

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **The Responses to the Gospel**

Scripture: Matthew 13:3b-9, 18-23

Code: 2299

Let's join together in looking at the Word of God, Matthew chapter 13. Part of our worship is to focus on the truth that God has granted to us. We might better be able to worship Him by better understanding His Word and His will. In looking at Matthew 13, we begin, today, an in-depth look at the parables of this marvelous chapter. Now I confess to you that I've waited a long time to dig into these parables because of their tremendous importance to us in this age.

As we've learned in the last couple of weeks together, the parables of Matthew 13 are given by our Lord to describe the character of the kingdom between His rejection and His return. And they describe the church age, as we know it, this period of time that is called the mystery form of the kingdom. Christ is still the King; His kingdom is here. It's the part of the kingdom, however, that was not seen in the Old Testament. The King was rejected. He will return to establish His prophesied kingdom. But, in the meantime, there is this mystery form, unseen in the past, that we know as the age of the church.

And we asked the question in the last couple of weeks; what will this period be like? How will it be? Will the gospel be preached? Will it be heard? Will it be believed? What will happen to the kingdom in this period?" And our Lord gives the answer to His disciples in a series of seven parables. They are given in this chapter and wonderfully explained to us, the very time in which we live.

Now, this morning, we want to look at the first parable. It begins in verse 3. "And He spoke many things unto them in parables, saying, 'Behold, a sower went forth to sow.'" Now as we pointed out to you, the Lord knows how to take the natural world and wield it as a weapon of great precision in instructing regarding spiritual truth.

He takes something they could understand, lays it alongside something they did not understand and the one explains the other. And that is what a parable is. It is a comparison. Each of these stories is filled with profound spiritual truth. And I have found that the longer you look at them and the longer you study them, the more rich and full they become.

This week, as I studied this parable over and over again, I suppose I spent 15 hours or more on this one parable, just looking at it and digging into it. It became more and more rich, and more and more rich, until I had to restrain myself from developing a series out of this one parable.

The amazing thing is that with all of the richness, with all of the wide range of ramifications of what is said by our Lord, it is amazing how each parable is so simply told. How the Lord has that supernatural capability of filing down all unnecessary words to get at the very bare minimum of terms, and yet express incredible profundity.

Now, the statement at the beginning there in verse 3, "Behold, a sower went forth to sow," opens up our understanding of this particular parable. Jesus is on familiar territory as He speaks in this regard, because there was much agricultural life in that part of the world. Everybody understood the sowing of seed; everybody understood what was involved in that. It may have been that as Jesus was off the shore of the lake of Galilee, in a boat, seated there, teaching the multitude gathered on the shore, that they could have looked off in the distance and seen this very thing taking place.

They could have been watching a man going up and down the furrow sowing seed. They would drape over the shoulder a bag, and the bag would be full of seed and it would have an opening. And as the furrows had been prepared, the man would reach in and take out the seed and with his hand he would broadcast it. That was the original meaning of that English word, to "broadcast."

He would scatter the seed in to the furrow, and he would do it with ordered steps in a straight line, and when he reached the end of the line, he would turn to start the other way, never miss a step, and continue throwing the seed. And that was how the field was sown, by throwing the seed, the broadcasting method. As he throws that seed, Jesus indicates there are four kinds of soil on which that seed will fall. Let's look at them.

First is what He calls the wayside soil, in verse 4. "And when he sowed, some of the seeds fell by the wayside and the fowls came and devoured them." Now, in Palestine which was just literally crisscrossed with fields, the fields were usually long, narrow strips and men could' cultivate those fields. The strips were separated from other strips and other fields by paths, the paths being about three feet or so wide, narrow paths.

Those were used by the farmer to get in between the fields to get to whatever field he wanted to reach. They were also used by the travelers who were going from one part of the country to another. We find even in Matthew chapter 12, that the Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples were walking through the fields of grain. And no doubt they were walking on those little paths that were for that purpose. There were no fences around the fields, there were no walls surrounding the fields, just these little narrow paths for travelers and for the farmer to get around in his area.

And no doubt this is what the Lord has in mind when He talks about the wayside. The dirt would then be packed down, beaten hard, uncultivated, never turned over, never loosened. And by all of the continual pounding and pounding, and because of the dryness of that part of the world it would be

compacted to the point where it was like a road. It was as hard as pavement.

And when the farmer came along and threw the seed and it went beyond the furrow and landed on that hard surface, it could not penetrate the ground. And it would lie there on the top and birds would hover, no doubt, until the farmer turned his back. And as he started down the next furrow, they would land on the hard surface and they would eat the seed. And what they did not eat, Luke says, was trampled by the feet of men who were passing through the fields. That's the wayside. The birds and the men removing the seed which cannot penetrate the soil.

