

**CORE SEMINAR**  
**Spring 2024**  
**The Parables of Jesus**  
**Course 2: Parable of the Soils/ Sower**

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**ICE BREAKER**

Choose an ice breaker from the **Spring Community Group Guide** or go to [www.fbcportland.org/icebreakers](http://www.fbcportland.org/icebreakers) to select an ice breaker to ask your group.

- Spend about 5 minutes discussing the question – this is a great way to “warm up” your group.

**INTRODUCTION**

Ok guys! We’ve made it to **Week 2** –today we will be in **Matthew 13:1-9 & 13:18-23**. We will be covering the Parable of the Soils/ Sower as well as looking at Jesus explanation of the Parable of the Soils/ Sower.

Now, Jesus told parables as an invitation to see Him/ to know Him for who He really is – not as we perceive Him or hope Him to be. And in Matthew, what we see is that He has an open invitation to a diverse group to know Him better and the Kingdom of God better. That’s because He is sitting before a crowd of seekers, enemies AND disciples – and He’s teaching them from a boat – so that they can hear Him more clearly.

And as He speaks, He’s teaching them with this parable. If you remember from last week, we said that parables were **simple** in detail, **common** in image and **indirect** with a message. So, Jesus leads off with this Parable of the Soils – *which bats lead-off in the batting order of parables* – and points His listeners toward the truth [the seed] of the Kingdom of God.

And we should pay attention to the fact that He’s teaching and giving an invitation simultaneously. Here’s why – these four soils cover every kind of person in every season of life. So, the question is how has the “seed” taken root as you have gone through these seasons? The invitation is to live with a posture of receiving God’s Word and then – through Jesus Christ – to listen and obey God’s Word. That to be a disciple of the Kingdom means that we should be ready to hear AND remain focused on the message of the Kingdom – in such a way that we are defined by it.

Let's Pray and we'll get started...

## PRAYER

### SET THE STAGE FOR THE PARABLE OF THE SOILS/ SOWER

#### Have someone in your group read Matthew 13:1-2

*That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. <sup>2</sup> And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach.*

In our discussion today, we are going to read about a typical situation where Jesus used parables to teach. Imagine the scene – Jesus is surrounded by a crowd [enemies, seekers and disciples] on the shore of Lake Galilee in Palestine. He wants the crowd to be able to hear His teach – so, He jumps into a boat and rows out a short way from the shore line. The crowd of course moves up – even a little bit into the water. His voice can be heard clearly across the water and He begins to speak...

#### QUESTION: Why do you think Jesus often taught by the sea?

- Who was Jesus' audience in this passage?

#### Have someone in your group read Matthew 13:3-9

*<sup>3</sup> And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. <sup>5</sup> Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, <sup>6</sup> but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. <sup>7</sup> Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. <sup>8</sup> Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup> He who has ears, let him hear."*

Ok, so let's break this down quickly. Let's look at the main parts of this parable:

- We have a sower
- We have a sower who spread seeds
- And, we have 4 soils
  - Hard soil [along the path], where birds liked to feast.
  - Rocky ground – not much soil / no depth of soil
  - Thorny ground – chokes out any growth.

- Good soil that produces different measures of fruit [100, 60 & 30 fold]

Now, from the ag perspective of this parable its apparent that this story is taken from the agricultural culture of Jesus' day. He would have been speaking to people who knew how seed was to be sown. They would have understood the story – but just like the disciples, they may not have understood the meaning.

In that region, seed was not sown the way it is in sewn in Tennessee. Meaning this, when it came time for planting, the farmer would take a large bag of seed and carry it over his shoulder. But, he wouldn't prepare the field first to receive the seed. Instead, he would go through the field and liberally sow the seed, and the wind currents would carry the seed where it would. And looking at the story, this is exactly what the sower is doing. He has seed going everywhere.

Sometimes, the seed would blow onto the middle of the field, onto the path along the side or in the middle, or onto the sections of the field under which there were hidden outcroppings of limestone. Wherever the wind carried the seed, there the seed landed. When he was done sowing the seed, he would then take his plow and plow the seed into the dirt. So, now the seed is mixed in well with the dirt. Then, the sower would wait for the rain to come and the seed to germinate.

Every time seed was sown by a farmer, certain things took place. Jesus mentions four of them:

1. Some of the seed that was cast about would fall along the path that was beaten down, soil that was hardpan, and that seed had no possibility of penetrating the earth. The seed that was cast in that manner never germinated or bore fruit but was plucked by the birds of the air. In a sense, the seed seemed to be wasted.
2. Two of the seeds grow a little before they fail:
  - Some of the seed would fall on the rock and had nowhere to go underneath the ground. When the plow came through, it couldn't break up the rock. So, the seed rested just barely below the surface, on the rock, with no possibility of taking root. So, the seed failed.
  - Some of the seed would fall along the sides of the field where other things were already growing, such as thorns and brambles, but it could still take root because there was soil. However, when the seed took root and began to grow alongside the thorns and brambles, it would be choked and die out – meaning the seed grew a little but ultimately failed.

3. Some of the seed would actually hit the good soil – that had the nutrients needed for germination and growth. The seed that fell on this soil took root. It grew and produced different measures of fruit in the good soil.

