

The Parable of the Sower
A Series on the Mysterious Nature of God's Kingdom: Part 4

1. When you read the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8), what is happening here? What events led up to Jesus telling the parable?

Matthew (Matt 12) reveals that Jesus is under increasing scrutiny and attacks by the Pharisees as they challenge His authority. Mark (Mark 3) reveals that the Pharisees are plotting with the Herodians (aristocratic Jews who support Herod Antipas) to destroy Jesus. Luke (Luke 7) reveals that Jesus is going around preaching and proclaiming the kingdom of God.

2. Because it is recounted in three of the gospels, the Parable of the Sower is considered a significant parable. To aid in observation, compare the three versions side by side. What differences do you observe in the three accounts (Matt 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8)?

Matthew 13:1-9

- 1) That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea.
- 2) And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach.

Mark 4:1-9

- 1) He began to teach again by the sea and such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land. 2) And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching,

Luke 8:4-8

- 4) When a large crowd was coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable:

Observations:

Matthew and **Mark** indicate that the location is by the Sea of Galilee. **Luke** indicates that a large group of people were gathering "from town after town."

Matthew 13:1-9

- 3) And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4) and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up.

Mark 4:1-9

- 3) "Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4) as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up.

Luke 8:4-8

- 5) "The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled under foot and the birds of the air ate it up.

Observations:

The exhortation "listen" is only found in **Mark** (Mark 4:3).

The sower sowed indiscriminately, and soon it will be apparent that the focus of the parable was not on the sower or the seed.

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Matthew 13:1-9	Mark 4:1-9	Luke 8:4-8
<p>5) Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6) But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.</p> <p>7) Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out</p> <p>8) And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9) He who has ears, let him hear."</p>	<p>5) Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. 6) And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.</p> <p>7) Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.</p> <p>8) Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." 9) And He was saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."</p>	<p>6) Other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture.</p> <p>7) Other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out.</p> <p>8) Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great." As He said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."</p>

Observations:

The Parable of the Sower is significant to the largely peasant agrarian townships about Galilee. Tenant farmers, who made up a large portion of the Roman Empire, were also common in rural Galilee.

Each gospel account reveals different details about the parable.

3. How did Jesus interpret His parable? Study Matthew 13:18-23; Mark 4:14-20; Luke 8:11-15.

A. What was sown?

Matthew 13:19	Mark 4:14	Luke 8:11
<p>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 the one on whom seed was sown beside the road.</p>	<p>14) The sower sows the word.</p>	<p>11) Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God.</p>

In Mark, the seed is "the word" (Mark 4:14). In Luke, the seed is qualified as "the word of God" (Luke 8:11), and in Matthew, it is further qualified as "the word of the kingdom" (Matt 13:19). Thus the seed figuratively represents the good news of the kingdom of God, which Jesus was doing in calling for repentance and heeding His message of salvation. The long awaited kingdom of God is at hand (Matt 10:7).

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B. What does the soil figuratively represent?

Matthew 13:19	Mark 4:15	Luke 8:12
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 the one on whom seed was sown beside the road.	15) These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them.	12) Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved.

Both Matthew (Matt 13:19) and Luke (Luke 8:12) indicate that the soil represents the “heart” of a person while Mark (Mark 4:15) indicates that it represents the whole person. From a Jewish perspective, the heart is seen as the seat of a human being’s deepest convictions, beliefs and volitional will; the heart reflects one’s true character (see the article: [The Material Aspect of Humanity... Heart and Mind at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/7Humans/EssenceHeartMind.aspx](http://www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/7Humans/EssenceHeartMind.aspx)).

C. What does the first soil by the path represent?

Matthew 13:19	Mark 4:15	Luke 8:12
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 the one on whom seed was sown beside the road.	15) These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them.	12) Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved.

