

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER: HOW A MAN RECEIVES THE GOSPEL MATHEW 13:01–09

DIVISION OVERVIEW

Parables, Mysteries and Secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven

The eight parables of Mt. 13 have to do with the “secrets of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 13:11). By secret Jesus does not mean something secretive or mysterious, but rather something unknown and not revealed until this present time. What is the secret, the new revelation? It is twofold.

1. Jesus pictured modern-day Christianity. He said the Kingdom of Heaven is a mixture of good and bad. It includes professing believers as well as genuine believers; false doctrine as well as true doctrine; false ritual as well as true ritual; hypocritical worship as well as genuine worship: professing belief as well as real belief. (The Farmer or Sower and the Seed, the Wheat and the Weeds, the Mustard Seed, and the Yeast.)
2. Jesus pictured the world and its priceless value. He said that He had come to seek and sacrificially purchase the world. He said that His followers are to laboriously work, seeking to pull men into the kingdom. He said they were unusually privileged: they had received the new revelation of God to add to their knowledge of the old revelation. Therefore, they were now responsible for teaching the new as well as the old (The Hidden Treasure, the Pearl, the Net, and the Householder).

Introduction: Mathew 13:01–09, 18–23 Parable of the Sower

Christ interprets this parable in verses 18-23. *The farmer or sower* is either the Lord Jesus Christ or a servant of His (v. 37). (The servants of the Lord, ministers or laymen, are “workers together with God,” (1 Cor. 3:9). *The seed* is the Word of God or the Word of the kingdom (v. 19). It is called (1) the “imperishable seed” (1 Pet. 1:23), and (2) “the gospel which...is bearing fruit” (Col. 1:5-6).

The ground upon which the seed is sown is the heart of the hearers. Christ says two significant things about the ground:

=> there are different ways for the ground to hear and receive the Word (seed).

=> the fate of the Word, how well it grows, depends upon the ground, that is, the hearer. (Mk. 4:1-20; Lk. 8:4-15)

Each hearer is personally responsible for how he receives the Word of God.

- I. Christ preached a parable (vv. 1-2).
 - II. A farmer went forth to sow seed — a symbol of the Word of God (vv. 3, 18).
 - III. A large number did not allow the Word to take permanent root, vv. 18-22 (vv. 4-7).
 - IV. Only a small number allowed the Word to take permanent root (v. 8).
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V. Only a few allowed the Word to bear 100 percent fruit (v. 8).

VI. A strong call: hear (v. 9).

I. *Mathew 13:01–02 Jesus Christ Preaching*

Christ preached a parable.

=> He preached on the Sabbath.

=> He preached by the seashore in a ship.

=> He preached as the large crowds gathered.

=> The large crowds pressed Him into a boat.

II. *Mathew 13:03 Witnessing*

A farmer or sower went forth to sow. Note two things.

=> First, the farmer or sower did go out.

=> Second, the farmer or sower did sow the seed (the Word of God) or the Word of the Kingdom (v. 19).

III. *Mathew 13:04–07 Unbelief and Rejection*

A large number did not allow the Word to take permanent root. But note: they did hear the Word of God. They were in church — regularly. The Word did fall upon them, but they did not allow the Word to penetrate — not permanently.

Note that the number of persons who rejected the Word was far greater than the ones who received it. They did not all obey the gospel...

Rom 10:16 But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?”

Mat 22:14 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Thought 1. A person is held accountable for the kind of heart he has: hard, emotional, superficial, thorny or soft and tender.

MATHEW 13:04, 19
WAYSIDE, PATH — HARDENED TO THE GOSPEL

Some dwelt by the path or wayside. In the day of Christ there were no fences to separate property lines. Instead, long narrow foot paths were used for the travelling public. These paths were trodden down as hard as pavement by the constant use of the travelling public. This is the hard path or wayside ground referred to by Christ.

