

THE SEED THAT FELL BY THE WAY SIDE—AND UPON STONY PLACES (Mt 13:1-6; 18-21)

Take your Bibles and turn once again to Matthew 13 where we have the parable of the sower. I'll expand on what a "sower" is in a little bit, but I need to start out by **defining** what a parable is. I failed to do that last week—my apologies—but I'm thankful that some of you brought that to my attention!

The English word "parable" comes from the Greek word "pah-rah-bo-LAY" and is used 50 times in the Greek New Testament with all of them being **in the Gospels**—except two in the book of Hebrews. **It means to** "place one thing by the side of something else to make a comparison." **Another definition** is: "a teaching aid cast alongside the truth being taught." **In its simplest form**, it is an "earthly story with a heavenly meaning." But it is more than that! The **Topical Lexicon in Biblehub.com** states: "A parable is **more than** an illustrative story; it is a **spiritual gem embedded in earthly language**, inviting faith-filled listeners to dig for meaning while veiling truth from the hard-hearted." And this last definition emphasizes some of what I said last week: Jesus used parables to reveal the condition of our hearts—and the necessity of faith.

This morning, we are going to look at the parable of the sower found here in Matthew 13. This same parable is also found in Mark 4 and Luke 8. We'll stay here in Matthew, but I do have some of the verses from the other two books on your outline when I want to point out some of the differences.

For the sake of context, I'm going to read the parable itself in verses 1-9; then verses 18-23 where we have Jesus providing us with the explanation of the parable. If you have your Bibles, please follow along as I read.

Maybe as I was reading some of you thought, "Wow, I didn't know we got the expression 'fell by the way side' from the Bible!" But you know now, don't you?!

Please know as we get started here this morning that a lot **has been written** about this parable—and there is a variety of ways it is interpreted—even though Jesus interpreted it for us! As you already know from your outline, today we are only going to look at **two of the four places** where the seed was sown. Next week we'll finish up the other two.

Notice again what it says in verses 1-4. Here we have...

1. The Seed that Fell by the Way Side

Unless I change my mind before next week, my plan is to use **the same three points** for all four types of soil.

A. The illustration

--Jesus, of course, is talking and says, "Behold, a sower went forth to sow..."

--Although we don't know **the gender** of the sower, we do know that the **sowing was not with** a needle and thread! It was the scattering of seed—and **not in a garden** in the backyard!

Why do I say that? Because a **prepared garden** doesn't have paths in it...or rocky spots...or thorns growing in the middle of it! The picture is of a man (presumably) out in the **open countryside** spreading seed by hand. The area is too vast—and varied—to prepare the soil, so he just walks around throwing handfuls of seed out of some kind of bag or container he was carrying.

--So **what is** "the way side"? Not sure how—or where—I learned this, but it seems to me that at one time the "Rest Areas" on the side of the freeway used to be called "Wayside Rests." Anyone else ever hear of that?

--The **Greek word** that "way side" comes from means "road or path." One well-known examples is **Matthew 7:13-14** "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is **the way** [road or path], that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: ¹⁴Because strait is the gate, and narrow is **the way** [road or path], which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." **John 14:6** – "I am the Way," is another.

--So some of the seed **fell on a path or road**; **Luke 8:4** adds that it "was trodden down." The path or road would have been **hard due** to it being traveled on. And because the ground was hard, the seeds stayed on top where "fowls came and devoured them up."

B. The explanation

--Before I get into the specifics, here are **four** "rules of thumb" to follow when interpreting parables.

First, look for **one central** truth that ties the parable together.

Second, don't over-allegorize! In other words, **every detail of the story** does not have symbolic meaning so don't look for one—or try to make one!

Third—if applicable—**compare the parable** with its accounts in the other Gospels. You can save yourself from a lot of misinterpretation by simply comparing Scripture with Scripture—especially when it is obviously talking about the same thing!

Fourth, don't use parables to create **new doctrine**! Parables illustrate spiritual truths, but should not be the basis for a "belief system" that is not found elsewhere in the Bible.

Back to the parable of the sower. Notice again what it says in vs 18-19.

