

FROM CURIOUS TO COMMITTED
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Dr. Howard Batson
First Baptist Church
Amarillo, Texas
October 20, 2019

People respond to the story about Jesus with varying degrees of receptiveness. To some, it is a silly story. Who ever heard of a dead man coming back to life? Walking on water? Or turning water into wine? How silly such a story can sound in our scientific age – an age in which we have fooled ourselves into believing that we can solve all of man’s problems.

Today, as Jesus tells the parable about the sower, the seed, and the soil, we’ll see different responses to the story of Jesus.

The parable is not so much about the sower, but we will find out who he is. The parable is not so much about the seeds, although we can identify the seed as well. The parable is really about the soils – the different kinds of soils.

Matthew 13:1

On that day Jesus went out of the house, and was sitting by the sea.

The house was probably in Capernaum, where Jesus had set up the headquarters of His ministry. Ancient teachers would sit in order to teach. And so many people had come to hear Jesus that day that He was being pressed closer and closer to the edge of the water. Eventually, He gave up and got into a boat – a boat probably owned by one of his fisherman-followers. Perhaps it was Peter’s.

Jesus taught them in parables this day, saying:

Look! Once upon a time, a farmer went out to sow seeds. Some of the seeds fell on the roadside, an area that had been packed down by the trodding of many feet. The seeds sitting on top of the beaten path were easily seen by the birds, and they were quickly devoured.

A few years ago, on the edge of my driveway, on the left hand side, there was a trodden path – not by feet, but by the weight of the car tires. I’m not sure why, but some particular teenage drivers in my home seemed to miss the driveway by about a six-inch path that made a road-like surface on the edge of the drive. I tried to sow some seed. I watered well. But as long as you’re running car tires over your lawn, you’re not going to have much grass – not to mention the fact that a sprinkler head is crushed by a car tire about two times each summer. It’s not good soil for the seed. It doesn’t make for a lush lawn – smashed down mud, this downtrodden dirt.

Matthew 13:5-6

And others fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

In Palestine, large areas of a field could be little more than superficially covered limestone. Just below the soil's surface, lies a limestone bedrock where seed might spring up, but, finding no soil, the plants would quickly wither away when the sun would shine its scorching rays upon the tender seedlings.

Now, there is a third kind of soil.

Matthew 13:7

And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out.

There are some weeds you just can't stop. Now, I don't know if it grows in Amarillo or not, but in Waco there was something called nut grass. At Meadowbrook Baptist Church there was a man named David who had an above-ground swimming pool, a really nice one I might add. He was so proud of his swimming pool. Put a new deck around it. Uncovered it in the spring just in time to get ready for family fun. And what was that in the bottom of his pool? Nut grass. It had grown about three feet high in the pool and looked like the seaweed in a swamp.

How could nut grass, getting absolutely no sun, penetrate the quarter inch thick vinyl liner of the swimming pool during the winter time and grow up two or three feet in absolute submersion? I don't know, but it did.

Now, David was discouraged – I'm not going to tell it any differently. But he still had his shell. He still had his pump. All he needed was a new liner. So he pulled back the old liner, purchased some poison, sprayed the area underneath the liner to make sure that nothing like that would ever happen again.

He went out one morning a few weeks later. Nobody had been swimming for about four days. What did he see? Nut grass growing through his brand new swimming pool liner. He had purchased the most potent poison. Now the weeds had ruined not one, but two liners. Ca-ching, ca-ching.

He went to an agricultural expert and asked, "What is a guy to do?"

"Well, as long as you have soil, it doesn't matter how much poison or how potent the potion, nut grass is hard to kill."

So, they decided there was only one surefire, foolproof way to stop the nut grass. He trashed yet a second liner, took the swimming pool down, poured a five-inch thick concrete slab, bought a third liner, rebuilt his pool – knowing fully well that nut grass can't grow through concrete.

Three weeks passed. Nobody swam for a few days. He went out there and looked – and lo and behold, to the amazement of many, there was nut grass that had grown not only through the soil, not only through the poison, but had come up through the five inches of concrete and through another quarter-inch liner to destroy yet a third liner.

I think David decided to get out of the swimming pool business at that point. Just took it all down and pouted.

On another occasion, I had a church member go on vacation and come back and say about his garden, “When we got home, because of the rain and the weed seeds, it was just too far gone to ever reclaim it.”

So it was with the third kind of soil. Weeds in the seeds. Nut grass.

A fourth kind of soil.

Matthew 13:8-9

And others fell on the good soil, and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.

This soil was not trodden nor hardened, so the seed was not susceptible to the birds. No rocks. No thorns.

Verse 9

He who has ears, let him hear.

Listen up!

Jesus gives an injunction to listen. The hearers should realize there is more to the story than appears on the surface. This isn't just some session on sowing on various soils. This is a lesson for life.

In verse 10, the disciples ask the question: “Why don't you just say what you mean and mean what you say? Why are you speaking in parables?”

Look how he answers in verses 11-17:

To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,

“You will keep on hearing, but will not understand;

And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;

For the heart of this people has become dull,

And with their ears they scarcely hear,

And they have closed their eyes

Lest they should see with their eyes,

And hear with their ears,

And understand with their heart and return,

And I should heal them.”

But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it; and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

It's not that the parables are brain teasers, intended to stump people. That's not the intention at all. There is nothing hard to understand about the parables unless your mind is already hardened to the truth. The separation between those who hear and understand and those who do not understand has occurred even before Jesus speaks the parables. They have closed their eyes, shut their ears, and refused to repent. And, as a consequence, they only get parables which reinforce their blindness and deafness.

