

**Matthew in Biblical Perspective:
The Kingdom of God and the Word of God –
The Parable of the Sower, Part 2 – The Hard Ground Hearer**

Matthew 13

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May 10, 2015 – Morning Sermon

We'll be looking at a couple of passages in this study. We'll start by looking at Matthew 13, the parable of the sower. This is the Word of God. It's the truth. Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23 says

[1] That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. [2] And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. [3] And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. [4] And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. [5] Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, [6] but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. [7] Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. [8] Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. [9] He who has ears, let him hear." [18] "Hear then the parable of the sower: [19] When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. [20] As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, [21] yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. [22] As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. [23] As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word does abide forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

The Gospels are very interesting and they have multiple purposes. One of those is to give a composite message, a composite profile and composite portrait of Christ. In other words you have Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and in all of those you have this message of the Savior and the biography of Jesus' life. Matthew, Mark and Luke we call the synoptic Gospels because they are arranged by both chronology and themes and they give you a flow of the life of Christ as well as essentially what He has taught. Now John is not so much interested in flow so it's not considered one of the synoptic, meaning putting together the life of Christ but it focused on themes he wants to bring to you concerning the life and ministry of Christ.

In the synoptic Gospels and the Gospels all together there is a composite picture. Let me give you the picture like this. Say there was an accident where two streets come together and there were four people who saw the accident, one on each corner. Each one would have things that each of them saw and all when they talked about it would be impressed about something and therefore they would have emphasized that when they talked about the accident. That is the way the Gospels are. When you put the Gospels all together you begin to get this picture of who Christ is and what has occurred in His life and ministry.

One of the things that happen in the composition of the Gospels is that six of Jesus' sermons make their way into the Gospels. I'm sure Jesus gave many sermons but one of His sermons appears in the Gospel of John and five are in the Gospel of Matthew and they are usually indicated by the phrase 'He sat down.' In those days the teacher would sit and the people would stand. In the Sermon on the Mount He sat down on a level place on the mountain. In Matthew 13 He sits down in a boat and the crowd is around the sea shore listening to Him. This is the sermon on the Kingdom and He has already given two sermons in the Gospel of Matthew – the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5 through 7) and the Sermon to commission His disciples (Matthew chapters 10 and 11).

Now we are at a third sermon about the Kingdom and what becomes very obvious is His use of parables. Parables characterize His life, particularly toward the public and very seldom does He use a parable with the Disciples. He uses them so much that the Disciples take notice and ask Him in Matthew 13 why He teaches the people in parables. We find out why He did. We did a whole study on this and this is our third study on the Kingdom parables. So here is what we said about the parabolic ministry of Christ. The parable ministry of Jesus not only reveals that He is the Messiah, but also reveals the spiritual disposition of the hearer and then accelerates it.

So why did Jesus speak in parables to the public? Jesus said that He does it to fulfill the Scriptures. Psalm 78:6 says that the Messiah will teach in parables. That is another prophecy fulfilled that He is the Messiah. The second thing is that it reveals the disposition of the heart. It is revealing to those who have a heart to hear. It is concealing to those who do not have a heart to hear. In other words,

the disposition of the heart is revealed in the parable ministry and then it accelerates it. Those who have a heart to learn, the parables insight them and they want to learn more. It both excites them and insights them. For those who do not, they are actually more confused, less interested and more annoyed by it than anything else and therefore it accelerates their disposition to have no concern with the Word of God in general and the parables in particular.

Now we come to a text that has seven Kingdom parables of His thirty plus parables. A book that will help you in the parable ministry of Jesus is written by a dear friend of mine, Terry Johnson and it's titled The Parables of Jesus. You may want to add this to your library and help give you a better understanding of these parables. I am doing five studies on the parable of the sower and then one study for each of the remaining six Kingdom parables. One reason I'm taking five studies for the parable of the sower is because it's the first one in the seven parables and that means it is important. Another reason it's important is because Jesus Himself says this is the key to all the other parables and if you can't understand this one you can't understand any of the rest of them. The third reason is that Jesus Himself interprets this one so now we can know how to interpret parables if you're interested in parables, which you are if you have a believing heart. Another reason is that this particular parable is the only one that is repeated with an interpretation in the three synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke. So clearly it's important and there's something to be seen.