Then you come to the stony soil in verse 5, "Some –" and this would be very true because of the method of sowing the seed would scatter and fall in different places and this one would fall on stony places, or rocky places – "where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth. And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away." Luke adds, "They had no moisture." There was no root to capture the moisture.

Now what is this? Well, it's not talking about soil with rocks in it because any farmer who cultivated a field would make sure all the rocks were out. But basically, Israel, in terms of its land, has running through it strata of limestone rock bed. And in very many places this rock bed surges up to become close to the soil so that maybe inches beneath the soil there would be solid rock bed limestone. And when cultivating the field you might not see that or you might be unable in the cultivating process to break up that rock bed.

And so right beneath the soil is this hard rock bed and as the seed falls in and begins to germinate and tries to shoot its roots down, they hit the rock bed. They have nowhere to go. All of the moisture and the sun that's there generates life upward so they spring up, probably higher than the other grain and the other seed which is going both ways and using its energy to go both ways. This flourishes immediately, but when the sun comes out, it dies because its roots are not strong enough to maintain moisture or to find moisture, and the rock bed hinders them and it dies in the heat of the summer.

Now verse 7 introduces us to the thorny, or better, weedy soil. Weeds are in this soil. "Some fell among thorns –" or weeds – "and the thorns –" or weeds – "sprang up and choked them." Now, this soil looks good. It's deep, it's rich, it's turned over, it's tilled, it's cultivated. It looks clean and it looks ready, and the seed falls down into that area and it begins to germinate. But also there are fibrous roots of weeds and they tend to choke that life out.

You see, weeds are natural to that soil; they belong in that soil. They fit in that soil. They're at home in that soil. The sowing of the grain is a foreign element into that soil. It's not natural; it has to be carefully cultivated. And the weeds in their natural soil just totally dominate and strangle and choke and grow up fast and send out their leafs and shade so that there cannot be the sun or the moisture.

There's not enough room for everyone to share the nutrients of that soil. And so, the good seed dies,

Finally, in verse 8, is the good soil. "Other seed fell into good ground and brought forth fruit. Some in hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold." Now, here is deep, soft, clean soil. It's soft, unlike the hard wayside. It's deep, unlike the stony limestone ground. And it's clean, unlike the weed-infested soil. And there the seed bursts into life and it brings forth a tremendous harvest, a hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold. And by the way, the average would be 7.5 fold we're told. A good crop would be tenfold. So, we're talking about a tremendous flourishing crop.

Now, the parable then is very simple. A man goes out and throws seed. The seed falls into four kinds of places. It falls on a hard path where it will never germinate. It's either picked up by birds or trampled under the feet of those who walk on the path. Some seed falls into rocky soil, germinates for a little while because the sun and the water are there to start with. It responds by growth but its growth is all upward and there's no root and when the sun scorches and burns that plant up there and it finds no resource underneath, it dies.

And then there is that seed that falls on the weedy ground that is strangled out and choked out by that which already lives there and is natural to that place. And then there is that which falls into the good, clean, deep, rich soft soil and it grows and produces a tremendous harvest.

Now, verse 9 simply says, "Who has ears to hear, let him hear." What does that mean? If you can understand this, then understand it. If you can get the message, then get the message because there's an important message. You say, "Well, who is this who can hear?" Well, that's why He has verses 10 to 17 there which we went into last time. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear. Whoever can understand this, understand this.

And we learned last time that the only people who can understand it are the people who believe in the King, right, are the people who are redeemed, who are in the kingdom. Because of you're in the kingdom, the King promises to explain to you the meaning of this. You see, the benefit of being a Christian is not that you get some instant academic knowledge; you get some instant wisdom so you understand everything on your own. No. The fact that you become a Christian doesn't mean you understand on your own any better. It does mean, however, that God promises to teach you the meaning of His Word.

And so, now He says, "If you can understand, then understand." And the question would immediately arise, "Well, who I can understand?" And first of all, He says, "Well, it's for sure one thing. The people with the hard hearts and the deaf ears can't understand." And so He quotes Isaiah there and He says down in verse 15, "The people's heart is gross, their ears are dull, their eyes they have closed," and so forth. It isn't going to be the people that reject Me. It isn't going to be the people that don't accept Me.

