Parable Of The Sower

Lesson 4.06

The parable of the sower gives the followers of Christ valuable insight into the secrets of the human heart. Only God knows the heart, and he shares some details with those whom he loves.

Please read Matthew 13:1-23 ESV before beginning free Bible study lessons, #4.06

Previous Lesson: Parable Of The Ten Virgins #4.05

Preliminary Bible Study Questions:
1. Who does the Footpath represent in the parable of the soils?
2. Who does the Rocky Soil represent?
3. What does the weeds and thorns represent?

This popular parable is also told in the Gospels of Mark (4:1-20) and Luke (8:4-15). Among strong Christians, this is one of the most enlightening parables concerning people's spiritual lives. Understanding the reasons behind what and how others think about Jesus Christ is intriguing, so Jesus' parable of the soils, i.e. parable of the sower is very helpful. Let's find out why.

Parable of the Sower Setting

Mark tells us that Jesus' parable of the sower was taught early in his ministry. Large crowds had gathered to listen to Jesus teach, so, while in their boat, he asked his disciples to row him out in the lake a ways. Picture the people listening intently from the lake shore as Jesus' voice traveled crisply and clearly over the open water. Jesus sat the boat while teaching this and many other parables on this day.

This particular parable is first for several reasons. Most notably, it is a parable about parables. What I mean is that Jesus, through this parable, explained the necessity of all his parables. The reason is because there are four types of people to whom he teaches his message. Those four types of listeners are described in the parable of the sower. Parables are meant to be understood by those with a warm heart, but they're meant to be nothing but confusion to those with cold hearts (Matthew 13:11-15 NASB). Which type of heart do you have?

Another related and important reason that the parable of the sower is first is because his disciples had to know why some people responded positively to Jesus, while others responded negatively. The disciples naturally figured that people would be excited to meet and then exalt Jesus as their Messiah. Jesus set out to show the disciples that the Farmer, i.e. Jesus and his disciples, wasn't the problem, nor was the Seed the issue (aka the Good News), but the problem was with the aforementioned hearers. Before we learn about the hearers of Jesus, let's chat about the Farmer and the seed.
Farmer and the Seed

The parable of the sower employs a sower, or farmer, to represent the work of Jesus Christ and his disciples, which would also include Christians today. The seed in the parable of the farmer sowing seeds is the good news about Jesus and his message of salvation. This is made clear by the explanation Jesus gave in Mark 4:14.

Jesus, in the parable of the sower, will now turn to dirt in order to represent people's hearts. Is this not fitting for us sinners? (Jeremiah 17:9; Hebrews 3:10-15).

Parable of the Soils - The Footpath

The parable of the sower starts with the worst of dirt, that of a footpath. It is concrete-like, hard as rock. The constant trampling on it by people and their animals, at the time of Jesus, compacted the dirt into road pavement material.

The farmer's field conjoined the field and occasionally the farmer accidentally sowed seed upon the path. Of course, people and animals would trample the seed underfoot. Birds would swoop down and eat some of the seed, as well. The sun would bake the remaining seed and the hot Jerusalem summer would sap every bit of moisture out of it, thereby killing it. Jesus gave this dramatic illustration to point out that some people have such calloused hearts his beautiful message of eternal forgiveness cannot penetrate it. The seed of the gospel has no chance to even swell and begin to shoot a root into the dirt.

The parable of the sower informs us that this group of people, and they are many, have hardened their hearts against God and his word. Their hearts have become a footpath. These people don't understand the gospel, don't consider the good news for a moment, nor do they feel bad about rejecting it. In fact, many hate it and will go so far as to destroy the messenger. This is the worst group of people on earth. Jesus said that "Satan steals the word from them." Do you have ears to hear what God is saying? Listen to him in Romans 1:21-24 NASB.

Think of the worst people you have ever known and include them here. Cain, Korah, Judas, and Caiaphas from the Scriptures are in this group. Include the worst of humanity's leaders, Stalin, Hitler, and the worst murderers. The gospel has no effect on these friends of Satan. Those who hate God, the Bible, and Christians belong in this large and pitiful group.

The Rocky Soil

The parable of the sower continues by referring to rocky soil as representative of a type of human heart. A field full of rocks, or a field with little dirt sitting on top of a rock base, gives little opportunity for a seed to sprout and mature into a healthy plant. The roots of the new plant strive to reach the lower regions of rich soil in order to draw nutrients and moisture up to the plant leaves. However, once a stone or rocky base blocks the roots from drilling down into the dirt the plant withers in the heat. There isn't enough moisture and the plant soon dies.

A human heart in the condition of rocky soil is hardened to the gospel, similar to the footpath.
The difference is that the seed actually sprouts, because there is some loose soil. The seed swells with moisture as the roots attempt to head downward searching for rich soil and moisture. The plant begins to grow, but finally succumbs to the elements of nature. **In much the same way as this soil, a person with a rocky heart hears the gospel, and enjoys the fact that the possibility of forgiveness exists. They like the thought of a kind God who forgives people.** These folks believe God exists, but is distant from creation.

They initially respond to the gospel by learning some of the Scriptures. They agree with much of what it says. They don't deny Jesus or his work in ministry or on the cross. Many believe he resurrected from the dead and ascended to heaven. **They have no problem with Jesus, except this one thing: Jesus' call for discipleship. This commitment makes them bristle. They shun Jesus at this point. The thought of giving up their time and resources to the study of the Bible doesn't work for them.** Finally, when the trials of life hit them, or persecution arises, they fall away from the Gospel. They lack trust in God's word. Do you have ears to hear? Listen to Jesus in **Mark 10:5** and **Romans 2:5**.

