

# The Parable of the Sower

(Matt. 13:1-23; Mk. 4:1-20; Lk. 8:4-15)

by: John C. Robertson

## Introduction:

During Jesus' second tour of preaching through Galilee (Lk. 8:1-3), the multitudes were pressing upon Him with such verosity that the Lord had to step into a boat at the Sea of Galilee and preach to the people who stood on the shore. Jesus first preached the parable of the sower. When the apostles questioned Jesus about this method of preaching, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 6:9-10 illustrating the virulent disbelief of the multitudes. No OT scripture is quoted more than Isa. 6:9-10 (cf. Matt. 13:14, 15; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10; Jn. 12:40; Acts 28:26, 27; Rom. 11:8; II Cor. 3:14). "Thus it is a sort of epilogue in both the Gospel of John at the close of Jesus' final appeal to the nation and in Acts at the close of Paul's last recorded appeal to the Jews in Rome."<sup>1</sup> The heart falls into one of two classes according to Jesus; i.e., waxed gross or perceptive (Matt. 13:15). The design of the parable of the sower is to expose the two hearts of men. One heart perceives truth the other rejects truth.

- I. **The sower went forth to sow seed (Matt. 13:3-9; Mk. 4:3-9; Lk. 8:5-8):**
  - A. Jesus illustrates truths through means of one who would sow seeds into the ground for a future harvest. The seed is good and represents the word of God.
  - B. There are four different soil types identified by Jesus that the seed fell into:
    1. *"Some fell by the wayside; and it was trodden under foot, and the birds of the heaven devoured it"* (Lk. 8:5).
    2. *"Other fell on the rocky ground, where it had not much earth; and straightway it sprang up, because it had no deepness of earth"* (Mk. 4:5).
    3. *"And others fell upon the thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked them"* (Matt. 13:7).
    4. *"And others fell upon the good ground, and yielded fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty"* (Matt. 13:8).
- II. **Why preach in parables Jesus? (Matt. 13:10-17; Mk. 4:10-12; Lk. 8:9-10):**
  - A. *"And the disciples came, and said unto him, why speakest thou unto them in parables?"* (Matt. 13:10).
  - B. Jesus answers, *"unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given"* (13:11).
    1. Jesus preached seven parables on this occasion all of which had as its subject the *"kingdom of heaven."*
      - a. This is the kingdom that Jesus came to establish (cf. Matt. 16:19).
      - b. This is the kingdom spoken of in prophecy and fulfilled on Pentecost in the church (cf. Isa. 2:2-4; II Sam. 7:12-15; Dan. 2:44; Acts 2).
    2. Jesus preached in parables because it veiled the truth from the minds of those who were not truly seeking the kingdom (cf. Matt. 13:17). It was not the true

<sup>1</sup> R. C. Foster. Studies in the Life of Christ pg. 560

will of many to receive Jesus as the Son of God, they only wanted the results of his miracles and food (Jn. 6:26). Jesus had the keen advantage of piercing into the hearts of man and seeing this and therefore preaching on it (Matt. 12:25; Lk. 6:8; Jn. 2:24; 6:24).

3. That which was given to the apostles is no different than that which is given to all (cf. Jn. 6:65). That “given” was the word of God (cf. Jn. 6:44-45). Some were recipient to the gift of God; however, others were not. Those with true desire for the gift received it, those with no desire received it not.
- C. *“For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath”* (Matt. 13:12).
1. A general principle is laid down here. All of humanity is equal regarding the gift of salvation (cf. II Pet. 3:9).
  2. That which differentiates one person from another is one’s desire for truth, wisdom, knowledge. The one who TRULY fears God will seek His truths out (cf. Prov. 1:7).
  3. The truth seeker gains while the rejecter of truth declines in knowledge being *“hardened by the deceitfulness of sin”* (Heb. 3:13).
  4. The gift of salvation was promised of God and preached by Paul (Acts 13:22-39). The grace of God, gift of the Holy Spirit, promise of God and salvation of God through Christ are all the same thing brought about by the gospel message; i.e., truth (cf. Rom. 5:1-4; Eph. 1:13).
- D. *“Therefore speak I to them in parables; because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand”* (Matt. 13:13).
1. Many have ability but few the desire! Athletes, musicians and artist may have tremendous ability; however, if there is no desire there will be no gain.
  2. A voluntary veil exists in the minds of the hard hearted against the word of God and Jesus identifies it as being a lack of desire to know.
  3. Paul said, *“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that perish”* (II Cor. 4:3).
  4. A paradox is given, *“because seeing they see not...”* The paradox indicates their ability yet their rejection of truth (cf. Acts 7:51).
  5. They do not understand truth because they willfully ignore it. Let no one say that truth is unattainable. Truth is understood only by those who so desire to understand it. Jesus said, *“And that in the good ground, these are such as in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it fast and bring forth fruit with patience”* (Lk. 8:15). The phrase *“heard the word”* (*akouo logos*) is defined as “to hear and understand” (LS 29) the word of God (cf. Matt. 13:14).
    - a. To know truth is to know Jesus (Jn. 14:6).
    - b. Truth reveals instructions for salvation (Eph. 1:13).
    - c. Truth reveals instructions for unity among baptized believers (Jn. 17:20-21; I Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1-2).
    - d. If truth cannot be completely understood then John gave us an impossible task (II Jn. 9), we cannot therefore know Jesus, the instructions of truth for

salvation would be vague and useless and there would of course be no unity among baptized believers.