Who's it going to be? Verse 16, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see and your ears, for they hear." Who can hear? You can hear, and only you can hear. This is then given to conceal from those who don't believe and revealed to those who do because the Lord's going to teach. In Mark 4, the disciples came to Jesus and they said, "Tell us the meaning of the parable. And when He had them apart from the multitude, He told them the meaning of the parable." But only them who know the King have the promise that He'll be their teacher.

He begins then, in verse 18, to explain the meaning of the parable. "Hear therefore," He says. So, verse 9 says, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." Who is that? Verse 16, "Blessed are your ears, for they hear." Therefore, verse 18 says, "Listen to what I'm saying." You are able, so take advantage of that. "Listen to what I say," and I think He's talking about get the spiritual message, get the deeper connotation. Here comes the interpretation.

Let's look at verse 18, and let's go right into the interpretation. "Hear therefore the parable of the sower." Now, we have to ask ourselves a question at this point because it's obvious. Who is the sower? Who is the sower? Well, it seems rather obvious that the sower is the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is confirmed later on in the chapter as the Lord is seen in another parable doing the same thing. Verse 37 says, "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man." The Lord is the original sower. He is the one who first puts the seed in the soil.

And you say, "What is the seed?" Well, it says in verse 19, "When anyone hears the Word of the kingdom." The seed is the Word. The seed is the Word of the kingdom. It is God's revelation. Luke 8:11, a parallel passage giving the same parable, says, "The seed is the Word of God." The message about the King and His kingdom, it is the gospel. And the first sower of the gospel was the Lord Himself.

But may I add this? Anybody who sows what Jesus first sowed is a sower. If you repeat the message of Jesus Christ, you become a sower. If I repeat the message of Jesus Christ, I become a sower. In Mark 4:14, it says, "And the sower sowed the Word." So, anybody who sows the Word becomes a sower. Jesus was the first sower, and we who follow by giving His message are also the sowers.

William Arnot said, "As every leaf of the forest and every ripple on the lake, which itself receives a sunbeam on its breast, may throw the sunbeam off again, and so spread the light around; in like manner, everyone, old or young, who receives Christ into his heart may and will publish with his life and lips that blessed name." So, we are all the sowers who love Christ, who received His message, who pass it on. The seed, then, is the Word of God. We are sowing, then, the gospel, the message of the kingdom.

And may I hasten to make a point here. You know, seed, just in its natural sense, seed cannot be created. If we ever lost the seeds, if we lost seed, we could never cause things to grow. We are dependent on what grows and produces more seed because the origination came from God. God originally created seed and seed reproduces itself. If we ever lost seed, we'd never be able to reproduce it. We can't create it. And the same is true in the seed of the Word of God.

God does not call on us to create our own message. God says, "Take that which has already been sown and sow it again." We are not to produce a new supply of information. We are to build upon the revelation of the Word of God and we are utterly dependent, then, upon divine revelation as much as we are dependent on God creating the seed in the first place which reproduces itself and brings to us the fruit that we eat even today. So, the seed is the Word. The seed is the Word.

And may I just add as a footnote, that the Word encompasses the written word but inside of it is the living word. It's as if the Bible is the husk and the living Christ is the seed within the husk. So, initially, it's Christ sowing the Word of God containing the seed, which is Himself. He is both sower and seed. We are the sowers who sow the seed. The husk is the Word of God and in it contains the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, the parable, then, is about this. It is about preaching the gospel. That's what it's about. It's about preaching the Word about the King and His kingdom, telling men that Jesus is the King, He's come to bring a kingdom; telling men what the King is like and telling men how to get in His kingdom; telling men what His kingdom is like and what it will promise to do in life and death and eternity. It's all about the good news of the King and His kingdom, to be in the King, to be in the kingdom, both one and the same. So, we're talking about preaching.

Now we come to the soils. And here is the main import of the parable. It is how men will respond to the gospel. When it's preached, how will they respond? Now, let's talk about the soils for a minute. We've seen there are four kinds of soils. Let me say this and I want you to understand it. All the soils are basically the same. Dirt is dirt is dirt, whether it's hard dirt, soft dirt, dirt with rock under it, or dirt with weeds in it, dirt is dirt is dirt. It's all talking about the same part of the world.

The issue is not specifically the soil; the issue is what has influenced the soil, the condition that it is in. It is to say, then, that all men could receive the seed, right? All soil could receive the seed if it was broken up, if it was cleaned of weeds. The issue, then, is this. Here comes the key to the parable. The result of hearing the gospel in the life of an individual depends upon the condition of that person's heart. Did you get that? That's what Jesus is teaching. The result of the preaching of the gospel will depend on the condition of the heart of the hearer.