We have already looked at this parable in general and in this study we'll look at the hard ground hearer with a study for each of the other soils as well. Do feel for me in this because in the course of this study the hard ground hearer fell providentially on Mother's Day. That wasn't very exciting for me to see that but then I got to thinking about that and mothers there is something in particular I want to tell you as we work through the hard ground hearer. Remember that a parable has a singular message and the singular message of the parable of the sower is the fate of the seed is determined by the condition of the soil.

In this parable there are four elements – the seed, the sower, the sowing and the soils. Three of those things do not vary in the text and that is the seed, the sower and the sowing. The only thing that varies is the soil. In other words, He gives four different kinds of hearts and the fate of the seed is determined by the condition of the soil of the heart. There is no hybrid seed for the different soils. There is just one seed, the Gospel of the Kingdom. The sower is Jesus Christ. When you sow you go out to your job, classes, friends, neighborhoods or wherever you are and you tell people about Jesus Christ. That is sowing the seed of the Kingdom. That is the general work of sowing.

The preaching of the Word of God each Lord's Day is the special calling of sowing the seed. What is affirmed in the text is there is good sowing, good seed, and the Sower who is Jesus working through the sowing that we're doing. Jesus works through the preaching of His Word and His sheep know His voice. Faith

comes from hearing the Word of Christ. When you are sharing Christ Himself begins to speak through you to those you are speaking with.

Everyone you are speaking with falls into one of two categories. One category has a seed, a root, a plant and fruit. The other category may have seed and may have a plant but has no fruit. That is three different kinds of soils that end up with no fruit. What are we talking about when we are talking about fruit? The best way to define it is the way Jesus defines it. A believer has fruit that comes from a plant and the plant has a root. The root is there because the seed germinated to put the root where it belonged. Jesus defines the fruit in John 15:8 which says [8] *By this my Father is glorified, that you (His people) bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.* Fruit is the lifestyle of a believer that manifests a root with the fruit. The fruit does two things. There is an increasing ability to glorify God with all the decisions of life, whether you eat or drink or whatsoever you do and in doing that living to the glory of God out of the joy of your salvation, you prove to be His disciples.

How do we know if we have a root? You have fruit. How do we know what fruit is? There is an intentional and intimate relationship with God that manifests a life that increasingly desires to lift up praise to God in their life. What about the heart of unbelief? The heart of unbelief is always characterized by one thing; no fruit, but it has three different kinds of soil – hard ground, rocky ground, thorny ground. The one that we are looking at in this study is the hard ground hearer. If the fate of the seed is determined by the condition of the soil then in the next couple of studies we'll find this out from each soil and then get the takeaway from it.

We are going to start with the hard ground hearer and we're going to look at this part of the parable from Matthew, Mark and Luke. One more thing before we look at the passages. Where do they plant the seed? The seed is planted everywhere. The seed is not modified based on the condition of the soil but the condition of the soil determines the fate of the seed. The emphasis is not on the instruments of sowing either, for Christ is the Sower and He uses all kinds of people. It is like a dad and his son where the dad takes his son out to help him throw the seed and the seed thrown by both grow for it is not determined by the one who throws it but it depended on the One who made it grow. The condition of the soil determines the fate of the seed.

