

We have seen how compelling Jesus is so far in the gospel of Matthew, from who he is in light of Scripture, from his healing every disease and every affliction among the people, to his authoritative teaching. Some have received him for who is – especially pagans and gentiles but others have rejected him and even accused him of being demon-possessed. Why the divided responses? Why such a mixed reception to this man? Why the various responses to such a compelling man and ministry? Why is this good news not universally embraced? Here, in Matt chapter 13, Jesus explains why with the parable of the sower, or more accurately the parable of the four soils. Here we have the third of six collections of Jesus' teaching: 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 23, 24-25. Let's consider the four kinds of soil, the purpose of parables, then what this parable means.¹ The main point is that we must be careful to hear, receive, and obey the Word of God.

I. Four Kinds of Soil 1-3 – A crowd comes and Jesus uses the boat for a pulpit and teaches them a parable.

1. Along the Path **4** – The ground had been walked on so the seed couldn't penetrate the soil. / 2. Rocky Soil **5-6** – quick growth but due to the rocks the sun scorches it. / 3. Thorny **7** / 4. Good Soil **8-9**

II. The Divine Purpose of Parables 10 – I wonder how you would answer? Lots of bad teaching is exposed here. Many will say that parables are earthy illustrative examples to make the truth clear. Jesus uses these to help people understand. What does Jesus say?

11-13 – The disciples have been given to know the secrets of the kingdom. But to those outside they have not been given the secrets. What are the secrets of the kingdom? The word for secret is actually *mysterion*, but secret is a good translation because in Scripture, a mystery is a secret now revealed. Secret does not mean a puzzle but privileged information, divine revelation. The disciples have been given the revelation about the Kingdom that others have not. We have been given eyes to see and ears to hear. We have been given privileged access to the secret of the Kingdom.

Jesus says parables are meant to obscure, to conceal. Not to make *more* clear but *less* clear! Jesus teaches the opposite of what many Bible teachers teach. Because this doesn't fit in their theological box. But here it is. And Jesus says this too, like so much else in Matthew, is to fulfill Scripture. He quotes from Isaiah 6. **14-17**.

Many Christians do not have a category for a Jesus who would seek to conceal himself from people, but that's what he says. We actually saw this in chapter **11:25-27**. Jesus praises his Father for hiding the truths of the kingdom from people and revealing them to little children. So, surprisingly, the divine purpose of parables is to keep some from seeing or hearing or understanding. The varied response to Jesus is not just a fact of life but the purpose of God. He has chosen to enlighten some but leave others in the dark and Jesus says parables are designed to reinforce that divine choice.

To you it has been given but to them it has not been given. Now, there are two ways to respond to this truth, Anger or gratitude. Anger puts us at odds with Paul. Rom 9:18-21: "So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?"

But gratitude puts us right alongside him in grateful praise. Eph 1:3-5: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love

¹ 1 Kin 4:32 *parabolai*

he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.
“The divine purpose of parables is to conceal to some and reveal to others.

III. The Four Soils Explained – The seed is the gospel and the soil is the human heart. 1. Along the footpath **18-19** – This is the hard heart. The Word is spread but we have an enemy. The evil one comes and snatches away the Word. Satan and his minions are real. We too often live like materialists. Live like there is no supernatural realm. But the evil one prowls like a lion seeking whom he can devour. And one of the ways he does that is by devouring the Word before it can take root.

This isn't the main point of the passage but notice how Jesus talks about the Kingdom. He says the word of the kingdom. That's important because today there is a lot of confusion about the Kingdom of God. Many will say that if we go dig wells or feed the hungry we are doing “kingdom work.” That's not quite right. Where there is no Word work, there is no Kingdom work. We must have word and deed.

2. Rocky Soil **20-21** – This is the shallow heart. This is the one who comes to Christ, but only endures for a while. We all have names that come to mind right now of such rocky ground people, don't we? The enemy is the cause of the first hearer not hearing but here what is it? Tribulation and persecution come and he falls away. Life gets hard. Trials are the test. The true flavor of the tea bag comes out when the heat gets turned up. Tribulation will move us in one of two directions: toward God or away from him. The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay. 1 Pet 1:6-7: “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Jesus says when persecution comes “on account of the word.” The NLT says, “They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word.” For the longest time in America we haven't experienced this. This is new for us. In fact, I have shown you this **cartoon** before but it is worth showing again.² As it becomes harder and harder to believe the Bible, we will see more fall away. A couple of chapters ago, Jesus said, “blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” Friends, let's resolve to follow him all the way. Let's never be embarrassed by even one syllable of the Word of God.

These are people who flare up and fizzle out. Quickly green and quickly gone. Often, they merely acted on a feeling, without counting the cost. Only emotional. The Friday night church camp decision. This was me in HS, went to a youth camp in Leuders because I was told there would be basketball and babes and Ken Freeman emotionally manipulated me into an altar call. There was no genuine faith, certainly no genuine repentance. It was rocky soil. In God's kindness I was genuinely converted 4 years later.