Now we know the soil refers to the heart because it tells us that in verse 19. "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and understands it not, then comes the wicked one and catches away that which

was sown in his – ” what? – “heart.” Heart is the same as soil. You see, the issue is the condition of the heart. That determines the reception of the gospel. And Jesus is saying to these disciples who at this point are saying, “Lord, what’s going to happen? You’ve been blasphemed. You’ve been rejected. The kingdom cannot come. All is lost. What is going to happen now?”

He says, “I’ll tell you what’s going to happen, you’re going to go out just like I did and you’re going to sow. And you’re going to sow the seed, which is the Word of God, and you’re going to preach the same message about the same King and the same kingdom.” “But, Lord, what is going to happen?” “Oh, lots of things are going to happen. But it’s going to depend on the condition of the heart of the hearer.”

And I think the basic point of the parable...and get this...is to encourage the apostles, that there will be wayside soil; you’ve got to know that or you could really get disillusioned. And there will be stony ground soil and there will be weedy ground soil but there will also be good ground soil that will bring forth thirty, sixty, a hundredfold. It’s an encouraging parable. It is a parable to help them to approach the ministry with excitement, anticipation that God is going to produce results.

Now, the mark of salvation in the soils is fruit. And only one out of four demonstrates it. And that’s a very important point. Salvation is noted by fruit. Not by foliage, by fruit. And if you don’t understand that, you get confused in the parable. So, we’re going to meet four kinds of hearers, four kinds of responders to the gospel. And they are characteristic of our day. So these are the things that we’re going to be able to really identify with.

Number one, we call this one the unresponsive hearer, the wayside hearer, verse 19. “Anyone hears the word of the kingdom, understands it not, then comes the wicked one and catches away that which was sown in his heart. This is he who receives seed by the wayside.” Seed fell on the hard surface, couldn’t penetrate the hard surface. The birds hovered around, waited till the man’s back was turned, came down and hit the surface and ate the seed. And the rest, says Luke, was trampled under feet.

Now, what is this? This is the man who is hard-hearted, very simple. This is the man the Old Testament would call stiff-necked. This is the man who is irresponsive, unresponsive, inattentive, unconcerned, indifferent, negligent, doesn’t want anything to do with it, just hits him and bounces off. And Satan is seen as the birds, the wicked one who comes and snatches away, so that even as the Lord said earlier in the chapter, “That which he has is lost, because he doesn’t respond to it.” Self-destroying neglect.

In other words, there’s a condition of the human heart that has been so pounded and pounded and pounded with the crisscrossing of the mixed multitudes of sins that traverse the life, that there’s just no sensitivity at all. This is the heart that knows no repentance, knows no sorrow for sin, knows no guilt, knows no concern over things that really matter; just allows itself to be trampled and trampled

and trampled with the mixed multitude, the feet pounding away that mark the sins of life day after day after day after day. Never broken up, never softened by conviction, hard-hearted, callous, indifferent.

I believe this could be best seen in the fool of Proverbs. The fool who hates knowledge, the fool who hates instruction. The fool who despises wisdom. The fool who is stiff-necked. The fool who is hard hearted. The fool who says in his heart there is no God. This is the fool who will not hear, whose mind is shut, who does not want to be bothered at all; who says, "Let us alone."

And we've all met him, haven't we? I mean, you've thrown your seed and it just bounces, nothing, no penetration. And it doesn't stay there very long but Satan comes in and he takes it away, he cleans it off. You say, "Well, what is this?" Well, this is the same as II Corinthians 4:4, where it says of Satan who is the god of this age, "That he's blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel should shine unto them."

In other words, when someone does not respond to the gospel initially, when they're hardhearted and stiff necked, Satan just snatches it away. He just blinds them to its true value. How does he do that? Well, there are a lot of ways. One way he does that is send false teachers along to say all of that stuff was lies. Don't believe that stuff. Another way he snatches the seed is by the fear of man. People don't respond to it because they're afraid they might lose their reputation or they might be kicked out of their little group or somebody might think they're a religious fanatic.

Sometimes Satan uses pride. People are just know-it-alls. They just don't want to admit that they need some help, that they need some information, that there's some things they don't know. Sometimes Satan snatches it away through doubt. Sometimes he snatches it away through prejudice, sometimes through stubbornness. Sometimes through the love of sin the person doesn't want to give up. Sometimes through procrastination. But one way or another or a combination of ways, when it hits that hard stuff, Satan snatches it away and the person so easily forgets that it ever came.