Note: These hear the Word but they do not understand it (v. 19). They are in the church regularly, and the Word falls upon them. Some have made public decisions, and some have not; but no matter, they are all still off to the side, paying little

attention to what is going on. Even those who have made decisions are not genuine. They are hard, very hard, with closed minds and concrete hearts; therefore, they pay no attention and give no heed to the Word. Their minds are elsewhere. They have no interest and are indifferent, failing to realize how important the Word is to life. They just feel they can get along without the Word of God, that it is not needed in life.

Christ said “the evil one” comes and snatches away whatever Word is sown. People whose hearts are not open and soft are easy prey for the devil. The Word always remains on the surface of the heart, thereby exposing it to whatever the devil may wish to grab.

There are at least four reasons why people become hardened to the gospel.

1. They rebel and rebel. They react because of some tragedy or some circumstance, and they blame God.
2. They do not stay awake or alert; they do not pay attention. They do not consider the gospel important enough to merit their attention. In their minds, other things need their attention more than the gospel.
3. They are careless in handling the gospel. They treat the gospel as an *item*, an *additive*, a part of life instead of life itself. When needed and when time is available, the gospel is acceptable. Their attitude is that the gospel has its place, but it is not the permeating factor of life that so many make it to be.
4. They are deceived. What matters to them is attendance, being present in *worship services* and associating with other Christians. A change of heart and life is meaningless. Religion to them is a matter of form and ceremony, not life.

Acts 28:27 ‘For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’

Eph 4:19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

Heb 3:13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.

Prov 29:1 A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed — without remedy.

Rom 2:5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

Thought 1. Scripture gives a clear warning: “We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away” (Heb. 2:1 f). □

MATHEW 13:05–06, 20–21 STONY PLACES,
ROCKY PLACES: BACKSLIDING, FALSE PROFESSION

Some received the Word in rocky, stony places. In some parts of Palestine lying right beneath the ground is a layer of limestone. When seed falls upon this ground, something dramatic happens. The limestone holds the rain and heat from the sunlight right under the surface; therefore, the fallen seed sprouts quickly and dramatically. But it has no root.

The application is clear: this person has what appears to be a dramatic conversion. He makes a decision for Christ, and he stands out as an example of a changed life and quick growth. However, the change lasts only for a season, perhaps an extended season, but in the end it fails. Note four things about this person (vv. 20-21):

- => he hears the Word
- => he receives the Word immediately
- => he receives the Word with joy
- => he endures for a while.

Note why this person fails.

1. He has no root in himself (v. 21). He has not rooted and grounded himself in the Word and in prayer. He has not learned the doctrines and principles of Christianity. He began in the *emotional joy* of the Word and in his decision to reform his life, but he has continued to live in the emotions of his experience and his new-found Christian friends. He does little about the hard demands of Christ that come only through diligent study and disciplined prayer. He knows little about sacrificial obedience: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved” (2 Tim. 2:15).
2. He has little spiritual strength to withstand the trials and persecutions of life. Pressure from circumstances or former friends of the world — mockery, abuse or whatever — causes him to cave in.

Mat 22:14 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Luke 6:49 “But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

Luke 9:62 Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

Gal 4:9 But now that you know God — or rather are known by God — how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

Heb 10:38 *“But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.”*

2 Pet 2:20-22 *If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and “A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.”*

Rev 2:4-5 *“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp-stand from its place.”*

Thought 1. Hearing the Word preached and taught will not get a person into heaven. A person has to receive the Word.

Thought 2. A great mistake is sometimes made with persons experiencing dramatic conversions. They are pushed forward as a strong testimony long before they have proven the genuineness of their conversion (1 Tim. 3:10).

Thought 3. A sobering fact: “He who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Mt. 10:22). □

MATHEW 13:07, 22 THORNS, WORLDLINESS, WEALTH

Some received the Word among thorns. The thorny ground is deceptive ground. It looks good and clean, appearing to be clear of weeds and thorns, but it is not. Right under the surface of the soil is a chain of roots ready to spring up. The fact that the roots are already there means that the thorns will be stronger and grow faster than the good seed. They will choke the life out of the good seed.