The disciples spoken of in **John 6:66** are in view here. People today like this are found in liberal churches and non-Christian religions. **They simply don't want to follow Jesus Christ as his disciple. They respect him, but time commitments and life's difficulties are used as excuses to depart the faith.** No fruit will be produced from these people. Liberals, *i.e.* those who disbelieve the Bible is fully God's word, and non-Christian religious people make up much of this very large group.

**The Weeds and Thorns**

The parable of the sower now presents an enlightening situation. Sometimes, regardless of the condition of the soil, there are weed seeds embedded in the field. A farmer can possess the darkest, richest, most fertile field in the country, but have a hidden weed problem. The farmer sows his good seed across the prepared field and proudly and patiently waits for his crop to grow. The plants spring up in the soil. The rains fall, the sun shines, and the plants flourish.

Suddenly, the farmer notices a horrible weed problem. These nasty weeds have deep roots and thick, sharp thorns choking the tender young plants to death. The weeds grow fast, taking over the field. The crops have no hope in the suffocating grasps of these terrible weeds. The soil was fine, but somehow weed seed invaded the once fertile field. What happened?!

Jesus says that the gospel took hold in this person's heart. The person was growing and enjoying life as a Christian. Most people would believe this person to be a solid Christian. However, hidden deep inside the heart, the person built false idols. The love of these idols choked out the gospel. The person placed too much love towards family, or friends, or power, or wealth, or sports, or education and career. The love for the other things negated their shallow, insufficient love for Jesus Christ. The false idols are the weeds that choked out the person's early love for Christ. Do you have ears to hear? Listen to God in **Ezekiel 14:3-4 NASB**.

Annanias and Sapphira in Acts are representative of these people. Their love for money made them lie to the Holy Spirit, which brought the judgment of death. There is no eternal fruit from
this person's life. These people are found throughout the Christian churches around the world. They're amongst the chosen. They're preachers and teachers, organists, and choir members; and they're the wives, daughters, husbands and sons, brothers and sisters of the elect saints.

The Good Soil

The parable of the sower now turns to the good soil to represent people who have warm, humble hearts that love Jesus and his word. These rare, true Christians love following Jesus as his disciple. The farmer sows his seed in this fertile soil and the seed grows into healthy, fruit-bearing plants. The true disciples grow spiritually through Bible knowledge and application, prayer, and service to the Lord. They make God #1 in their life, and they think of others before themselves. This group teaches others both inside and outside the church. They produce spiritual fruit that returns 30, 60, and even 100 fold. Do you have ears to hear? Listen to God in Psalm 119:161-168.

The parable of the sower teaches us through the four types of soils that there are two types of people: believers and non-believers. People have warm, tender hearts, or they have cold, calloused hearts. Jesus wanted to give helpful insight for the reasons why non-believers don't believe. He did an awesome job of teaching, because it is now clear.

Listen to Jesus in Matthew 12:35-37, "A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. And I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak. The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you."

Let's consider ourselves sternly warned by our ultimate Judge. He says our hearts are the key to eternal life. Is your heart on fire for Jesus and his righteous kingdom; or icy and rebellious, hiding in Satan's dark kingdom?

Grasp This!

The parable of the sower begs the question, "What can a diligent farmer, i.e. you and me, do when attempting to sow seeds and grow plants in the different types of dirt?" First, the footpath? Not much we as humans can do here. We can try to plow the dirt over and hope people stop walking on it and Satan stops his thieving. We can return insults and attacks from these people with smiles and good deeds. Pray silently for them, that God will heal and warm their icy hearts. It can happen.

Next, the rocky soil? Pray for them, and always be prepared to answer their questions with the word that is stored in our hearts. Occasionally, a plant will rise, flourish and produce fruit in a field of stony soil. Next, the weedy and thorny fields? When noticing a person who seems to be falling away, getting caught up in the concerns of the world, take the time to discuss what you observe. Gently warn them, and even show them this parable of the sower, and Christ's message. A person's true love(s) are usually exposed through their speech. Listen to them.

Farmers should always be cultivating the ground, gathering and removing rocks, and killing
weeds. We should eliminate pests with insecticides and irrigate the field through drought periods. As ministers, *i.e.* farmers, we should always be at work farming the fields, *i.e.* our communities, cultivating the soil, *i.e.* people's hearts, and preparing the kingdom for a great harvest, *i.e.* spiritual fruit. But, don't ever forget that God is the One who changes hearts ([Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 36:26-27](#)) - we can only assist him. Glory to him alone.

Next Lesson: Two Sons Parable #4.07

**Bible Study Questions:**
1. The parable of the sower implies that all humans have heart issues. As a Christian, with which of the three bad soils do you struggle? For example, do you struggle with coveting wealth, or possibly in making your spouse or children your idols?
2. If you had to voice your opinion of the main theme of the parable of the soils, what would you choose?
3. As a "farmer" sowing the seed of the gospel, what are some practical ways to be a good tenant of the fields God has given you?

**Inspirational Bible Verses:**
Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to your word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes. With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.

**Psalm 119:9-16 KJV**

**Prayers Of Thanksgiving:**
The parable of the sower, dear Father, reveals so much about people's hearts, including mine. I apologize for the idols that I build in my heart. Those worldly things block and even shove out my love for you. Please, as I read your word, convict me of my idolatry. Show me those things that block my love for you. Help me remove those idols which have deceived me. Warm my heart, Holy Spirit. Mold my heart into a tender heart that desires you and your word. Thank you. In Jesus' name. Amen.