There are many people like that. And I guess you ought to examine your heart at this point. Are you that dry, hard, road on the edge of the field? You may be on the fringes of religion and activity but sins have just pounded and pounded and pounded down the dirt of your heart until it is utterly unproductive and unresponsive to God. There are people like that. And some of them hang on the edges, very close, and very shut to the truth. And so, we expect that. We expect that when we preach the gospel. Jesus said, "Expect it."

There's a second kind, and that's the rocky ground hearer, verse 20. "He that receive the seed in stony places, rocky places, the same is he that hears the word and immediately with joy receives it." Now, I like this one. This is the person who hears the Word and immediately with joy receives it. And the indication is that there's not a lot of thought involved. It's just sort of a quick response, a wow, you know. It's sort of emotional, sort of euphoria, sort of instant excitement without counting the cost,



without understanding the real significance.

There's a warm affection, there's a good feeling and there's a lot of joy and the thing shoots up. And all of the energy is going up and it's all external and it's all on the outside 'cause there's nothing underneath. Because that rock bed of resistance is still there to true repentance, to true brokenness, to true contrition. There's just a soft surface, that's all. And there are people like that. They don't really ever deal with the real issues. They just sort of jump on the Jesus Bandwagon. It looks so good.

You know, and we look at them and we see that deal shoot up and it may even shoot higher and faster than the rest of the people who are really going to bear fruit because everything is going up. And those are the ones we say, "Ah, that's real. Boy, that is real, look at the joy. Oh, tears and joy, and that's got to be real. Have you ever had that? And three months later, gone. They're gone. And all that was there, it was all the euphoria.

Maybe they wanted to belong or maybe...maybe they wanted to marry you and, all of a sudden, you said I'm a Christian and they said, "Okay." And they got all joyful and turned...didn't turn out the way it looked. Or, maybe the person's coming out of a deep problem and they reach for Christianity. And there's sort of an instant feeling, "I've got it now, God's on my side." Or, maybe some inadequate evangelism, and there's so much of this, you know, going on, who just talk about a happy-go-lucky Jesus kind of relationship.

And they jump on the bandwagon and now there's a happiness and a joy that comes because they belong, they found acceptance, you've been kind to them. They have a sort of a sense that everything's okay and it's all really wonderful, but they've never really plowed the soil underneath. They're like the guy who built the house on the what? On the sand. They built the house all right, I mean, it's up there. The religious structure is there, nothing holding it up. Superficial joy.

Now, if you look at the field at first, you don't really notice these people except that they stick out because they're taller than everybody else. You say, "Boy, got to be real. Look at that, isn't that exciting? And you come back a little later when the summer hits, and the moisture is very limited, and the sun is very hot and you see them dead. And it says in verse 21, "He has no root in himself, so he endures for a while." Never been redeemed; he's just sort of accepting the seed, but it's never been really genuine.

Endures for a little while, and what finally does it? Tribulation and persecution, *thlipsis*. Pressure and suffering arise because of the Word, because you belong to Christ, because of living the Word of God, because of being identified with the Lord Jesus Christ, all of a sudden some pressure comes. There's maybe a pressure to really begin to live the Christian life. There's maybe a pressure that comes.

People around you saying, “I want you to get into a Bible study, I want to meet with you to have prayer. I want to disciple you.” And, all of a sudden, you begin to feel the pressure coming. And then there’s persecution. You’re a Christian and now people start to say things about you. They start to knock you. They start to criticize you. Well, this kind of person won’t survive that because there’s no root there, there’s no depth.

This is...this will blow them right out, and they’ll give evidence of the non-reality of the initial response. Now this is so insightful, isn’t it? It’s so helpful because it tells us to expect this kind of thing. We know...I know that when I pray with someone to receive Jesus Christ, they can be this kind of person. And when you see a very immediate, very instantaneous and a sort of a euphoric response, there’s something in you that says this might be rocky soil. Where’s the depth and the brokenness and the counting of the costs?

William Arnot said in 1896 when he commented on this, “If the law of God is never rent the stony heart, and made it contrite, that is bruised it small, you may by receiving the gospel on some temporary superficial softness of nature obtain your religion more easily and quickly than others who have been more deeply exercised, but you may not retain it. He that endureth to the end shall be saved, he that fails in the middle, shall not,” end quote.

And so we expect that. Tribulation, pressure, suffering for the sake of Christ. “All that live godly in this present age –” 2 Timothy 3:12 says – “shall suffer persecution.” So when the persecution comes and the pressure comes, they’re gone. We’ve had them here. I’ve baptized them. I’ve even prayed with some of them. I’ve even spent hours discipling some of them. And I can’t tell till the pressure comes, till the persecution comes.