1) The sower. Do we know—from vs 4 or 18—**who** the sower is? **No**; we don't! Mark 4 doesn't give us any additional insight—and neither does Luke 8. It seems to me then that it is **not a** particular sower. Does it apply **to Jesus**? **Yes**; He was sowing the seed as He spoke to them! Does it apply **only to Jesus**? **No**; the sower represents **anyone** who spreads seed.

2) The seed. **What** is the seed? Vs 19 says, "When any one heareth **the word of the kingdom...**"

--Mark 4:14 calls it "**the word**," but **Luke 8:11** really clears it up for us: "Now the parable is this: The seed is **the word of God**." I remember one guy trying to tell me that the seed **was salvation**—and that this parable was teaching that salvation could be "sown" into your heart—then snatched from it! But the seed is **the word of God**—not salvation!

3) The soil. **What** is the soil? The middle of vs 19 says, "...then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown **in his heart**." Mark 4:15 refers to "the word that was **sown in their hearts**." Luke 8:12 says basically the same thing. So the soil is the **hearts of men and women** who have the word of God "sown" there.

4) The fowls. **Who** are the fowls of the air that devoured the seed? Here in vs 19 it says, "then cometh the **wicked one**." **Who** is the wicked one? Mark 4:15 "**then Satan** cometh immediately;" Luke 8:12 "then cometh **the devil**." So the "fowls of the air" represent Satan.

--**Why** doesn't Satan want people to **receive and understand** God's Word? We **aren't told here** in Matthew, but notice what it says in **Luke 8:12** "Those by the way side are they that hear; then **cometh the devil**, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should **believe and be saved**."

What's a **good question** to ask ourselves when we hear—or see—the word "saved?" "Saved from **what**," right? And from the context, we know that being saved refers to being **saved from the penalty of our sins**—not **saved from starvation** because we failed to grow food!

--**How does Satan** snatch God's Word out of people's hearts? Is Jesus saying that the devil is "**everywhere present**"—or that the devil is in **everyone's heart**? No; Jesus is **not saying that!** Remember what I said earlier about being careful not to "over allegorize"—and not to use a parable **to create new doctrine**? There is only **one devil**—and he is not "everywhere present"!

So if Satan is **not** everywhere, **how does** he snatch God's Word out of our hearts? He does it **indirectly** through our **thoughts!** Satan opposes God—and the Word of God—and **works with our sin nature** to bring **distracting thoughts** into our minds. Are not our thoughts **like birds** that "flit in and out" of our thinking?

Without being too specific, here are some thoughts **some of you** may be having right now:

- 'I wonder if **anyone will like** what I brought today?'
- 'I wonder **if I will like** anything other people brought today?'
- 'I wonder if Pastor knows the Packers play at noon?'
- 'What should I wear to school tomorrow?'
- 'I can't wait for football practice tomorrow!'
- 'I wonder how bad I did on the quiz we had on Friday?'

I obviously could go on, but I'm sure you get the point!

Satan is not “in our heads”—but he **does use our thoughts** to distract us and keep us from thinking about the Word of God! And before you know it, the sermon is over and you can barely remember what you just heard!

So the explanation of the seed that fell on the way side is this: The word of God is given out to all kinds of people—who have different attitudes in their heart. God’s Word does not penetrate—it does not impact—the hearts of some because they have a **hard** heart—and Satan (or his demons) use distracting thoughts to keep us from thinking about—and applying—the Word of God.

Now let’s consider... C. The application

So how do we apply this parable to our lives? There is **one** explanation/interpretation, but **many applications**, right? Here are **three**.

1) God’s Word needs to be given out!

--**Where should we sow?** To **everyone**, right? It is not up to us to somehow “evaluate” a person’s heart to determine what kind of “soil” it is, then decide if we should “share the word”—or not! **Isaiah 32:20** “Blessed are ye that **sow beside all waters...**”

--**Who should sow?** **All of us**, right? The Great Commission—Jesus’ “Marching Orders to the Church”—is for **all those** who have put their faith and trust in Jesus alone for salvation. **All of us** should be sharing the good news—not just a select few!