Because of its location along the path, this soil is hardened and describes the person who does not understand the gospel or its truth. Conceivably this could be by ignorance, or deceit by worldview or philosophy. The evil one mentioned in Matthew is identified as Satan (Mark 4:1) the devil (Luke 8:12). At this early stage of the New Testament, Satan was known more for his activity in the Old Testament. Satan was a deceiver (Gen 3:1-13), prompts people towards ungodly behavior (1 Chron 21:1) and as an accuser (Job 1:6-11; Zech 3:1). The gospels portray fallen angels as causing blindness, deafness, dumbness, insanity, gross carnal sins and sexual sins. Whatever the case, this person is unresponsive to the good news of the kingdom.

D. What does the second soil on rocky places represent?

Matthew 13:20-21	Mark 4:16-17	Luke 8:13
20) The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21) yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.	16) In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; 17) and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away.	13) Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.

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The rocky soil has little soil for a germinating seed to develop roots with. In symbolic manner, Jesus speaks of the person who hears the word and receives it with joy, but their belief is shallow and temporary as they fall away when persecuted as a Christian. Was Jesus speaking of a person who lacked genuine faith and was thus unsaved? Or was He referring to a Believer like Peter who denied Christ in fear of persecution (Matt 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62)? Whether Jesus was making a comment about the saved and unsaved, it is not clear. However, as Jesus is explaining this parable to His disciples in regard to the kingdom, it is clear that the kingdom is not determined by how one initially responds to the gospel. All three gospel accounts record that the "word was received with joy;" yet Jesus wanted the disciples to know that the person fell away, because he did not fully understand, believe or trust the good news of the kingdom when challenged by his peers or culture.

E. What does the third soil with thorny plants represent?

Matthew 13:22	Mark 4:18-19	Luke 8:14
22) And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.	18) And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, 19) but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.	14) The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

The third soil represents the person who hears the gospel but its message is not a priority. The gospels record subtle differences in what competes for the person's attention: Matthew records "worry of the world" and "the deceitfulness of wealth", Mark matches Matthew and adds "the desires for other things", and Luke qualifies with "pleasures of this life." What did Jesus mean by "deceitfulness of riches"? The Greek term used here for "deceitfulness" is in the sense of deceiving, seducing or enticing which usually involved sin. That Jesus refers to the worries of the world and deceit of riches in all three gospels indicates that the kingdom of God is for those who have the right priorities and devotion.

F. What does the fourth type of soil, the "good" soil, represent?

Matthew 13:23	Mark 4:20	Luke 8:15
23) And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.	20) And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."	15) But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.

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The good soil represents the ideal hearer. This person hears the word, understands it (Matt), accepts it (Mark), holds it fast (Luke) and bears fruit.

In contrast to the hearer who is unresponsive to the gospel and message of the kingdom, the ideal hearer receives the good news; he is not hard.

In contrast to the hearer who receives the gospel but has very shallow belief, the ideal hearer understands the gospel and allows the message of the kingdom to take root; he is not shallow.

In contrast to the hearer with consuming worldly interests, the ideal hearer holds fast to the priority of the gospel and kingdom; he is not preoccupied.

What is the fruit?

Matthew 13:23	Mark 4:20	Luke 8:15
23) ...who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.	20) ... bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."	15) ... bear fruit with perseverance.

Both Matthew and Mark speak of fruit in terms of quantity, but Luke speaks of fruit within the context of a person's character. Reflected in his character, the fruit represents the quality of one's spiritual life. In Luke 8:15, the emphasis is not on whether a person perseveres but on the kind of person who does persevere. The parable reveals that the kingdom of God is much about the hearer's responsibility and about the importance of learning with one's whole will and obedience. If one hears without responding, without doing something about it and committing himself to its meaning, then the good news of the kingdom is lost as well as one's entrance into it.

In contrast to Jewish expectations, the kingdom of God was not about political power or land. In His Parable of the Sower, Jesus indicates that the good news of the kingdom will be heard by all kinds of people, but only a small number will hear, understand, accept and have an abundant spiritual life from it. The Parable of the Sower is in a small way a paradox: a common story about farming but understood by only a few of the farming community.

References:

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