

SERMON STUDY GUIDE



Part 1 // “Parable of the Sower”



The Kingdom of Heaven is God's rule in our hearts and lives. The parables are the secrets of what the kingdom is and how it operates. The teachings of living in the Kingdom of God seem completely opposite from how we have learned to live in our society. The Kingdom of God is right-side-up living! It's the world that is upside down! No wonder so many people are tired and weary; they have spent their whole lives living upside down. Here, we journey through Matthew's Gospel using the parables to explain the Kingdom of Heaven to our upside-down world!

ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS

- Do you have a green thumb or a black thumb? Share your gardening glows or woes!
- If you could have a five-minute face-to-face meeting with Jesus Christ, what would you talk about?

GOING DEEPER INTO THE MESSAGE

Read Matthew 13:1-9 (CSB)

1 On that day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. 2 Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, while the whole crowd stood on the shore. 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying, "Consider the sower who went out to sow. 4 As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground where it didn't have much soil, and it grew up quickly since the soil wasn't deep. 6 But when the sun came up, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it. 8 Still other seed fell on good ground and produced fruit: some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times what was sown. 9 Let anyone who has ears listen."

POINT 1- God is actively telling the world about His kingdom.

Jesus was a master storyteller. He used stories, often referred to as parables, to help teach difficult concepts to those who were willing to believe. These parables were from everyday life and helped convey truth through story and analogy. Many believe that the first parable Jesus shared was the Parable of the Sower.

Question: Why do you think Jesus used stories to convey truth?

In Matthew 13, Jesus got into a boat to teach because the crowd that surrounded him was too big to be easily seen and heard. As everyone stood on the shore waiting for him to speak, Jesus shared with them a parable about a farmer who sowed seeds in 4 different soils (Matthew 13:3-9).

The first seed fell along the path but the birds came and devoured them (vs.3-4). The second seed fell on rocky ground and it grew up quickly but didn't last since the soil was shallow and the sun scorched it (vs.5-6). The third seed fell among thorns and its life was choked out (vs.7). The last seed fell on good soil and it produced a bountiful crop (vs.8). Jesus ended the parable in verse 9 by stating, "Let anyone who has ears listen."

Question: What were the similarities and differences between the 4 different soils?

Notice the progression in the first three scenes: the first seed never started; the second started well but did not survive; the third may even have survived, but produced nothing.

Jesus didn't explain the parable to the crowds but he did communicate the meaning to His disciples (vs.16-23).

Read Matthew 13:16-23 (CSB)- THE EXPLANATION OF THE SOILS.

16 "Blessed are your eyes because they do see, and your ears because they do hear. 17 For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see the things you see but didn't see them, to hear the things you hear but didn't hear them. 18 "So listen to the parable of the sower: 19 When anyone hears the word about the kingdom and doesn't understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the one sown along the path. 20 And the one sown on rocky ground—this is one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. 21 But he has no root and is short-lived. When distress or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 Now the one sown among the thorns—this is one who hears the word, but the worries of this age and the deceitfulness[c] of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 23 But the one sown on the good ground—this is one who hears and understands the word, who does produce fruit and yields: some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty times what was sown."

NO SOIL (Matthew 13:19)

The first seed has no soil to steep into so it falls vulnerable to birds. A bird eats seed, but Peter 5:8 compares the Devil to a roaring lion on the hunt to devour! A hardened heart is like rocky soil that doesn't give God and the words of the Kingdom, a chance to break in.

SHALLOW SOIL (Matthew 13:20-21)

The second soil had shallow soil, experienced quick growth, but had no roots so it was scorched by the sun. In his explanation, Jesus says this type of seed ("faith") withers at persecution. In essence, when this person's faith is challenged by direct hostility, it proves to have no root to sustain it. Without the breadth of roots, our growth will be brief and short-lived! In the ancient world, the image of a "root" was a common metaphor for commitment. What's missing here is stability and a conductor of ongoing nourishment.

CROWDED SOIL (Matthew 13:22)

The third seed had roots, but the roots couldn't withstand the competition with the thorns around it, so it lost the spiritual battle and yielded to the thorns (materialism, desires of the flesh, distractions of the world). Our hearts can become "crowded" by the worries of this world and choke out the work of God in our lives.

PREPARED SOIL (Matthew 13:23)

The fourth soil takes root and produces fruit that multiplies. This kind of soil has a receptive posture to God-hearing His word, doing what it says, and therefore, a fruitful life follows organically.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The Parable of the Sower is recorded in three of the four gospels (Matthew 13:1–23, Mark 4:1–20, and Luke 8:4–15). Can you spot any differences between Matthew, Mark, and Luke’s account of the Parable of the Sower?
- After reading about the different soils, which kind of soil are you? What evidence do you have to support your choice?
- Is there anything that is currently choking out the work of God in your life?
- Why do you think Jesus explained the Parable of the Sower to the disciples and not the crowds?

POINT 2 - Prepare our hearts to receive and respond to God's message.

Reread Matthew 13:16, 23 (CSB)

"Blessed are your eyes because they do see, and your ears because they do hear." ... 23"But the one sown on the good ground—this is one who hears and understands the word, who does produce fruit and yields: some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty times what was sown."

The fourth soil produces fruit because it is open to God and responds to His message. One way to remain receptive to God in our lives is to keep saying "yes" to Jesus. When we say "yes" to Jesus, we actively put our lives in His hands and remain obedient to His direction. This type of life is filled with God's fruitfulness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How can we make our hearts more receptive and open to God?
- What does a fruitful life look like as a Christian? Would you describe your life as fruitful? If yes, what evidence would show that?
- How is the fruit from your life currently impacting the lives of others around you?