And then it says at the end of verse 21, “They are offended.” They are scandalized. It means, basically, the word for baiting a trap. They’re trapped, they’re caught, offended. So watch for the conversion that’s all smiles and cheers and lacks the beatitude attitude. Watch for that superficial kind of thing that happens so often today in the superficial presentations of the gospel that very often occur through television and other means.

Now, just as a footnote here, trouble and persecution, then, become very important to the...to the kingdom of God, because trouble and persecution will do two things. One, trouble and persecution will kill the false believers. And secondly, they’ll strengthen the true believers, right? First Peter 5:10 says, “After you have suffered, the Lord will make you perfect.” So, we should really desire this because trouble and persecution kill off the false and strengthen the true, very important element.

If your confession of Christ, however you define it...if your confession of Christ...I’m talking about you personally...does not come from a deep inner conviction of your sin, does not come from a deep

sense of lostness, does not include a tremendous desire for the Lord to cleanse and purify and lead you; if your confession of Christ does not involve a great hunger for self-denial and self-sacrifice and a willingness to suffer for His sake, then you have no root and it's only a matter of time.

And something will come along and you'll burn up and die, because you're not willing, as Jesus said, to take up the cross and follow Him. And if you're not, you're not worthy to be His what? His disciple. Only God can break up that stony heart. And if you've got that kind of heart, you need to pray and ask the Lord to do for you what He promised to do for Israel in Ezekiel 36:26 when He said, "I'll take away your stony heart and give you a heart of flesh."

Third here is in verse 22, "He that received the seed among the weeds –" or the thorns – "is he that hears the Word." You notice they all hear the Word, and the Word again indicating that that's what the seed is. "And the care of this age –" Worldliness, folks – "and the deceitfulness of riches –" which is the heart and soul of worldliness. Living for the mundane, living for the things of this world, the cares of this age. Your career, your house, your car, your job, your wardrobe, your prestige, your looks.

And riches deceive, they are liars. They pierce many, many hearts. Read 1 Timothy 6. They are deceitful, and the love of them the root of all evil. And so, He says there are...there are these who hear, but they never clean out the soil. The world is still there. And money is still there. And that's exactly why Jesus said, "You cannot serve God and money. You either hate the one and love the other –" or despise the one and cling to the other.

That's why John said, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is –" what? – "not in him." You can't be that double-minded man. The soil that is going to produce the fruit must be cleansed of that stuff. And that is why I'm so convinced in my heart that true salvation only occurs where there is true repentance...where there's a willingness to deal with sin in the life and that is a marvelous and gracious work of God.

You know, the U.S. Agricultural Department has come up with a kind of an interesting new system when they're trying to help farmers with their planting and stuff. They have developed a six percent ethyl alcohol solution. And when they go to a field that's going to be planted, they'll cover that field with this six percent ethyl alcohol solution and it...it causes weeds to grow. I mean, weeds just love it.

They just come up like mad. And that's the whole point. And they get all the weeds up and then once the weeds are all up and full grown, they can deal with them mechanically. And what they found is that instead of a seasonal dealing with the weeds, it's a long-term extending beyond five years before they have a problem from the new ones that blow in.

And I think there's an interesting parallel in that sense, that as you as an individual come to the Lord Jesus Christ, there must be a willingness to deal with all the stuff, to get it up and get it out. And I

think that's part of what true conversion is all about. And I know there are people who say, "Well, you don't have to do anything to be saved. Just believe and that's it. But I think that sounds too much like rocky soil, and it sounds too much like thorny soil, or weedy soil.

Now the soil is good. It's just impure. Somebody trying to hold on to everything at the same time wants the Word of God and wants everything else. But, you see everything else...and here's the key point I made a few minutes ago, everything else is indigenous to that earth. Weeds flourish, that's their natural home. When you introduce the seed that is a foreign element, and it has to be cared for and nurtured and cultivated. It can't survive. The ground's only got so much to give. There's only so much nourishment there.

And if it's trying to support all of the weeds, it isn't going to survive in trying to...it isn't going to be able to cause the seed to survive, an important thought. Nothing wrong with this sower, by the way. Nothing wrong with the seed. Nothing wrong with the soil either. It's just the condition that it was in. People don't get saved when their hearts are still occupied with the things of the world. They'll choke it out. They'll choke it out.

Now, all of these parables so far, leave us with a negative feeling, that there are going to be people that just totally resist, and boy, we've all known that. There are going to be people who spring up real fast. And then there going to be people who try to waltz along with the whole thing hand in hand. We've seen these, too, haven't we? Have you ever wondered about people? You say, "Well, you know, come to church but never seem to get committed? Right? Always seem to be preoccupied with the world's thing; money, career, fame, fortune; always wanting to fulfill the lust of the flesh.

