

## The Parables of Jesus

### Lesson 6

#### Parable of the Sower – Matthew 13:1-23

The parable of the sower gives Christians valuable insight into the secrets of the human heart. Only God truly knows the heart but He shares some details with us here in this parable.

This parable is also recorded in Mark 4:1-20 and Luke 8:4-15. It is probably one of the most enlightening parables concerning people's spiritual lives. Understanding reasons behind what and how others think about Jesus is interesting and this parable is very helpful. So let's find out why.

#### Setting for the Parable

Jesus' parable of the sower was taught early in His ministry. Large crowds had gathered to listen to Jesus teach. While in their boat, He asked His disciples to row Him out in the lake. Picture the people listening intently from the lake shore as Jesus' voice traveled crisply and clearly over the open water. Jesus sat in the boat while teaching this and many other parables on that day.

This particular parable is first for several reasons. Most notably it is a parable about parables. Meaning that Jesus...through this parable....explained the necessity of all His parables. The reason is because there are four types of people to whom He teaches. Those four types of listeners are described in the parable of the sower. Keep in mind that parables are meant to be understood by those with a warm heart but they're meant to be confusing to those with cold hearts.

Another related and important reason that the parable of the sower is first is because His disciples had to know why some people responded positively while others responded negatively to the gospel. The disciples thought that people would be excited to meet and then exalt Jesus as their Messiah. Jesus set out to show the disciples that the Farmer wasn't the problem and the Seed wasn't the issue...the problem was with the soil.

#### Telling and Meaning of the Parable

This parable uses a sower...or farmer...to represent the work of Jesus and His disciples. This work includes our witnessing today as His disciples. The seed in the parable is the good news about Jesus and His message of salvation.

It's fitting that Jesus uses dirt to represent the hearts of sinful mankind. He starts with the worst kind of dirt for planting and growing...the path. The constant trampling of the path by people and animals made this dirt hard as rock.

People and animals would trample the seed underfoot. Birds would swoop down and eat some of the seed as well. Jesus gave this illustration to point out that some people have such hard, calloused hearts His beautiful message of eternal forgiveness cannot penetrate it. The seed of the gospel has no chance to even begin to grow.

The parable continues by referring to rocky soil. A field full of rocks or a field with little dirt sitting on top of a rock base gives little opportunity for seed to sprout and grow into a healthy plant. The roots of the new plant try to reach the lower regions of rich soil but once a stone or rocky base blocks the roots from growing the plant withers in the heat. There isn't enough moisture and the plant soon dies.

A human heart in this condition is hardened to the gospel but not to the extent of the path. The seed actually sprouts because there is some loose soil. The plant begins to grow but soon dies because there is not enough rich soil for the roots to grow deep. This person hears the gospel and enjoys the fact that the possibility of forgiveness exists. They like the thought of a kind God who loves and forgives people.

Some may even believe much of what the Bible says...believe that Jesus died and is in heaven today. They have no problem with church, God, the Bible or Jesus. The problem arises when the call to give themselves completely to Him comes. The thought of giving up their time and resources to serve God doesn't work for them. They simply do not want to follow Him and use all kinds of excuses to not accept His gift of salvation.

The parable of the sower now presents an enlightening situation. Sometimes, regardless of the condition of the soil, there are weeds in the field. A farmer can possess the darkest, richest, most fertile soil but have a weed problem. The farmer sows his good seed across the prepared field and waits for the crop to grow. The plants spring up in the soil. The rains fall, the sun shines and the plants flourish.

Suddenly, the farmer notices the horrible weed problem. These weeds have deep roots and thick, sharp thorns choking the young plants to death. The weeds grow fast and take over the field. The crops have no hope in the grasp of these terrible weeds. The soil was fine but somehow weeds invaded the field.

This person appears to be a growing and thriving Christian. From all outward appearance, most people would believe everything is alright with this person spiritually. But in reality this person doesn't have the personal, individual relationship needed for salvation. Jesus talked about this group of people in Matthew 7:22-23, "Many will say to me on that day Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you."

The parable of the sower finally turns to the good soil to represent people who have opened their hearts and through faith received Christ. The farmer sows seed in this fertile soil and the seed grows into healthy, fruit bearing plants. The true Christian grows spiritually through Bible knowledge and application, prayer and service to the Lord. They make God number 1 in their life.

The parable of the sower teaches us through the four types of dirt that there are two types of people... saved and lost. Some people have warm, tender hearts while others have cold, calloused hearts. Jesus wanted to give helpful insight for the reasons why people don't believe. Hopefully He's made it somewhat clear for us.

## **Get This!**

The parable of the sower really begs the question, "What can we do when attempting to sow seeds and grow plants in these different types of dirt?"

First, the path. Unfortunately not much we as humans can do here. We can pray that God will heal and warm hearts. It can happen.

Next, the rocky soil. Again...pray for them. Always be prepared to answer their questions with the Word that is stored in our hearts.

Third, the weedy and thorny ground. This is probably the most difficult group to try and reach. These people have convinced themselves that everything is ok between them and God. They go to church, have been baptized and are good people so they are going to heaven. All we can do with this group is keep sharing the message that a personal individual relationship with Christ is needed for salvation and pray that He will convict and reveal this to them.

Never forget that He is the One who changes hearts. Our job is to be obedient...pray, go and tell....be His witnesses (Acts 1:8).