E. Jesus then quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10 saying, “*unto them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah...*”

1. Isaiah experienced this condition of heart in his day and so Jesus sees it in His day. The antecedent to the pronoun “*them*” are those who see but do not see and hear but do not hear.
2. Isaiah identifies the source of their problem: “*For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing and their eyes have they closed*” (Matt. 13:15).
  - a. A heart that is “*waxed gross*” (*pachuno*) “to make thick; to make fat, fatten: to make stupid (to render the soul dull or callous)” (Thayer 497). “Thick, stout, fat; of things, thick, massive, thick witted, gross, dull, stupid” (LS 614).
  - b. Their ears are “*dull of hearing*” (*bareos*) “heavy to bear, grievous, burdensome, oppressive, wearisome” (LS 147). “Hear with anger” (AG 133).
  - c. Their “*eyes have they closed*” (*kammuno*) “to shut or close the eyes, hence to drop asleep, doze” (LS 411).
3. A clear attitude toward truth is revealed by Jesus. There are those who do not understand truth because God’s commands are a burden and oppressive. Through their lack of fear of God they display stupidity (being ‘thick headed’) in seeking the things of this world rather than hearing, understanding and following God’s instructions (cf. I Jn. 2:15-17).

F. Why preach in parables Jesus? Because the word of God sifts the mind that is burdened by God’s gracious offer of eternity from those who truly desire a heavenly home (cf. Matt. 13:16-17)!

1. Jesus said, “*he that is not with me is against me*” (Matt. 12:30) and the Lord was not going to preach a message that marred the lines of true discipleship.
2. Jesus’ preaching then exposed those who were dull of hearing, stupid (thick headed) and one’s who lack desire toward His word that the true disciples would not be influenced by them (cf. Matt. 7:15ff; II Cor. 11:3-4). For this cause are Christians to expose false teachers and doctrines today (Eph. 5:11; II Jn. 9-11). Thick-headedness is like a contagious disease (cf. II Tim. 2:16-17).

### III. Jesus explains the parable of the sower to His disciples (Matt. 13:18-23; Mk. 4:13-20; Lk. 8:11-15):

- A. Jesus identifies four types of hearers.
- B. The first type of hearer is the heart represented by the “*wayside*.” The wayside heart hears; however the truth never takes root into his mind. He sees no need for the gospel message and therefore gives no place to it in his heart. That which he does receive is easily snatched away by the devil (Matt. 13:19).
- C. The second type of heart is represented by the “*rocky places*” (Matt. 13:20-21). With joy this person receives the gospel message; however, when he finds that suffering accompanies such living he is not willing to follow Jesus (II Tim. 3:12; I Pet. 2:21).

- D. The third type of heart is represented by seed sown among the “*thorns*” (Matt. 13:22). The word of God makes demands upon one’s time and finances. Such a heart that views this with dull ears sees only the burden of Christ rather than the liberty offered (Jn. 8:30-31; I Jn. 2:15-17).
- E. The fourth type of heart is the “*good ground*” (Matt. 13:23). The word of God does not burden this heart but rather this one hears, believes and understands. This person goes forth and spreads more seeds of the gospel and gains increase. This one’s desire and ability makes a truth seeker.

## Conclusion:

Often times brethren read the parable of the sower and relate to the sower rather than asking, “what kind of soil does my heart represent.” Though four types of soils are identified, only one is acceptable to the Lord.

What do we learn from the parable of the sower? We learn from the parable God’s love for the souls of men (Matt. 13:15). Secondly, we learn that God’s word does not return unto Him void (Isa. 55:10-11). Salvation is offered through hearing and believing (Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:26; Rev. 22:7). Identification of the correct heart God desires is revealed; i.e., fear (Prov. 1:7; Ps. 119:63), desire (Matt. 13:16; I Pet. 1:10-11), humility and contrition of heart (Isa. 57:15; 66:2; II Cor. 7:9-10), and diligence (Phil. 3:14; II Tim. 2:15 II Pet. 1:10). Thirdly, we learn that the Lord exposes the unacceptable attitudes toward His word. The unacceptable have no desire for truth and therefore no understanding of truth (Matt. 13:18). These have no fortitude when the going gets tuff (Matt. 13:21). Lastly, Jesus exposes the fact that the no desire heart is filled with worldliness (Matt. 13:22; I Jn. 2:15-17). Jesus would not allow a counterfeit disciple to exist because souls were and are at stake.