This is a person who always says they're a Christian but...but can't be faithful in a marriage, that doesn't care or seem to care about a pure life. Or the person who just lives their whole life for...for personal gain, personal prestige, personal money, enterprises, and this is the goal of life. It may be that this person is just weedy soil. And yes, there's a germinating of the seed and it looks so good, but eventually it just gets choked out and they just sort of fade away.

We've all seen people like that. There are some like that sitting right in this room right now, some of you. You never really plowed out the garbage, you never got rid of the world and the cares of this age and the deceitfulness of riches, and the seed is choked. So, the Lord says you're going to have to expect that. This is so profound, people, I can't tell you. When Jesus said this, this is all prophetic, and this is exactly what we see in the church today. This is what we see in the kingdom.

And we all scratch our head and we say, "You know, maybe they lost their salvation." But Jesus is saying here they never had it, isn't He? That's the whole point. And what's the mark of salvation in this parable? What is it? Fruit. Fruit; and that's always the way it is. In John 15, if you don't bear fruit, He cuts you off and burns you. That's hell for people who are fruitless. Because not being on the vine,

that's not salvation. That's attachment to Jesus. It's the fruit bearing that marks the salvation. In other words, a true believer manifests fruit. And that takes us to the last soil.

Verse 23, "He that receives seed in the good ground is he that hears the Word, understands it – " Mark says, "Accepts it." Luke says, "Holds on to it." – "and bears fruit and it brings forth a hundred and sixty and thirtyfold." Now that's very productive soil. Three thousand percent, six thousand percent, ten thousand percent product. Now would you notice something here? This is dirt like the rest of the dirt but it was good because of its preparation. No weeds, no rocks, no hard surface.

And this is, I think, the climax of the whole parable. This is where the Lord is trying us. It's like there is good soil out there. There really is. Now isn't that a wonderful promise? I mean, we've all run into the hard stuff, haven't we? And you go away and you're discouraged. And then you've all run into the stuff that springs up real fast, and you're so excited and then when it sort of falls away and dies, you say, "Aww," And it's very discouraging. And we've all come across those people and we've invested but they're double-minded and they never let the world go. And finally they fade away and we get discouraged and we wonder if it's worth it. But then comes this last one and the Lord says, "The good soil's out there." It's out there. You be faithful.

Beloved, the ultimate mark of salvation is fruit bearing, fruitfulness. What is fruit? What is this? It's product, it's evidence of the divine life. If you want it simply, Paul put it this way, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control." In other words, you look at a life; you see gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control, love, joy and peace. And do you see it on a long-term, protracted, continuous basis because the fruit is a continual thing? That's attitude fruit.

And then it tells us in Paul's writing to the Colossians and the Thessalonians and Philippians, that there was to be the fruit of righteous behavior, so that fruit is a right kind of attitude and fruit is a right kind of deed. Paul tells us in Romans that fruit is winning People to Jesus Christ. He said, "I want to come and have some fruit among you, as I've had in other places." Fruit is God at work, manifesting in the attitude, manifesting in the action. Fruit is God producing spiritual reality in our life.

You show me somebody who has no manifestation of those attributes, somebody who has no manifestation of righteous deeds as God counts righteousness and I'll show you somebody, no matter what they may look like on the surface, who's going to die out. Fruit is the issue. Even in the 1st Psalm it says that the true person, the true believer is like a tree planted by the rivers of waters who bringeth forth – " what? – "fruit in a season. Fruit is always the mark of true faith.

In John 15, the true branches brought forth fruit. In Ephesians 2:10, Paul says, "You are created unto good works, and God ordained that you walk in them." It isn't that you're never going to do something wrong. It's really this, that one who is truly good ground has as a consuming desire to be productive,

to let God produce through his life. And even when there's failure, there's great brokenness over the failure because the desire is to see God at work.

Now, notice another thought as well, too. It says that there will be some who bring a hundredfold, some sixty and some thirty. Not everybody is equally productive. God uses people in different ways. And there are some Christians who never really fully get their act together, and they go through life being a thirty-fold, when they could be a sixty or a hundred. And there is...when we say that Christians will always be fruitful, we're not saying that all Christians will always be as fruitful as they ought to be or could be. Because when we do become disobedient, then we restrict that.

But may I hasten to add, all Christians at this point in the parable start and thirtyfold and thirtyfold is three times what was even normal. So that a true believer isn't somebody you've got to scrounge around looking behind the leaves to try to find a piece of fruit hanging somewhere. A true believer is one whose fruit is multiplied and manifest. And it only goes from a tremendous and obvious fruit to one that is just inconceivable in terms of fruit. That's the plan. True believers produce fruit.