The soil is the heart. There are two kinds of hearts – believing and unbelieving. There are three ways the unbelieving heart is manifested in the text. So the first passage we'll look at is Matthew 13:3–4 which says [3] *And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. [4] And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them."* There is the opening depiction of the hard ground. Now let's look at Mark 4. Each one of these Gospels will build on the hard ground hearer. Mark 4:3–4 which says [3] ***Listen!*** *Behold, a sower went out to sow. [4] And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it."* Now let's see what Luke 8

adds to this. Luke 8:4–5 says [4] *And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, [5] “A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it.”*

So the composition has been identified and we can identify the soil and then the fate of the seed. What is the first thing we learn about the condition of the soil? It is hard-packed. It is hardened. Growing up I didn't hunt, fish or plant anything because for me it was all about baseball, basketball, football and cutting the grass. Now when I was in college one of the jobs I held at the college was in building and grounds. Grounds was the hard one. My boss Mr. Sims taught me how to wear the bag in front of me and how to cast the seed back and forth so that you are casting everywhere. Remember Gospel preaching is indiscriminate for it goes everywhere and what you think might be good ground could be bad ground and vice versa so you just keep casting the seed. So we cast the seed lavishly and indiscriminately everywhere we possibly can and then you learn how to pace yourself and how to do it.

In Israel in those days on a farm, there would be the field and fields were everywhere, so were houses, little towns and villages. A lot of times you'd find fields that had pathways through it. In fact in Matthew 12 Jesus is along a pathway in a field and tells His disciples to pick some corn because they were hungry. So it would be a common thing to see a field with a path and the path indicated the shortest distance between two places. When the University of Alabama was built they put in these wonderful symmetric sidewalks but the students never used them because they would cut through to take the shortest route. Eventually they put sidewalks where the students had made paths and University of South Alabama realized what happened at U of A and so when they built their campus they actually didn't put sidewalks in for about six months. They waited to see where the students were going to walk and then they went in and laid the sidewalks. So these fields had these paths. Now when you're sowing you're walking all over the field and you may not walk on the path but they didn't choose not to put seed on the path for it was thrown everywhere. So some seed fell on that hard-packed path.

So secondly it was not only hard-packed but it was trampled down because people kept walking on it. Even after seed was cast on those paths people kept walking on it so the paths were not only hard but they were being hardened that much more as people kept walking on them. There was the trampling of the feet hardening up the path and breaking up the seed.

Thirdly, now the seed was in something that was non-receptive. There was no way to get the seed in the soil for it was hard-packed and it's getting more hard-packed as it is getting trampled. On top of that the seed is being broken down by the trampling. That is what is taking place and that is the condition of the soil that then leads us to understand the fate of the seed.

What is the fate of the seed? It is three things. Number one the seed is exposed. It is not in the soil. We just sung a song that said, 'speak O Lord, plant your Word deep in us.' We don't want it to just sit on top of the heart but we want it planted deep in the heart but this seed is exposed.

Secondly, the seed gets trampled. It gets broken up. When I worked in grounds and would sow those fields and then would walk away the birds were waiting for me to finish for my sowing was ringing their dinner bell. As I walked away anything that was exposed or I had walked on would get devoured by these birds because it was trampled down.

Thirdly, that means the seed is devoured. It is gone, snatched away and eaten up by the birds of the air. Remember that little child that you gave milk to, who eventually went to baby food and then eventually they got to what God intended us to eat which was meat. When the seed was thrown out to the birds that was dinner served and as it gets trampled down it gets cut up into small pieces for the birds just as you did when you got that small child to eat meat. Before you know it all that seed that is exposed and trampled down is gone and snatched away.

Before we get to the takeaway let's look at how Jesus interprets this. In Matthew, Mark and Luke each interpretation builds and you can see why it is recorded in all three. Matthew 13:18–19 says [18] *"Hear then the parable of the sower: [19] When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path."*

Now let's look at Mark 4:13–15 which says [13] *And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? [14] The sower sows the word. [15] And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them."* Why would he come immediately to take away the Word that was sown? We'll find the answer in Luke 8. Luke 8:11–12 says [11] *Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. [12] The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.*

So here is the takeaway. What is Jesus teaching us about the hard ground hearer? Hard ground hearers of the Gospel produce no plant and therefore no fruit because they have neither heart interest nor heart understanding. They heard the Gospel. Jesus Christ revealed to us the bad news that we're sinners who are helpless and hopeless and they hear that. Man-made religion can't save you. What do you mean I'm not good enough or my religion isn't good enough? The great news is that God has so loved you that He gave His only Son who went to the cross and took upon Himself all of our sin. He did what? There He took the wrath of God where every sin is a capital punishment of eternal

condemnation and He paid it in full. He took the wrath of God that was due to us. What do you mean the wrath of God? What kind of God are you talking about? Then Jesus says now that I've paid for it, this costly gift I now give to you freely. Come and believe for anyone who believes has eternal life but no man can come to the Father but through Him. What kind of an arrogant statement is that?