God's good news – the mysteries of the kingdom of God – is not to be grasped by everyone. It is only those who trust Jesus fully who will be given further understanding of the Father's kingdom. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer in regard to understanding of Jesus.

One cannot be so arrogant as to think that God will show the riches of His kingdom to the curious. Some people want God to lay out His whole plan for their life in a blueprint form. They want to inspect all the plans of God before they decide to “buy into Christianity.”

This approach misses the mark. You cannot follow Jesus halfway. You cannot – at the same time – trust God for your eternal salvation if you, indeed, do not trust Him with your daily life.

The mysteries of the kingdom of God are only to go to the committed, and not to the curious.

The Old Testament passage quoted here in verses 14-15 comes from Isaiah 6, when Isaiah is called to carry a message to Israel but God warns him that “although you will preach the message for the next 40 years, they will not pay attention. They will hear the words, but they will not really respond. They will see with their eyes all right, but they will not really perceive the truth. These people have lost their spiritual awareness, their hearts have become dull. So Isaiah, go ahead and preach away for 40 years, but realize you're not going to have any converts.”

It comes as a great relief, as a preacher, when you realize that your job is not to respond to the message. Your job is to speak the message.

Jesus says that His committed followers are not the curious. They are the ones who are blessed because, unlike the others, they have eyes that perceive and ears that really hear.

Some people are like Christopher Columbus when it comes to understanding the gospel. Think about Christopher Columbus. He didn't know where he was going. He didn't know where he was when he got there. And he didn't know where he had been when he returned.

But the disciples were actually hearing what the prophets and righteous men of old desired to hear. The heroes of faith of the past had no clue. But now all is possible by the preaching of Jesus. The

long-awaited Messiah had come. The kingdom of God was inaugurated. The disciples were living in a privileged generation.

We have a rare occasion in verses 18-23. Here Jesus interprets His own parable – that doesn't happen much – in order to make the meaning clear.

Matthew 13:19.

The seed that was cast on the trodden path, the seed that was easily eaten by the birds, represents those who are not spiritually perceptive enough to understand the kingdom of God. The evil one, Satan, comes and snatches away the understanding or the seed of the gospel message that has been planted. The heart has been hardened from repeated rejection of the gospel, and the seed does not germinate.

It's interesting to notice that each soil hears. They all hear – but only one understands.

Matthew 13:20-21

The shallow soil, the soil that overlays a bedrock of limestone, here the seed quickly sprouts, Jesus says. Yet when the hot rays of the sun beam down, the seed quickly withers. So it is with those who receive the good news of the gospel, rejoice, and become excited about Christ, excited about the church. But when troubles come their way, when hardships abound, they wither. They leave the church and many are never heard from again.

Those who endure persecution, disappointment, hardship, suffering and loss, and yet still declare the Lordship of Jesus are those who are truly saved. If you have not been persecuted because of your Christian faith, you've not walked with Christ long enough or close enough, for it's sure to happen.

It happens all the time at church. People join the church. They act extremely excited. They become involved in every program available. Yet, all of a sudden, one day they don't show up and you don't hear from them again. You become disappointed, even hurt sometimes, by their rejection. Then you're reminded – just as surely as Jesus told the parable – sometimes seeds fall on the rocky soil. Sometimes people respond to the gospel, or seem to respond, and they quickly fall away.

Matthew 13:22

Not only did seeds fall on the trodden soil and the rocky soil, but some also fell among the thorns. Jesus is saying here (verse 22) that this man, who is the thorny soil, hears the word, seems to respond to the word, but he forgets that this kingdom is not his home. He forgets that he is merely passing through. He becomes entangled and encumbered by the worries of this world.

**I looked upon a farm one day,
that once I used to own;
the barn had fallen to the ground,
the fields were overgrown.
The house in which my children grew,
where we had lived for years...**

**I turned to see it broken down,
and brushed aside the tears.
I looked upon my soul one day to find it too had grown,
with thorns and nettles everywhere,
the seeds neglect had sown.
The years had passed
while I had cared for things of lesser worth.**

**The things of heaven I let go
while minding things of earth.
To Christ I turned with bitter tears and cried,
“Oh Lord, forgive!”
I have not much time left for Thee,
not many years to live.
The wasted years forever gone,
the days I can’t recall.
If I could live those days again,
I’d make Him Lord of all.**

On August 11, 1978, Double Eagle II, a large helium balloon, and her crew of three eased into an almost windless sky above the potato fields of Maine. Their destination was Paris, France. The aerodynamics of ballooning are somewhat complex, but one thing is certain. In order for the balloon to stay aloft as the journey progressed, ballast (that which is used to add weight) had to be expelled. As they approached continental Europe six days later, one of the crew wrote, “We have been expending ballast wisely, but as we neared land, not cheaply...over went such gear as records, radios, film, magazines, sleeping bags, lawn chairs, most of our water, food, and the cooler it was in.”

Following Christ is the wisest choice a man can make, but it does not come cheap. Just as for these balloonists many important things had to be abandoned because they weighed them down, so for the believer. (P.S. The balloonists’ mission was accomplished.)

Matthew 13:23

Finally, we have the soil that bears fruit, the good soil – representative of those who both hear the gospel and, unlike the other soils, also understand it, those who realize the importance of the kingdom and endeavor to do something about it.

John Stuart Mill said, “One person with a belief is equal to a force of 99 who have only interest.”

All soils hear. Only one responds.

On which soil has the word of God fallen with you today?