--**Why sow God’s Word?** Because God uses His word to **convict** sinners...and **convert** sinners...and **change forgiven sinners** so that they become more Christ-like!

Not only does God’s Word need to be **given out**, **2) God’s Word needs to be taken in!**

--In other words, **we are responsible** for the condition of our heart and how **we listen!**

--**Whose fault** is it if your heart is hard? It’s **your fault**, right?

--Don’t blame the sower—the preacher—for you having a **hard** heart! Do some people do that?

--Maybe—and probably! ‘Pastor, if you told more stories we would like your preaching better and get more out of it!’

--That may be true, but this **parable**—and the **life of Jesus**—reminds us that although Jesus was **the greatest preacher**—and **perfectly preached** the Word of God—there were still people who closed their heart to what He preached!

--So **what’s your attitude** when the Word of God is preached? **One man** put it like this: “True Biblical listening is to realize that the most needy person in the room is the one sitting in your chair!” (M Bradstreet; 6/26/13)

--And let’s not forget about what we learned last week from vs 12. If you have a truth-seeking heart, your understanding of spiritual truths **will increase**. But if you don’t have that kind of heart, your understanding **will decrease**—and eventually be removed from you completely!

What is the application for us? **First**, God’s Word needs to be given out. **Second**, God’s Word needs to be taken in. **Third, 3) God’s desire is for us to bear fruit!**

--I’m not going to spend a lot of time on this one now because we will be looking at it again when we get to the heart that has “good soil,” but let’s not miss the obvious point: **seed is sown in order to grow plants that bear fruit!** And God certainly desires that the Word of God produces **spiritual fruit** in those that hear it!

So there you have it: the illustration, explanation, and application of the seed that fell by the way side!

Next, let’s look at... **2. The Seed that Fell Upon Stony Places**

Following the same outline as before, first let’s look at...

A. The illustration

--Vs 5. “Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth...” The sower did not throw the seed on the tops of rocks—he threw it on soil that was not very deep because there were rocks underneath it.

The difference here, though, is that unlike the seed that fell by the way side, this seed actually **sprung up**—meaning **a plant began to grow** from the seed. **How long** did it grow we don't know, but we do know this: when the temperature rose due to heat of the sun, verse 6 says, "...they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away." Mark makes a similar statement; Luke adds that it withered away because it "lacked moisture."

B. The explanation

--We already know that the **seed** is the word of God...and the **sower** is whoever shares the word of God...and the **soil** is the hearts of men and women. So what is the **explanation of the seed** that fell on stony places?

--Vs 20. "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;" What is the response of the person whose heart is "stony"?

1) Immediate and joyful reception of the word.

--"anon" means "immediately, as soon as, at once, right away."

--"with joy" is emphasized in **all three** accounts; Mark uses the phrase "with gladness."

--"receiveth it" is also emphasized in **all three** accounts. What is the "it" that is **received**?

--The Word of God! Is it a **good** thing—or a **bad** thing—to immediately and joyfully receive the Word of God?

--It's a **good** thing, right? But the description **doesn't end** there!

Notice what it says in verse 21: "Yet **hath he not root** in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended."

I'm calling this... **2) Outward reception—but no inward transformation.**

--**Why** do I say that? Because Jesus says, "Yet **hath he not root** in himself..." Put your **thinking caps** on: Can a plant **grow without a root**? I'm sure there are some exceptions, but for the most part, **NO**—a plant needs a root to "spring up!" So **was Jesus confused** about agriculture, botany, and horticulture? **Obviously not!** He created all life—to **include plant life**—& knows more about how plants grow than anyone who has ever lived!

--So **what is** Jesus saying? Is He saying that this person **once had true spiritual life**—meaning salvation—then fell away because of trials and persecution? Some people teach that, but **that is not consistent with** what the Bible says about salvation.

--What Jesus **was saying was simply this**: This person initially enjoyed hearing God's Word—and was emotionally moved by it—but it never took root and changed their lives! Stated another way, they **looked like** a genuine believer—but persecution proved that they weren't!