There is no understanding or interest in a hard heart. I'm a sinner. I can't save myself. Yet there is no heart understanding of the holiness of God met by the grace of God to fulfill the justice of God. There is no desire to understand, just incredulous that shows up with mocking or anger or dismissal but always disinterest. That is what the hard ground hearer is telling us. Here is the fact and I want to give you three walkaways from this takeaway.

The first one is we all begin life with this hard heart for it is the heart that everyone is born with. I want to look at one more passage of Scripture in I Corinthians 2. I read this text constantly to remind myself about these things. I Corinthians 2:14–16 says

[14] The natural person (the person born into this world) does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. [15] The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. [16] "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

He is telling us that the natural person which is what we all are when we are born into this world, does not understand the things of the Lord for we have no interest in them, we have no ability to understand them and no desire to understand them. Paul says it this way in Ephesians 2:1, *[1] And you were dead in the trespasses and sins...* What interest or understanding will a corpse have if I preach a sermon to them? They will have none and that's the way you and I were born spiritually. We're not sin sick but we're sin dead. So something has to happen to our heart by God's grace because we all begin with this heart. Paul says it this way in Romans 3:10–18. Just as it is written there is none who seek God. There is none who understand. All have turned away. Universally every person born of Adam and Eve into this world is born not only with a sin record but a sin heart and a sin nature with no interest or understanding at all.

I loved listening to J. Vernon McGee. I used to listen to him at about 5:30 in the morning while I lived in Miami. This one time he said in his raspy voice, "I'm sick and tired of hearing you preachers tell people to give their hearts to Jesus." I thought the man had a stroke. I pulled over to the side of the road to finish listening to him and then he said "Where in the Bible does it tell you to give your heart to Jesus? The Gospel is not that you give your heart to Jesus because He doesn't want anything to do with that filthy old thing. The Gospel is that He takes

out your heart, nails it to the cross and gives you a new heart. That's good soil!" That is what He has done.

If today you have an interest in Jesus, love His Word, long for it and desire to grow in grace, the reason why is because the Holy Spirit has done heart surgery. The Holy Spirit has taken hold of your heart. It is not because you were a little bit smarter than the hard soil hearer. It is because He changed your soil. It seems that when we have a new member's class I'll have someone come and say to me "Pastor, I've been to church all my life and I never understood the Gospel until I got to your church and heard your preaching." Yeah praise the Lord, my church, my preaching...but I always tell pastors that when someone says that to you don't get too excited because very likely some children that grew up in your church is telling another pastor the same thing. Now sometimes there are people who grow up in a church that didn't preach the Gospel but most of the time they were in a church that kept preaching the Gospel but they didn't have eyes to see and ears to hear and then God changed the heart. The heart of problem is the problem with the heart. We are all born with this problem heart and the reason you're saved is because of God's amazing grace.

I know the heart has to change and I know that because the Bible tells me that. Another reason I know the heart has to change is because I'm saved. If it had been left up to me with my heart I would have never been converted but God reached in and saved me by His grace and gave me eyes to see and ears to hear. That's what God has done to give you salvation. So when you're out there sharing the Gospel and people's eyes glaze over or people walk away it's generally because there is no interest in it. Someone might not think they delivered the message that well but if the baby is hungry enough they will figure a way to get some goody out of it. The work that is taking place in the heart has been done long before you got here today.