Now what is the Lord saying in the parable? Listen very carefully, as we draw the lessons from it. He's saying this. "Go and preach, and realize it as you preach, you're going to get resistance. And you're going to get short-termed converts, and you're going to get double-minded people who can't let go of the system. But you're also going to get the real ones. And keep this in mind; you're going to have an enemy all the way along. And the enemy is defined for us very clearly. First in verse 19, "The wicked one," *ho ponros*, Satan, the devil. He's going to do everything he can to stop it.

Secondly, the flesh, verse 21. People get under tribulation and persecution and they can't take the grief. They want to be comfortable. They want to be fat and sassy and without complications in their lives. They're not willing to pay the price, make the sacrifice. The flesh is an enemy. And, finally, in verse 22, the care of this age and the deceitfulness of riches speaks of the world. And there you have the three constant enemies of the gospel: the world, the flesh and the devil. And they'll be at it in the process of sowing to try to stop you.

Now, there are several lessons in conclusion. One is this. Self-examination. What kind of soil are you? That's the prior lesson here. What kind of soil are you? Where do you fit? God help you to be the good ground. And if you're that hard stuff that the birds just take the seed off, you better ask God to plow your heart.

And if you're that rocky soil underneath a soft superficial exterior, you better ask God to do the plowing deeper. And if you're that weedy soil, you better ask the Lord to clean you so you can receive with purity the gospel. The first lesson in the parable is to look at your own life to see what kind of ground you are.

Here's the second lesson, and I love this. The second lesson is this. The issue in the parable is not the talent of the sower. Did you get that? It is not the talent of the sower. You take a little kid, barefoot, five years old, wants to go out and sow a field with his daddy. His father knows how to do it beautifully.

Boy, he throws that seed just mechan...and the little kid's going along throwing seed all over the place. And you know something? It may not be as much seed hit the good soil when the little guy throws it as when his dad does. But when the seed hits the good soil, it doesn't matter who threw it, right? It's going to grow. It does not depend on the talent of the sower. And that's so important to know.

Some people say, "We'll I'd like to preach the gospel. I'd like to witness for the Lord, but I...I'm not very talented. That isn't the issue. You got the seed, the Word of God. Throw it. The issue is the condition of the soil, not the talent of the sower. I...I...I'm always amazed to hear people say, "Oh, you know, if we could ever get so and so saved, oh how many they could win to the Lord." No, no, no, no. Or, "If so and so ever got turned on, wow could they be a great soul winner." No, no, no, no. No, it is not the talent of the sower; it's the nature of the soil.

But let me tell you something, folks. The more you throw the better the opportunity you're going to hit some good soil. I mean, some people are letting out a seed or two every year, and it is really tough. You just keep slinging it and you'll be amazed how much good soil is lying around, no matter how incapable you may be as a sower.

And then, remember this. That sometimes the Lord plows up the stuff that doesn't receive the seed the first time, so don't give up. In fact, you know, they had a way of sowing sometimes in Palestine that was quite interesting. They would throw the seed first, and then plow it under afterwards. Sometimes you've just thrown the seed; you throw it there and before the birds can hit it, comes the Holy Spirit with the plow, plows it under.

So, be faithful. Hard soil, shallow soil, weedy soil, may not always stay that way. By God's grace He may do some tilling in that soil. So keep throwing the seed in that same field over and over, over and over, over and over and see if the Lord won't break up the soil. Well, the lessons are very clear. Check your own life and make sure you're following the Lord Jesus sowing the seed.

Father, we thank You again this morning that we can look into Your Word. Help us, first of all, to come to the point of self-examination, honesty in our own hearts to see what kind of soil we really are. We know that all men are able to receive, but the conditions aren't right. Father, if there are some with us this morning who are hard-hearted, stiff-necked, break up that, plow that under. Some, who are shallow, reach deep into their lives and get to those places, those hard places, those resistant

places and break them up.

And for those whose lives are filled with the roots and the fibers of weeds, who are still filled with the cares of this age and the deceitfulness of riches, the system of the world, the sins of life, the things that they want from their own desires, clean them out, Lord. There might be true repentance and then faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Lord, for those of us who love You, give us those places where we find the good soil, to help us to know it isn't the talent of the sower, it's the condition of the soil and the power of the seed. Help us to be throwing out the seed that it might bring forth some hundred, some sixty, some thirtyfold. In Christ's name, amen.

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