

# The Parable of the Sower, Seed and Soils – Matthew 13:1-23

**Introduction** – When Jesus spoke to the multitudes, it was often in parables. When He described the kingdom and the work of the kingdom, He didn't use systematic theologies; He spoke with short, pithy stories and images. And while the longest version of this parable is in Matthew, there are a few interesting things to notice in Mark and Luke. In Mark 4:13, Jesus warns his disciples that they will need to understand this parable in order to understand how to understand parables. The kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt 4:17) and is being declared, described, and brought forth in the preaching of the Word of God.

**The Parable** (vv3-9) – There was a sower who went out to sow. Some seed fell on the wayside and the birds ate it. Some fell on thin soil over stones; these sprung up quickly but then were scorched. Some fell among thorns and were choked. Finally, some fell on good ground and yielded wonderful crops. Jesus then says, "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*" We have the parable of one sower, four soils, and possibly six seed-results. Let those who get it, get it.

**Why Parables?** (vv10-17) – Jesus said He spoke in parables in order to conceal and to reveal (v11). He also said that teaching in parables gave more to those who had and took away what those who did not have seemingly thought they had (v12 – He will say this again specifically of the Pharisees in 25:29). This is because these mysteries are being proclaimed fulfilling the judgment pronounced upon Israel by Isaiah (vv13-15). The parables declare and produce both judgment and mercy. And Jesus uses this agrarian parable (and many others) pointing to the promise of Isaiah 6:13b – Jesus is the holy seed, the remaining stump, and as He is planted and plants the seed of the new Israel, a great harvest is coming.

**The Answer Key** (vv18-23) – Like a good classroom teacher, Jesus' gives the answer to this first parable so that His disciples learn how to answer the others (i.e. Mark 4:13). The one who received the seed by the wayside finds the seed snatched away by *the wicked one* (*Satan, the devil*, in Mark and Luke, "...lest they should believe and be saved" – Luke 8:12). Like an exuberant tent-meeting, the shallow soil receives the seed, springs up, but quickly falls away in times of tribulation or persecution (vv 20-21). The soil which receives the seed among the thorns finds that the cares of this world and the lies of wealth choke it out (v22). But the good soil receives the seed and bears a harvest of 30, 60 and 100 fold (v23).

**The Sower** – In the next parable, Jesus is identified as the Sower (Matt 13:37) and so we should receive that here as well. In addition, Luke records Jesus quoting a portion of this parable to the disciples after the seventy go out preaching and come back amazed at the results (Luke 10:23-24). When we preach the Word, we are preaching Jesus and this parable comes to pass.

**The Seed** – The "*word of the kingdom*" is the seed (Matt 13:19); but the seed is also the New Israel being plucked up and planted in the world. Mark will say, "*these are the ones who are sown...*" (i.e. Mark 4:16). This parable is the fulfillment of the promise that Israel would be replanted in the world (Isaiah 1:9; 6:13; 37:31-32; Jer 31:27; Ezra 9:2). Therefore, we should understand "the seed" to be the word, the "word of God," the "word of the kingdom," and.... – us, the church. Just as Jesus is the Word of God and speaks the Word, so those who are in Jesus are the living Word in community; we are the "Jesus Film."

**The Soils** – In one sense, the soils first of all represent the history of Israel; and the times of the Pharisees particularly relates to the thorny soil with their formal allegiance to God but their compromised allegiance to status (John 5:44) and riches (Luke 16:14). They would reject Christ and His message; crucify Him, snatching Him up and casting Him out. But their rejection would be the God-given plan for the establishment of the kingdom. The stone rejected would become the chief corner stone. The vineyard would be taken from Old Israel and given to another (Matt 21:43-44).

In another sense, the soils represent different eras and different places at different times. We can see places that remain in darkness and other peoples and places that have seen unbelievable harvests of souls. And so it is appropriate to ask "what kind of soil do we find our culture in now?"

And finally, the soils represent four different kinds of hearts and so it is appropriate to ask "what kind of soil are you?"

**The Purpose and Promised Results** – The purpose of this parable, as Jesus said, is to conceal and to reveal. To those individuals, to those churches, and to those cultures, who are soils that will not bear fruit, the parable confuses, confounds, hardens and angers. But the parable is proclaimed because the mercy of a hundredfold harvest is promised as well. And nothing critical is said of the thirtyfold work; it is all good. Those fruitful harvests declare where this is all going. The world has been reconciled to Christ and so therefore He is pleading through us, "*be reconciled to God*" (2 Cor 5:18-20). The history of the world proves that God is not working out His plan "drawing with straight lines." History is a mess of messy stories and God loves them. We are to look up with eyes of faith and consider another parable where Jesus said the world is white for harvest (John 4:35) – and especially, when eyes of flesh cannot see that it is so. "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*"