3. Thorny **22** – This is the strangled heart. The Word gets choked out. The Word proves unfruitful. Why? Worldliness. The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. The cares of the world nudge Christ out. Rom 12:2 don't be conformed to the world, do not let the world squeeze you into its mold. Hobbies, sports, youth sports, bills, the lake, you name it. Something – usually something morally neutral – and usually slowly – begins to choke out what matters most. Listen to the warning of James: “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” 1 John 2:15-17: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone

² <https://adam4d.com/death-of-christianity/>

loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” We resist the world. We stay focused. 2 Tim 2: No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

This is the hearer who ends up putting the things of the world before the Lord. That’s the breaking of the 1st commandment, isn’t it? Whatever or whoever we put before the Lord is an idol. The thorny ground ends up worshipping idols rather than Jesus. Interestingly, here Jesus quotes Isaiah to speak of those on the outside as those who do not see or hear or understand. **14b.** This is the way the Psalmists describes idols. Listen to Psalm 115:4-8: “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them” (135:15-18). Idols can’t see or hear. Idolaters can’t see or hear. We become like what we worship. Those who make them become like them.

The Word is choked out by the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. Riches are deceitful. They will lie to you. Riches will seek to lure you in. Now, it is a heart issue. It is fine to own things but not okay to be owned by things. He who dies with the most toys wins. Wrong. That’s a lie and we live in America with its dream and its lies. In Matt 19:23, Jesus warns that only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom.

Riches deceitful. They promise what they cannot deliver. They oversell themselves because they want you to think they’ll make you happy. False. There has been a resurgence of “happiness” studies in the last decade or so and study after study has shown that after a certain level of needs are met, additional money doesn’t make a difference. Which if you watch the news, you already knew that any. Money and fame do not fulfill. Jim Carrey said “I think everyone should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer.” Robin Williams. So many musicians who “have it all” but their lives are a wreck.

They won’t satisfy and they won’t last. **6:19-21, 24.** Prov 23:4-5: “Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.” Riches are deceitful. Prov 11:28: Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf. The cares of the world are fleeting. And we must be on guard because we are all comparatively rich and riches do not immediately choke out the Word but it is a slow and gradual death.

4. Good Soil **23** – Finally, we have the good soil. This is the open heart. He hears and understands and bears fruit. Only one of four is good soil giving us the sobering reality that there are a variety of ways to hear the Word without benefit.

Let me close with 7 implications:

1. Be grateful for God’s sovereign grace. Some cannot hear or see or understand. **16-17.** God has graciously revealed the secrets of the K to you. As we sang, “I was an orphan lost at the fall, Running away when I’d hear your call, But Father, you worked your will. I was in darkness all of my life, I never knew the day from the night, But Spirit, you made me see, I swore I knew the way on my own, Head full of rocks, a heart made of stone, But Spirit, you moved in me, At your touch my sleeping spirit was awakened, On my darkened heart the

light of Christ has shone, Called into a kingdom that cannot be shaken, Heaven's citizen by grace and grace alone." Be grateful for grace.

2. We must persevere. Notice the language of falling away. Some respond positively for a season but then fall away. Does this mean they lost their salvation? No, it means they were never genuinely saved. How do we know that? Because they did not persevere. 1 John 2:19: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us." We know someone has true salvation because they remain with us in the local church.

The evidence of hearing the Word rightly is that we bear fruit. We are changed. It is slow at times. But slowly but surely, over time, we are being changed and bearing fruit. We are turning from sin and turning to Christ. We are seeing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. **Gal 5:16-24**. The only sure evidence of genuine reception of the Word of God in a person's life is spiritual fruit.

2. For ministry, our job is to cast the seed far and wide. We don't focus on the condition of the soil, we can't see the heart and even if we could, the Spirit of God can break the hardest of hearts.

3. As we do cast the seed far and wide, we are dependent upon God for results. Listen to 1 Cor 3:5-7: "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." We cast like crazy and pray like crazy and God gives the growth. Our job is to be faithful to the principles of God's word and be patient. We want to God's work God's way.

4. As we cast the seed, we should expect rejection. God has ordained it that way. Jesus quotes Isa 6 here and that is the famous calling passage. Isa 6:4-11. We will be rejected often. But. Some will believe. Some soil will be good.

5. Let us be those who listen with care. Notice the emphasis on hearing? 14 times in these 23 verses! It is vital that we be good hearers of the Word. We do that through two main avenues: prayerful, daily time in God's Word. Set aside a time, find a place, commit to a plan. Second, the preaching of the Word. This moment in our life together is so significant because it the weekly time where we gather as the people of God to submit to the Word of God. So pray for the preaching of the Word. Read the passage ahead of time. After the sermon, talk about the passage with members. Last Sunday at our member's meeting we voted in 16 new members and one of them was a freshman named Grace and one of the greatest spiritual influences in her life was a woman in her church her took the initiative to meet weekly with her to talk about and apply the sermon. / Parents, have your kids take notes and engage them at lunch. Kids, see if you can have at least one take-away every week.

6. Let's be hundred-fold fruitful. Look again at **23**. I don't know about you, but I am grateful to bear any fruit, but I really want to be a 100 fold Christian. I want all the joy. All of us have different callings on our lives and rhythms we are in but all of our prayer ought to be, Lord, use me maximally. Spirit, bear fruit through me!

7. If you don't know the Lord, turn to him. You don't have to be stuck on the outside. If you lack understanding, seek understanding by faith. Jesus promises: all who come to me I will never cast out. In verse 9, Jesus says, he who has ears, let him hear.