



## **Matthew 13:18–23**

18 “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20 The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since they have no root, they

last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. 22 The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. 23 But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

## **Reflection**

In Mark 4:13, when speaking about the parable of the sower, Jesus says to his disciples,

“Don’t you understand this parable?  
How then will you understand any  
parable?”

It would appear from Jesus’ words that understanding the parable of the sower is the key to understanding all of the parables which is fortunate for us as Jesus goes on to explain its meaning in our passage today. But first, here it is again from Matthew 13:3–9,

“A farmer went out to sow his seed.  
4 As he was scattering the seed,  
some fell along the path, and the  
birds came and ate it up. 5 Some  
fell on rocky places, where it did not  
have much soil. It sprang up quickly,  
because the soil was shallow. 6 But

when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9 Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

The parable of the sower could well be named the parable of the soils, or even better, the parable of the human heart. Jesus, or one of his followers, sows the seed of the message of the kingdom of God. The seed falls on four types of soil: the hardened soil of the path; the shallow, rocky soil; the soil that also contains thorns and weeds; and the good soil. Four soils, four responses to the gospel, from

four types of hearts: hard hearts, shallow hearts, wayward hearts and open hearts. Let's look at each of these in turn.

Firstly the hardened heart, from verse 19,

19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

Paths are hard, and hard hearts prevent the seed of the gospel from taking root. Even more than that, they make it easy for Satan to come and snatch the truth away forever. Hard hearts come about by loving sin more than God, and sin has a way of suppressing truth, making it seem crazy.

For example, for so many people Christianity is a non-starter, simply just not an option, they can't understand how anyone could become a Christian, because they cannot fathom not sleeping with their boyfriend or girlfriend. And because of this they've made their hearts impossibly hard. They've shut the door completely on Jesus, and Satan is only too happy to keep feeding their desires to ensure that it never opens.

Secondly, the response of the shallow heart to the gospel,

20 The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since they have no root, they last only a short time.

People with shallow hearts are like the rocky ground with little soil. They might respond to the gospel initially, like many of the people in the crowds that Jesus is preaching too. But without a personal commitment to Jesus the vast majority of them fall away. Without putting down roots (that is, growing in faith and commitment to Jesus) all it takes is a small storm in life, perhaps family or friends giving you a hard time, to snuff out a budding faith.

Jesus teaches us the third response to the gospel in verse 22.

22 The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke

the word, making it unfruitful.

This is the response of a wayward heart. It's the person who hears the gospel and may even claim to be a Christian, but theirs is not a whole hearted faith. They have competing priorities, they want to have it both ways, a foot in the kingdom of this world, and a foot in the kingdom of God. But as Jesus has taught us you cannot serve two masters, you either begin to love one and hate the other, or vice versa. Whether it's worry or wealth, either can gradually grow up and strangle the budding spiritual life within.

Finally there is the good soil, or the heart that is open and receptive to the gospel. When this person hears the gospel it takes root and yields a harvest; thirty, six-



ty or a hundred times what is sown. Jesus doesn't say what this harvest is but I think it's perhaps best understood as the out-working of the life of the seed. The seed takes root and grows to full maturity; as you grow you are transformed, you realise your potential as you grow increasingly into the likeness of Christ. Which means you begin to bear fruit, the fruits of his spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This also includes righteous living in our world, doing the good that Christ would do if he walked in your shoes, because he does. A transformed life like this will also result in people coming to faith in Christ through your ministry as you in turn spread the message of the kingdom of God.

## Think & Pray

Take some time now to think and pray over this passage. Jesus has taught us that there are only four responses to the gospel. Which one is yours? Do you have a receptive heart? Have you allowed the teaching of the bible to sink down deeply into your life, like the seed into the good soil, so that you have turned from sin, placed your whole faith in Jesus, and begun to produce the Holy Spirit's fruit? Perhaps your honest answer to this question is, "No. I wish my heart were like that, but I'm afraid it is hard or shallow or too distracted by the things of this world to make a firm commitment to Jesus. What can I do, is my case hopeless?"

No it's not. It is true that on your own there's

nothing you can do, any more than soil can change its nature. But there is one who can: the sower, Jesus Christ, he can break up the hard ground, uproot the rocks, and remove the thorns. He can give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you; he can remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. Pray that he would do so now, it's the type of prayer that Jesus loves to answer.

But if yours is the good soil, then consider the growth of that seed. Are you growing in your faith? Are you increasingly resembling Jesus in the way you think, the way you speak, the way you relate to the people in your life, and the way you live in his world? What does the fruit that you are bearing look like? Is it abundant? Or could it be that riches and lifestyle have been

gradually growing in your life, little by little, choking the word and making you unfruitful?

A powerful word from Jesus, the parable of parables, worthy of deep thought and much prayer.