable.

The first type of soil was along the path where people walked. This soil would have been trampled down and hardened. The seed that landed there would have served as bird food more than plant life. Next, He described rocky ground with a thin layer of soil covering a stony foundation. Seed that fell there might sprout up quickly but wouldn't take root due to the rock layer underneath the shallow bed of soil.

The last two types of soil described were among thorns and then, finally, good soil. The seed thrown among the thorns never had a chance to grow because it was choked out by the waiting thorns. The good soil represents the type of ground that receives seed rightly and grows a productive crop. As He finished his parable, Jesus made the call for those with ears to hear to listen carefully. Jesus was telling them an important spiritual truth.

? Application: What of these verses is new to you or stands out in a different way today? Silently consider which type of soil you would initially say represents your heart.


2. Why Parables? (Matthew 13:10-17)

As the disciples were among the crowd that day listening to the parable of the sower, they had questions about Jesus's method of teaching. Pulling Jesus aside, they asked why He was using parables instead of speaking the truth plainly. Although the story Jesus told was easy to picture in the hearers' context, the spiritual application may not be easily discerned. Why was Jesus speaking in this manner?

Jesus explained His motivation behind the parable. The reception of the audience served to further emphasize the point of the parable. The disciples and those who were spiritually sensitive had understanding due to soft hearts and open ears. But those with hearts that were closed would not receive the message, just as the bad soil would not receive the seed.


? How have you seen it to be true that those who are spiritually receptive will "be given more"? How have you experienced this in your own life?

Those that are open to spiritual things will receive truth that grows their faith and ministers to their hearts while those who are hardened to the gospel message will hear the story but not receive the true meaning. We are reminded through this passage that it is God who opens eyes and ears to receive the truth of the gospel. As His messengers, we are responsible for obediently taking His Word to others, but we cannot force anyone to genuinely believe.

 How would you describe a calloused heart? How would you describe an open heart?

Jesus quoted words written in Isaiah 6 that the hardened would hear but not listen and see but remain blind. He described the people's hearts as having grown dull. This describes those who are hardened to the truth of the Word of God to their lives. This is a plague on the American church today and one Christ followers must guard against.

Jesus said the disciples were blessed because they were able to understand His message. All who are spiritually sensitive to the gospel are blessed. Not only do they gain the benefit of new understanding and spiritual growth, but they also enjoy fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Spiritual Truth is meant to continually transform us into the image of our Savior through understanding and application.

 Application: How can you seek to guard against your sensitivity to the Spirit of God growing dull?

3. The Point Explained (Matthew 13:18-23)

Jesus then explained the parable and how the types of soils represent different ways that the gospel is received. Three of the types of soil don't receive the message but the last one does, resulting in a great harvest.

One of the main applications of this parable is to assess which type of soil best reflects the state of our own hearts. The first type Jesus mentioned is the soil along the path—hard and unwelcome ground, representing those who are closed

to the gospel. These people may be antagonistic and resistant toward Jesus or simply indifferent. People with this type of heart reject the gospel directly.

? Why are all people's hearts bad soil apart from God's work in our lives?

The next type of soil receives the gospel initially and even with excitement, but never develops deep spiritual roots. When opposition arises, the seed shrivels in the elements. These hearts may appear to believe for a while but when testing or suffering comes, they ultimately fall away. Even though these individuals may start well, eventually the cares of the world and the anxiety and stress of life overwhelm and overcome them.

Thirdly, some hearts and soil receive the gospel message at first. They are interested and maybe even invested for a time, but eventually thorns choke the apparent life in this soil. Whatever form the thorns take in these individuals' lives, they ultimately gain greater power than the message that has been received.

? Why is it important to continually assess the receptivity of our hearts before God? What is the danger of not doing this on an ongoing basis?


Finally, we see the good soil which represents hearts that are receptive and ready for the message. This is fertile ground for things of the Lord to survive and even thrive. Jesus said that this type of heart will reap an abundant harvest that bears fruit in any circumstance. This is the goal of following Jesus. As you consider the four types of soil, it is important to note that the same seed was scattered on each. The farmer didn't pick and choose which soil to throw the seed on, he scattered freely, but the reception varied. Most likely, we see bits and pieces of our own hearts in each of the different types of soil, and we benefit from evaluating this regularly. Ultimately, those who belong to Jesus will receive His message and product a harvest over time. And God is the one who brings the harvest as we receive His truth and live according to it.


? Application: How can you prepare the soil of your heart for spiritual things?


Conclusion

Jesus's words challenge us to consider the state of the soil of our hearts. A farmer works the ground preparing the soil throughout the year in preparation for planting and then eventually the harvest. We should also take our own spiritual cultivation as seriously and intentionally.

God is the one who brings about the harvest, but we are also responsible for evaluating the soil of our own hearts, seeking that the seeds of spiritual things can take root, grow deep, and produce fruit in our lives. We cultivate the soil of our hearts by plowing up and removing rocks of ungodly thoughts and attitudes. We pull up any roots of bitterness or unforgiveness that try to sprout. We stay on guard against weeds of sin that need to be removed and we fertilize our soil by receiving the Word daily and applying it to our lives.

 How do you need to be intentional about preparing the soil of your heart for spiritual things?

 How can we support one another in this effort as a group?

 How can you share the gospel with another person by sharing the parable of the sower this week?

Memorize

"But the one sown on the good ground—this is one who hears and understands the word, who does produce fruit and yields: some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty times what was sown."

- Matthew 13:23, CSB

References

1. Charles L. Quarles, "Matthew," in CSB Study Bible: Notes, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1522–1523.