Thorns represent those who receive the Word as an addition to their life. The Word is merely added on, not allowed to replace the world and the things of it. These do not truly repent; they just try to take God and add Him to their collection in life. They make Him only a small part of their affairs; consequently, the Word is always choked to death. (1 Jn. 2:1516).

Note what the thorns are: (See Mt. 6:1924 for a thorough study on wealth).

1. Thorns are “the worries of this life” (v. 22). They prick and prick away at the Word. They *entangle* a person in the world and the things of the world (2 Tim. 2:34). They irritate, aggravate, trouble and hinder a person from pursuing his

task. When a person's mind is on *the worries of this life*, his mind is not on God and the things of the Word or Spirit. He is carnal-minded, not spiritual-minded (Rom. 8:58; 2 Cor. 10:35).

2. Thorns are "the deceitfulness of wealth" (v. 22). Note: it is not wealth itself that is worldly (thorny); it is *the deceit of wealth*. Wealth deceives in several ways.
 - a. Wealth tends to make a person *self-confident and self-dependent*. It makes him feel comfortable and secure in this world. Such tends to keep him from trusting and calling upon God.
 - b. Wealth tends to make a person *Overly comfortable, extravagant and indulgent*. It makes him live sumptuously, beyond what is needed. He sometimes feels that he can spend to get a little more and a little better than is necessary. This feeling arises especially if he has already given in to meet the needs of the world. (See *Sin*, Lk. 16:1921.)
 - c. Wealth tends to *consume a person's mind*. It arouses the urge and passion to keep and protect all that a person has and to make more and more. A wealthy person often finds himself more and more centred around his wealth and less and less centred around the things of God and His Word.
 - d. Wealth tends to *misinterpret the blessings of God*. It leads a person to the false idea and security that to have is to *be blessed by God*, and not to have is to be blessed less by God. This is a false concept that has prevailed since the beginning of time: that to receive and have anything in this world is a blessing from God, and the more a person has, the more he is especially blessed. God has promised the necessities of life in this material world, but His great blessings are spiritual (Mt. 6:2534; Eph. 1:3).

Note: these four deceptions show clearly why it is so difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Mark 4:19 "But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful."

1 Tim 6:9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.

James 5:3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.

Mat 19:23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."

1 Tim 6:7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

Job 20:28 A flood will carry off his house, rushing waters on the day of God's wrath.

Psa 49:10 For all can see that wise men die; the foolish and the senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others. (see Eccl 2:18)

Prov 23:5 Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.

Jer 17:11 Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay is the man who gains riches by unjust means. When his life is half gone, they will desert him, and in the end he will prove to be a fool. □

LUKE 16:19–21 SIN

*“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.” **Luke 16:19-21***

The sin of the rich man would not be a sin in the eyes of most societies. There is no record of a vicious, glaring sin; no record of a vulgar, public sin. He was not cruel — he never ordered Lazarus from his gate nor refused Lazarus the crumbs from his table. He was not a tyrant; not an oppressor of the poor, not a monstrous member of society. Rather, he was socially responsible, an upright citizen, respected and well-liked. No earthly court would ever think of arresting or condemning him. In society’s eyes he was honoured and highly esteemed. People liked him and spoke well of him. What then was his sin?

1. The word *luxury* (*lampros*) means that he was flamboyant, displaying his wealth in materialistic ways.
2. The “gate” was a large gate indicating that his home was a large house or a mansion.
3. The purple and fine linen show that he had the latest styles and the ultimate in luxury.
4. The words “every day” show that he feasted every day. His sin was *self-indulgence, comfort, ease, luxury, extravagant living*. He sought the things and pleasures of this world. He was complacent, hoarding and allowing money to lie around making more and more for himself and his estate while needs lay all around him — right at his gate. He neglected and ignored others, most significantly, Lazarus. The needs of a degenerate world concerned him little, if at all. He wanted what others in the world had, plenty for themselves and more. The world acknowledged and honoured those who had plenty, and he wanted such recognition and honour for himself. He wanted what others had and he wanted to keep up with them.

