



Part 2 of the Ignite Series

The Sower and the Seeds

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

UNDERSTANDING

Pages 20 - 25

DISCUSSION

Pages 26 - 30

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The Big Picture

Jesus tells of a farmer who scattered seed across his land, but only the seed that fell on good soil grew to produce lasting crops. What kind of soil are we and what do our lives produce?

“The Sower and the Seeds” is the first in a series of seven parables or stories in Matthew 13 that discuss the kingdom of heaven. In it, Jesus explains our part in the kingdom of heaven, what we must do to become and remain a part of it, and how we are to share the good news with others.

A Summary

In the parable, Jesus tells the story of a farmer who scatters seed all around his land (v. 1-9). Some seed lands on the path and is eaten up by birds. Some falls on rocky soil, where it is prevented from growing deep roots and ends up withering in the sun. Some seed lands among thorns and is choked. Finally, some seed lands on good soil, where it produces abundant fruit.

An Explanation

Jesus later explains this parable to the disciples (v. 18–23). The seed that lands on the path and is eaten by birds is representative of those who do not allow Jesus' message to penetrate their hearts, leaving the message to be picked away by Satan. The rocky soil represents those who believe in Jesus at first but who, because of their shallow faith and understanding, fall away when trials and tribulations occur. The thorn-infested soil points to those who believe but who allow worldly cares and desires to smother their once lively faith. Finally, the good soil that bears much fruit represents those who hear and follow Christ's message.

Application to Jesus

Jesus' message is powerful; it has the ability to give life and reproduce itself.

Openhanded Farming

To the modern listener, the farmer's method of seeding the land seems extraordinarily wasteful. The farmer doesn't seem too particular about where the seed lands, scattering it almost randomly as he goes. This says a lot about who God is. He does not preach only to those He knew would believe in Him, but gives Himself to each and every man. Christ's message comes to all, regardless of the preparedness of their hearts.

What does this say about how we should share the gospel?

We must remember that God's message is to be shared with

everyone. Just as the farmer sows without worrying where the seed lands, trusting that rain and the sun will bring to life those seeds that find root, so must we trust in the Son and the Spirit who rains down from heaven to bring life in those souls who open themselves to the love of God.

The First Two Kinds of Soil

This analogy helps us identify what kind of soil we are and what kind of soil we want to become. We can be like the path, closed off and impenetrable. We can allow ourselves to listen without hearing. If Christ's message is not allowed to make a difference in our hearts, to penetrate our souls and draw us to conversion, we will remain hard and dry.

We can be like the rocky soil, rejoicing over God's truth for a time, but not allowing it to change us much, leaving our shallow roots to wither from the persecutions we endure and the troubles that come our way. Troubles will always come. There will always be illness, family strife, shattered relationships, financial worries, and unmet expectations. And persecutions are promised for those who genuinely try to follow after Jesus' example. The difference lies, Jesus says, in the way that we choose to respond. If our faith is shallow, untended, and unwatered, we will not have the strength to withstand these difficulties. The harshness of the world is quick to burn up the life of Christ if we do not work to protect and care for it.

The Last Two Kinds of Soil

The next two types of soil both represent those who believe in God's word, but there is a distinct difference between them. The person who is the good soil "hears the word and understands it; he indeed

bears fruit, and yields in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty" (v. 23). Most of us are not familiar with farming terminology, so it is important to make sure we see the implications here. Those who are good soil see fruit in their own lives, but they also reproduce that fruit 100 times over! When God plants His word in our lives, He doesn't just want to just see our own salvation; He wants us to spread His word to others.

This is vastly different from the soil with thorns. In this soil, weeds and thorns spring up, allowing desire for power, money, pleasure, or honor to smother our faith. Not only are we not fruitful in our own life, but we do not yield or reproduce the faith elsewhere. How many people are like this in our Church today? Their faith is shallow and not seen as something they need to share with others. The cares of the world make their faith sterile.