Lastly, let's consider... C. The application

What are **some truths we can glean** from the seed sown on the stony places that **are different** than the seed that fell by the way side? Here are **three**.

1) People can joyfully receive the word of God and not be saved.

--**What** do I mean by that? We just talked about it, but I'm going to elaborate on it a little more here. I think you'd agree that there are some **wonderful, joy-giving truths** that God gives us in His Word.

--**Truths like**: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

--And Jesus' words in **John 10:10** "...I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

--And Jesus' promise in **John 14** that He is preparing a place for us and will come again to receive us unto Himself that were He is, we may be also.

--And God's promise in **Mt 6:33** that if we seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, that all our needs will be taken care of.

But joyfully "believing and receiving" those truths doesn't get you into heaven!

--Here's **another** example. A little over a year ago, Charlie Kirk **was murdered**. Did a **"revival of religion"** take place at college campuses throughout our country? Some say **"Yes,"** but—sadly—you don't hear much about that anymore, do you? **Why?** Because it may have been those decisions to "stand up for Jesus" were made in the **emotions of the moment** but weren't genuine conversions!

A second application is this: **2) Tribulation and persecution will come**

--Jesus didn't say, "**if** trouble or persecution ariseth because of the word"—He said, **when!**

--**What is** tribulation? Is Jesus talking about the 7-year period of God's judgment on earth after the Rapture of the church? No! "**Tribulation**" here means anguish...and distress...and pressure...and problems that come from living in a sin-cursed world with sinful people.

--**How does** tribulation—anguish and pressure—**arise from the Word?**

--You can have anguish of heart—internal distress and pressure—when you learn that following God's Word may mean you have to **separate** from certain people...or not **pursue** a certain career...or **lose your job** because your boss wants you to do something unethical.

--What about **persecution**? The Greek word that **persecution** comes from literally means "the hunt to bring someone down like an animal"—like Saul of Tarsus was doing before God saved him!

--Although we are not—in our country—currently being "hunted down" for our Christian beliefs, that is happening in other parts of the world—and **may someday** happen here.

--**What happens** when persecution comes to these who have **emotionally received** God's Word—but have no root? They are "offended"—meaning they stumble and fall away. And the verb is in the **present** tense—meaning they are in the **constant state of falling away**. In other words, this is not a picture of a believer who temporarily backslides—it is someone who permanently falls away because they weren't a believer in the first place!

And that brings us to application number... **3) True disciples persevere**

--**Why** did these fall away? Because they **had no root!**

--**Why** did they have no root? Because they weren't **a true believer!**

--So **if unbelievers** demonstrate they have no root by falling away when tribulation or persecution comes, Jesus **expects genuine believers to continue** in their walk with Him—even when tribulations and persecution **do come!** How do we know that was Jesus' expectation?

--**John 8:31** "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;"

--Jesus makes a similar statement in **John 10:27** "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and **they follow me:**"

What about you? Are you a true child of God that has a root that goes down deep—and will stand the test of time and trouble? Or—are you rootless...and have had no change in your heart...and are just a trial away from falling away?

So what would God have us do in light of what we've heard this morning?

1. First, think back on **why** you turned to Jesus—**if you have**.

--Why did you **receive** Him? Why did you "call upon the name of the Lord?"

--Did you receive the message of Jesus because you wanted to be rescued from **emotional** problems...or **financial** problems...or **health** problems...or **relationship** problems?

--If you did, you came to Jesus for the **wrong** reason—and you have no root! The Bible reason for receiving Jesus as our Saviour is because we believe—and agree with God—about the **bad news!**

What's the **bad news**? That we are sinful...and disqualified from heaven...and deserving of eternal punishment because of our sin!

But it doesn't end there—we must also believe the **good news!** And the good news is that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The good news is that if you come to Jesus in humility and faith—trusting in His death on the cross to be the payment for your sins—He will forgive you and save you and make you a child of God!

Have you done that?

2. But what about those of us that are God's children? What would God have us do?

--Are you giving out God's Word so others can hear the good news?

--And are you taking in God's Word so you can grow and bear fruit?