Mat 25:43 *“I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.”*

1 John 3:17 *“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?”*

Mark 4:19 *“But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”*

1 Tim 6:9 *People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.*

Zec 7:6 *And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves?*

Deu 15:7 *If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your poor brother. □*

IV. Mathew 13:08, 23 Fruitfulness, Salvation

Only a small number allowed the Word to take permanent root. A person who allows the Word to take permanent root represents the honest and good heart (Lk. 8:15). Christ says two things about him.

1. He hears the Word of God and understands it. His heart is soft and tender toward God, so he listens, meditates, concentrates and thinks. He is not hypocritical, wasting his time and being present physically but absent mentally. He does not allow his thoughts to wander off when the Word of God is being preached. He is responsible and behaves intelligently. He listens to God’s Word, studies and receives it.
2. He is fruitful. He bears the fruit of God’s Word and Spirit in his own life (Gal. 5:22-23). And he reproduces himself by reaching out to lead others to a saving knowledge of the Lord (See *Fruit Bearing*, Jn. 15:18).

Note that John 15 classifies fruit-bearing as “no fruit” (Jn. 15:2), “fruit” (Jn. 15:2), “more fruit” (Jn. 15:2), and “much fruit” (Jn. 15:5, 8).

2 Cor 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

John 12:24 *“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”*

John 15:5 *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*

Phil 1:11 *Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God.*

Eph 5:9 *For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.*

Col 1:10 *And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.*

Psa 92:13-14 *Planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green.*

Thought 1. God's Word shall never return to Him empty (Isa. 55:11). This is a glorious encouragement to the true minister and teacher of God.

Thought 2. Fruit is that which distinguishes the true believer from the hypocrite.

V. **Mathew 13:08, 23 Commitment and Fruitfulness**

This is a shocking truth! Not all believers are equal. Some bear only 30 percent fruit; some 60 percent fruit; and shockingly, only a very small number bear 100 percent fruit. Most are just not willing to give 100 percent of their energy, effort, strength, time and possessions. There is not the willingness to pay the price — not within most men.

VI. **Mathew 13:09 Decision**

Christ issues a strong call, "Hear. The person who has ears to hear, let him hear" (v. 9).

Mat 7:21 *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."*

Thought 1. The ear has no greater purpose than to hear the message of God. ■

JOHN 15:01–08 FRUIT-BEARING, ABIDE

There are four stages of fruit-bearing given: (1) no fruit (v. 2), (2) fruit (v. 2), (3) more fruit (v. 2), and (4) much fruit (vv. 5, 8).

What does it mean to say a Christian is to bear fruit? It means to bear converts (Rom. 1:13), to bear righteousness (Rom. 6:21-23), to bear Christian character or the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Note also the conditions for bearing fruit in life: cleansing (v. 3) and abiding or remaining in Christ (v. 5) and obedience (vs. 10, 12). A true Christian is a person who really does abide in Christ (1 Jn. 2:10). John said that to abide or remain in Christ means eight things. (See *Abide*, Jn. 15:4-6.)

1. A person walks in open confession before God. He walks through life opening up his life to God; he confesses all known sin. He does not walk in sin, and he does not allow any sin to go unconfessed (1 Jn. 1:6-10).
2. A person walks and has fellowship with Christ. He lives and moves and has his being with Christ. He communes and lives in consciousness of God's presence,

and from God's presence, he learns of God and he draws the strength and authority to live victoriously day by day (1 Jn. 2:6; 2:27; see Psa. 16:11; Prov. 3:5-6).

3. A person continues in the church; he has not gone out from the church (1 Jn. 2:19).
4. A person possesses confidence, an unashamedness in life, that prepares him for eternity (1 Jn. 2:28).
5. A person does not walk in continuous sin (1 Jn. 3:6). He experiences constant victory over sin.
6. A person actively surrenders himself to obey God's commandments (1 Jn. 3:24).
7. A person experiences the indwelling presence and witness of the Spirit (1 Jn. 4:12-13).
8. A person dwells in love and unity and fellowship with all other believers (Jn. 17:21-23; 1 Jn. 4:16; see 1 Jn. 4:20). □