**QUESTIONS: This parable is known as the “Parable of the Soils/ Sower.” Do you think this is the most descriptive title for this parable?**

- **Do you think there’s another title that would be more appropriate?**

**Has there been a time when you’ve been like the fertile ground in the parable of the sower, and the Word of God has taken root in you, creating a fruitful spiritual life?**

- **What was going on in your life during that time?**
- **Why do you think you were more fruitful soil at that time, and not at other times?**

After finishing the parable, Jesus says this, **“After telling this story, Jesus said: “Do you understand what I’m saying? He who has ears to hear what I’m saying, let him hear.”**

Now, there are times I have talked to my kids. And depending on the subject and the tone in which I am speaking to them will determine the level they respond to me. Many times, I’ve stopped in the middle of my conversation and asked, “Are you listening to me? Do you understand what I am saying to you?”

- I almost feel like Chris Tucker in the movie Rush Hour – when he looks over at Jackie Chan and – hoping Jackie speaks English – Tucker yells this, “Do you understand the words that are coming out of my mouth?”

This is the picture that I have going on in my head of Jesus’ reaction to the crowd after telling the parable. There were probably some people looking at each other confused. Not really sure if Jesus was giving the “farm report,” or maybe just talking about sowing some seed.

- Seeing their faces, He stops and asks, “Do you understand the words that are coming out of My mouth?”

**QUESTION: What do you think He means by the statement, “He who has ears to hear what I’m saying, let him hear.”**

### **DISCIPLES RESPONSE & JESUS EXPLAINS**

And obviously, Jesus’ question was a legitimate one - because if we were to read verse 10-17, the disciples came to Him and asked, **“Why do you speak to them in parables?”** Basically, He responds with some will hear and understand [like the disciples] and some will not [in this

case His mother and brothers (end of chapter 12) and the Pharisees]. And how blessed the disciples are that they get to witness and hear the teachings of Jesus.

The disciples must still seem a little confused so Jesus explains the parable to them.

### Have someone in your group read Matthew 13:18-23

He starts off by teaching them that the first soil is akin to the one who hears the Word [the seed] and doesn't understand it. The evil one [the birds] come and snatch it away. This is the seed that is thrown on the path or hard ground.

#### QUESTION: What kind of person does this soil represent?

In **verses 20-21**, we see the seed that was sown on the rocky ground hears the Word and receives it with joy but the Word does not take root in his heart. They endure for a while, but when persecution comes – and let's be real here – BECAUSE OF THE WORD [the seed planted in their soil], they fall away. This is the seed that is thrown on the rocky ground.

#### QUESTION: The shallow soil results in quick growth that fades quickly in the heat. What kind of person does this soil represent?

The seed that was liberally thrown among the thorns is the one that hears the Word of God but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches or “stuff” choke out the Word. And it proves unfruitful.

- Now, if you think about the teachings of Jesus as well as His other parables [which we will get to] that speak about the eternal beauty and priceless nature of the Kingdom of God. So, you take that picture and then you size it up to what Jesus says in **verse 22**. That **“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.”** How sad of a commentary is this – that someone could hear the Word but trade it for the temporary riches of this temporary world!

Now, **some may look at these middle two soils** and think it teaches that people can be saved and lose their salvation. They can be in a state of grace and be justified, but it doesn't last.

- This kind of thinking goes against what the Bible teaches about how God preserves those He redeems – the regenerate. Ephesians 1 tells us that God gives those He redeems the seal of the Holy Spirit. We are told that He who began a good work will finish it to the end.
- So, this parable does not contradict what is taught in other places in Scripture.

**QUESTION: In your opinion, what are the weeds that often prevent growth and fruitfulness in a person's life?**

- **What are some things that often distract us from focusing on God's Word?**

Last, in **verse 23**, we see a picture of the seed that was sown on the good soil. The receiver hears the Word and understands it. They bear fruit and it yields in different measures [100/60/30 fold]. Different people bear fruit that looks different in the soil.

- Word of caution: Do not walk away and think that Jesus said, “only good people respond to the gospel,” because He said that some seed fell “**on the good earth.**” That is not the point Jesus is making. The point He is making is that the reason the soil is good to begin with is because the seed fell on it and the Holy Spirit then did the work of preparing it, tilling it, and making it fertile.

**QUESTION: Why do you think the good soil produces different – even declining – measures of fruit? [starts at 100, then 60 and finally 30 fold]**

## CONCLUSION

Ask if the group has any questions they would like to ask. I hope you have all enjoyed this parable of parables – a parable about receiving God's Word [His seed], understanding His Word and then growing in His Word. Let us all be children of God who want to grow in His Word!

The parables we will be discussing this spring are:

1. **The Parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector/ Publican [Luke 18:9-14]**
2. **The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant [Matthew 18:21-35]**
3. **The Parable of the Prodigal Son [Luke 15:1-3, 11-32]**
4. **The Parable of the Talents [Matthew 25:14-30]**
5. **The Parable of the Ten Virgins [Matthew 25:1-13]**
6. **The Parable of the Good Samaritan. [Luke 10:25-37]**

I would encourage you to read ahead and study these parables in the days and weeks ahead. I am excited to see where this study leads us as a group and individually in understanding the teachings of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

## PRAYER