

Harvesting Miracles: The Parable of the Sower



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Aims for today....

- To explore the topic of bearing fruit in our relationship to Christ:
 - What kind of fruit does God seek in our lives?
 - How does this fruit come about?
 - What are the threats or opposition to bearing fruit?
 - What is our responsibility and what is God's provision?
- To encourage you to persevere in bearing fruit
 - fellowship with Christ is integral to bearing fruit
 - Struggles, hardships, BUT abundant grace and joy
 - Perseverance in faith is central to redemption
- **LET'S PRAY**

The parable of the Sower

Three occurrences of the parable of the sower in the New Testament

- Matthew 13:1-23 (followed by parable of the wheat and tares)
- Mark 4:1-20 (followed by the illustration of the lamp under a bushel)
- Luke 8: 4 - 15 (also followed by the lamp illustration)

All three Gospel writers follow the same format:

- Jesus tells the parable of the sower to a large audience
- Jesus tells the disciples why he uses parables
- Jesus explains the meaning of the parable to the disciples
- LETS READ (from Matthew today)

Outline for today....

- Focus on the verses where Jesus explains the parable
 - 1) Take a closer look at the seed and the sower
 - 2) Take a closer look at the different soil types:
 - Characteristics or qualities
 - Limitations and corrective actions
 - 3) Make the connection between the parable of the sower to the great commission given by Jesus to his disciples (last chapter of Matthew)

What is the seed?



What is the seed?

- The word of the kingdom (Matthew 13:19)
- Word (Mark 4:14)
- The seed is the word of God (Luke 8:11)

Who is the sower?



Who is the sower?

- A sower (of the word of God); today we might say “an evangelist”
- Jesus is the source of the seed, and therefore the original sower (John 1:1)

What is the soil?



What is the soil?

- Hard-packed soil (the path): the devil comes and snatches away what has been sown in his *heart* (Matthew 13:19)
- Good soil: those who hold the word fast in an honest and good *heart*, and bear fruit with patience (Luke 8:15)

What types of soil are described in the parable?



What types of soil are described in the parable?

1) Hard-packed

2) Shallow (or rocky)

3) Weedy

4) Good

Taking a closer look at the 4 types

- All of us fall into one of these types of soil (state of heart) at any given point in time
- All of us can fall into different categories (state of heart) over time
- Hence we need to learn from the parable:
 - what gives rise to a particular soil type (heart condition)?
 - how to avoid unfruitful soil (heart condition)?
 - how, by God's grace, to be fruitful soil (heart condition)?
- Key point: recognize our heart condition and know how to respond?

1) The hard packed soil (v4, v19)

- Hard heart: the seed (word of God) does not penetrate
 - The state of our hearts before we are saved
 - Not seeing, not hearing, not understanding (verses 13-16)
 - The state of our hearts if we fall into deliberate sin
- Diagnosing this heart condition
 - Resistance to God's word
 - Desire for autonomy ("pride")
- Correcting this heart condition
 - Pray for "softening" of the heart to God's word
 - Pray for conviction and repentance
 - Requires a miracle of saving grace!

2) The rocky or shallow soil (v5-6, vs20-21)

- The word of God germinates but fails to develop a “root system” that can endure tribulation or persecution
- Diagnosing this heart condition: a casual or passive approach to following Jesus
 - We do not recognize our spiritual weakness
 - We do not make the effort to grow (regular bible study, worship and fellowship)
 - We forget that our soul has an enemy
 - We treat God’s commands as optional instead of actively fighting sin
 - **Fatal consequences:** no perseverance in temptation or tribulation (opposite of the testing of our faith producing steadfastness (James 1:3))

2) Correcting the shallow soil heart condition

- Study God's word
- Believe God's word
- Obey God's word

- Blessed is the man who meditates on the law day and night... "like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in season and its leaf does not wither" (Psalm 1:1-3)

- Don't neglect other spiritual disciplines too!

3) The weedy soil (v7, v22)

- The fickle (unfaithful) heart
 - “No one can serve two masters... you cannot serve God and money” Matthew 6:24
- Diagnosing this heart condition
 - We focus more on our anxieties than on God’s strength and love
 - We trust more in our own efforts than trusting God’s provision
 - We are more attracted to the pleasures of this life than God’s eternal joy
 - Consequence is failing to fulfill God’s purpose in our lives (fruit)

3) Correcting the weedy soil

- Don't allow weeds and thorns to grow !! Get rid of them each hour of each day:
- Faith in God's promises: "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you." Matthew 6:33
- Making Christ our highest treasure: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" Matthew 6:21
- Like David, ask God to "Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name" Psalm 86:11

4) Good soil and the miracle harvest (v8, v23)

- What is the good soil?
 - Good soil is the heart of the disciple in which Christ is fully formed: knowledgeable, obedient, faithful
 - How do we become good soil? By knowing Christ in our hearts!
- What fruit comes from good soil?
 - We begin our spiritual life as seed (the living truth of God's word implanted in our hearts)
 - We bear fruit in the form of seed (the living truth of God's word implanted in the hearts of others);
 - We grow as disciples by discipling others (through Christ in our hearts);
 - This is not a repetitive loop but an upward spiral of faith and learning through obedience;

4) Why different harvests?

- Why does seed, in the same “soil”, produce a range of outcomes (thirty times, sixty times, a hundred times)?
 - Soil is only one component of a plant’s growing environment – temperature, rainfall, pest and disease challenge, all play a role too
 - There may be fewer opportunities to disciple people from some culture, language and faith backgrounds than others;
- ***The quantity is not important, it is faithfulness in bearing fruit that matters***

The role of the Holy Spirit

- Not explicitly mentioned in the parable – why?
- John 14:16-17 and 25-26:

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you..... These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

- The Holy Spirit is our daily mentor as we seek to grow in fruit bearing

The purpose of the parable: preparing for the great commission

Matthew 28:¹⁸ All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Key point of the parable: the kingdom of God is realized by proclamation of the Gospel (sowing) accompanied by discipleship (teaching and mentoring) in the presence of Christ (by the Holy Spirit)



Summary: keys to fulfilling the great commission of Jesus

- Take care of the soil of your heart
- Be willing to be a disciple – be teachable
- Be willing to disciple others – pray for, encourage, and mentor others
- Persevere because “I am with you always, to the end of the age”
- Follow the example of Paul:

But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3: 13,14)

LETS PRAY !