Holy Spirit come and give me a new heart. Come work in my heart. Why? Here is the second walkaway and that is an unattended new heart can return to seasons of hardness. Now we you are converted you don't have two hearts. You have one, a new heart. You don't even have two natures, you have one. If any man be in Christ he is a new creation but you still have an old man that remembers that old hardened way and that old man keeps wanting to come back to your nature and heart to live the other way. So if you leave your heart unattended it can go back into seasons of hardness. Then the birds of the air come and begin to pluck it away. When our heart is not tended to the bird of triviality comes. I see it all the time.

I see people hearing the Gospel of grace laying hold of it and they begin to dig deep down into it and then I'll go out to the lobby and come back and see them in little groups talking and praying. Then there are others who want to talk about something else. There is the bird of triviality, the bird of preoccupation, the bird of the hardened heart because we have aught against someone and we're holding

it against them. We can't receive the Word because we have allowed a season of hardness in our life. We have given room for the birds of the air, for Satan to come and do his work. Yet here is this glorious truth that I can not only have a new heart but I can attend to my heart where I have a new record, a new life, a new home and a new family. That heart can be ready to get into the Word and into that discipleship group, through worship, in singing, preaching and in fellowship, as we share truth and love with each other and receive the Word.

Lastly, we have an adversary (Satan) who is active, reactive and opportunistic. The Word has been sown. Satan comes immediately to take it away. Satan is also reactive for when the Gospel is sown and is going out there is a reaction that takes place. They have heard the Word. Why worry about coming immediately for if the heart is hard it is not going to receive but Satan knows the same seed of the Word that is planted in the heart that gives fruit in their conversion, is the same instrument that God uses to soften the hard heart. So when the Word is preached even though it is not putting down a root and fruit Satan comes and snatches it away lest they believe. The Word is not only the instrument that brings them into the Kingdom but it's the Word that the Holy Spirit uses to break up the heart. So Satan comes immediately.

This is where I thank the Lord. I want to close with this illustration about my mother. I had that hard heart and didn't get a new heart until I was 21 years old. The reason I got the new heart at 21 is because the first 20 years many people I could point to but one of them is my dad and one is my mom. My father was in baseball so I went to eleven schools in twelve years of education. That not only meant we went to new schools but new churches and I can remember the criteria of my dad and mom every time they chose a church. They always looked for one thing; where is the Bible preached, taught and discipleship in the Word. In the morning worship services I had to sit with them but in the evening worship services when I got to be 14 they let me sit with the youth group. I was one of those whose eyes got glazed over or I would color on the bulletin. My mother was not going to let that Word get snatched away.

When I began to drift or wander my mother would pinch underneath my arm and say "Pay attention boy." Then I would pay attention and she kept doing that every time I started to wander. As soon as we would get in the car I would be ready to move on to something else and my parents would ask me "son, what did you learn today?" They never evaluated the preacher in the car but they always evaluated me. They were doing their best so that Satan wouldn't snatch it away. I had a grandmother who would do the same with me when she would keep me. I wanted to go play and she would say "not until you learn the catechism." Then we would sing Jesus loves me. Eye has not seen, ear has not heard what is recorded in God's Word. I know I was glazed over, disinterested and couldn't wait when we were done but I also know that when I was in the deepest part of my rebellion I can remember the Bible verses I had to learn. How wonderful is your Savior!

Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so and all that time that they kept the plow share in and went in league with the Holy Spirit not to let it get snatched away. That is why on days like Mother's Day I miss my mother because she did her best to keep them birds away. She knew that I might not be responding to it then but that same Word is the plow share in the hands of the Holy Spirit. That's why I am thankful for the woman I married, the people I pastor for fathers and mothers are sowing it. A church is sowing it, resting in the work of the Holy Spirit who gives new hearts and then being instruments in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Get away birds! Prepare in my heart and raising others with the Word that one day it would bear fruit because it takes root in Jesus. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. I thank You for the glorious, wonderful truth of Your Word. I pray that You would speak to hearts that are reading this today – hearts that have interest and understanding because You have given it to them, hearts that are learning because they want to and all because You have changed them. Now use this Word to strengthen the root, grow the plant and bear fruit, more fruit, much fruit. Holy Spirit, come now. Do not let the evil one snatch it away for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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