Jesus tells us that we must let go of the world and its cares if we are to follow Him. He is the ultimate good, and to choose earthly things in place of Him is to reduce our ability to reproduce the faith. All secondary goods and pleasures will fail to satisfy. As St. Therese of Lisieux said, "Possessing them [all the things of this world], I should be utterly unhappy, my heart would be so empty!... It's incredible how big a thing my heart seems when I consider the world's treasures... since all of them massed together could not content it...but how small a thing it seems when I consider Jesus."

What Kind of Soil Do You Want to Be?

In the end, we get to choose what kind of soil we want to be. Jesus gives us an incredible vision of what good soil can produce. But, if we want to produce, we must be willing to cultivate our hearts. Farming is dirty work. We must get down on our hands and knees to root out

Understanding / The Sower and the Seeds

the weeds, rocks, and thorns that threaten to overtake us. We must learn to turn from those thorns—wealth, fame, and power—when they push us away from God. We must be willing to prune ourselves so that God can have room to move in our lives. What kind of soil do you want to be?

Application to Our Lives

What kind of soil will we be? Are we willing to work to rid ourselves of the things that keep us from knowing Jesus and making Him known?

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

STEP 1: OPENER

Have you ever grown anything before? How did it go?

STEP 2: BACKGROUND

The parable in the passage today is about a farmer who scatters his seed on all types of terrain. It helps us explore whether we are accepting Jesus' message in our lives and how we will spread it to others.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Read Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 together.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Jesus tells of a farmer who is sowing seed in his field. Is there anything striking about how he is scattering the seed?

Answer: He isn't too particular about where the seed lands, scattering it as he goes.

2. What does this say about God?

Answer: God is willing to give Himself to each and every man. Christ's message comes to all, regardless of the preparedness of their hearts.

3. What does this example say about how we should share the faith?

Answer: We are often too afraid to share ourselves with others, especially when it comes to something as "controversial" as faith in Jesus. However, we are called to share the truth with all men—especially when it comes to Him who is Truth—and especially with those who need to hear it the most. Like the farmer who trusts that the rain and sun will bring to life those seeds that find root, so must we trust in the Son and the Spirit who rains down from heaven to bring life in those souls who open themselves to the love of God.

4. To dive into this passage, it is first helpful to identify the four kinds of places the seeds land and Jesus' explanation for each. Would anyone like to share one place the seeds land and Jesus' explanation?

Answer: The path represents those who hear the message of the kingdom but don't understand. Satan snatches away what was sown.

Discussion / The Sower and the Seeds

- *The rocky soil is those who receive the word with joy but have no roots and are destroyed by trials and persecution.*
- *The thorn-infested soil is those who believe in Jesus but allow the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of worldly cares to choke their faith.*
- *The good soil is those who hear, understand, and cultivate the message they have received, bearing much fruit.*

5. Read 2 Timothy 2:26. Compare the contents of this verse with the seed that falls on the path. What is God's perspective on those who don't believe in Him?

Answer: They are in bondage.

6. How might God's perspective change the way we look at those who don't believe?

Allow the group to discuss.

7. The rocky soil receives the seed with joy, but the plant withers when trials and tribulations come. How can trials and tribulations weaken our faith?

Allow the group to discuss. Example response: Trials can make us doubt and question God.

8. How can trials and tribulations strength our faith?

Allow the group to discuss. Example response: Trials can help us realize that we need God, especially during difficult times.

9. What is the result of the good soil?

Answer: It is fruitful and yields "in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

10. What do you think Jesus means by yield? What would this actually look like?

Answer: The fruitfulness applies to their own life, but the yielding means that they have reproduced or spread the faith to many other people.

11. The third kind of soil has thorns that prevent the seed from flourishing and producing more fruit. What does Jesus say prevents it from becoming fruitful?

Answer: The cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the word.

12. What sort of soil are you, and why? Are you more like one, or are you a combination?

Allow the group to discuss.

13. What kind of soil do you want to be, and what prevents you from being that type of soil?

Allow the group to discuss.

14. What is one area in your life you want to work on to make yourself more fruitful?

Allow the group to discuss. Example response: I am going to pray 10 minutes each day this week.

