

July 2, 2017

## “The Parable of the Soils” Matthew 13:1-23

FCF: Failure to respond to Jesus’ call in the right way

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) Jesus spreads the gospel like a sower, widely into all kinds of soils.  
(magnet) We need to respond to the gospel rightly.

### SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Summertime means blockbuster movies. Here’s one from a few years ago – “Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade.” The great climax comes when the two rival treasure seekers find the Holy Grail, guarded by a knight from centuries ago. “*You must choose*,” he says. Before them is a table filled with various chalices and cups. But which one is the Grail? Which one will they choose? Indy’s rival takes one he thinks to be “the cup of a king,” dips it in the water and drinks. He dies what we could call an ugly death. And the knight proclaims, “*He chose poorly*.”

The true Jesus extends His call to us. We need to choose. May we not choose poorly.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** Matthew 13:1-23

### PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

### SERMON INTRODUCTION:

The context of this teaching is vital to see (READ Matthew 13:1). What had happened “that same day”? The tide of opposition was rising. We see that through the last two chapters.

Which raises a question. How could Jesus the King show these signs of the Kingdom and yet be so opposed by His own people? How can it be? This was the question. And it still is. Think with me. How can it be that Jesus has come, free and full salvation is offered, yet so many people are not only indifferent, but even actively against it? How can that be? A good question.

Part of the answer, part of the reason for our confusion, has to do with our expectations. For Jesus comes not to wage war but to sow seed, not as a warrior but as a farmer. We see that with this first parable. Parables are stories that work like analogies. This first one can be referred to as “The Parable of the Soils”. And what Jesus wants us see is that He spreads the gospel like a sower, widely into all kinds of soils. And we need to respond to the gospel rightly.

There are four soils in this parable. The first three all share this in common - they are all unfruitful. But not the fourth. It is completely different. Let’s look at these soils each in turn.

### I. ALONG THE PATH

#### A) Background

##### 1. Odd methods

(READ Matthew 13:3b-4) Now this might seem strange. We’re use to a plow-then-sow method.

##### 2. Explanation

Theirs was a sow-then-plow method, “broadcasting” the seed by hand as you walked. And it was natural then to have some seed fall on the path where birds would sweep down and eat it up.

#### B) Significance

##### 1. Hardened hearts

(**READ Matthew 13:18-19**) The path stands for those with hardened hearts who refuse to believe.

## 2. Satan's work

The birds stand for Satan's work, thwarting the growth of the seed – a deceiving, distracting work that was hardly unique to just those times. Satan is still every bit as active here and now.

*Application:*

To which I have to say, with all seriousness, to those of you here this morning whose hearts are hardened to the gospel, you need to consider why it really is that you don't believe. I know you think it's because of a choice you've made. But please consider why you've made it.

## II. ON ROCKY GROUND

### A) Background

#### 1. The rocks

(**READ Matthew 13:5-6**) There were areas with shallow soil upon layers of rocks underneath.

#### 2. The heat

The rocks absorb heat in summer, release that heat in winter, causing the seeds to spring up. But they have no root system. So, when the intensity of the sun comes, they dry up and die out.

### B) Significance

#### 1. Shallow belief

(**READ Matthew 13:20-21**) The rocky ground is a shallow belief. The quick growth is an initial joy that proves to be superficial. The rocks are anything that prevent the roots from going deep.

#### 2. Persecution and trouble

The heat is the persecution and trouble that comes from belief. The withering is a falling away.

*Application:*

To which I have to say that, if you're new to the faith, you need to know that these hard times will come. And to endure and to grow through them, you will need depth to your faith, a depth that comes through the disciplines of daily time in God's Word, prayer, and the fellowship of other believers around you. Those times will come. Now is the time to cultivate a deeper soil.

## III. AMONG THE WEEDS

### A) Background

#### 1. The weeds

(**READ Matthew 13:7**) Think about it. Weeds do allow for growth. At least, to some extent.

#### 2. Robbing strength

The problem is that they compete for nutrients and light, taking away the strength of the plants.

### B) Significance

#### 1. A competition

(**READ Matthew 13:22**) The problem is not what's missing but what's been added – the choking weeds of worry, the allurements of riches and pleasures, the desires for things outside our reach.

## 2. A choking effect

All of which inevitably works, slowly but surely, because of this competition for the affections and attention of our hearts, to have a choking effect on the Word. Which renders us unfruitful.

*Application:*

To which I have to say that this competition of the weeds is real. “The cares of the world” – whatever it is we think we need that God isn’t giving, whatever is tempting us to fret will lead us to faithlessness. “The deceitfulness of riches” – wealth lies and then leaves. Which leads to a question demanding to be asked. What would “weeding the garden” look like for us?

## IV. ON GOOD SOIL

Which takes us to the last point, the seed sown on good soil (**READ Matthew 13:8, 23**).

### A) Background

#### 1. Typical yield

A little background. In modern times, a 40 to 60-fold gain is excellent. In those times, a 5 to 15-fold gain was typical, 10-fold quite good. This is what would have been normal and expected.

#### 2. This yield

But Jesus speaks here of a 100-fold gain. This was unheard of in Galilean soil (especially in those days), far beyond what was expected and what folks were used to. What’s going on here?

### B) Significance

#### 1. The fruitful disciple

With this imagery, Jesus is speaking of fruitful soil, of the fruitful disciple. It’s in utter contrast to the other three responses - hearing the Word, retaining it, and persevering to produce a crop.

#### 2. The nature of the fruit

And the nature of the fruit? Consider the things Jesus had taught already up to this point (**READ Matthew 5:3-10, 13-14**). This is a fruitfulness not of vine and bushel but character and influence.

*Application:*

What do we say to this? How our hearts should be moved with wonder and appreciation of this Teacher! Jesus, the One who has made all things, is the Sower. And, unlike any other farmer in any other field, He does not simply stop at sowing the seed. He brings forth the growth as well. So, if we have any understanding of these things, we need to recognize that it is only by His grace that we have eyes to see and ears to hear anything at all. May that humble us.

And, paradoxically, may we hear. May we hear. Jesus spreads the seed of the gospel like a sower, widely into all kinds of soils. We need to respond to the gospel rightly by embracing it.

## CONCLUSION:

The disciples were asking, “*How can this be?*” And Jesus addresses that. Which then leaves us with another question, “*Which soil are we?*” This is how parables work. They lure us in, capture our imaginations, causing us to wonder, forcing a question. Which soil are we?

Ultimately, it only matters to a farmer if the seed is fruitful. That stands to reason. After all, he has a crop to harvest. He's invested so much into it. His livelihood, his family, his community, his next crop is depending on this yield. Now I'm not saying Jesus is standing there wringing His hands waiting on us. The point is that there is really only one thing that matters.

There is only one thing that matters. There are ultimately two kinds of soil – unfruitful and fruitful. That's not arrogant. It's the facts. And Jesus isn't playing games (**READ Matthew 13:9**). Do we have ears for this? He's laid this out before us. Are we willing to hear Him?

Jesus spreads the seed of the gospel like a sower, widely into all kinds of soils. We need to respond to the gospel rightly by embracing it. It's a question worth asking: which soil are we?

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