

Question: "What is the meaning of the Parable of the Sower?"

Answer: The Parable of the Sower (also known as the Parable of the Four Soils) is found in Matthew 13:3-9; Mark 4:2-9; and Luke 8:4-8. After presenting this parable to the multitude, Jesus interprets it for His disciples in Matthew 13:18-23; Mark 4:13-20; and Luke 8:11-15.

The Parable of the Sower concerns a sower who scatters seed, which falls on four different types of ground. The hard ground "by the way side" prevents the seed from sprouting at all, and the seed becomes nothing more than bird food. The stony ground provides enough soil for the seeds to germinate and begin to grow, but because there is "no deepness of earth," the plants do not take root and are soon withered in the sun. The thorny ground allows the seed to grow, but the competing thorns choke the life out of the beneficial plants. The good ground receives the seed and produces much fruit.

Matthew 13:18-23:

18 "Now here is the explanation of the story I told about the farmer sowing grain: 19 The seed that fell on the **hard path** represents those who hear the Good News about the Kingdom and **don't understand it**. Then the evil one comes and snatches the seed away from their hearts. 20 The **rocky soil** represents those who hear the message and receive it with joy. 21 But like young plants in such soil, **their roots don't go very deep**. At first they get along fine, but they wilt as soon as they have problems or are persecuted because they believe the word. 22 The **thorny ground** represents those who hear and accept the Good News, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares of this life and the lure of wealth, so no crop is produced. 23 The **good soil** represents the hearts of those who **truly accept God's message and produce a huge harvest** -- thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted."

Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Sower highlights four different responses to the gospel. The seed is "the word of the kingdom." The hard ground represents someone who is hardened by sin; he hears but does not understand the Word, and Satan plucks the message away, keeping the heart dull and preventing the Word from making an impression. The stony ground pictures a man who professes delight with the Word; however, his heart is not changed, and when trouble arises, his so-called faith quickly disappears. The thorny ground depicts one who seems to receive the Word, but whose heart is full of riches, pleasures, and lusts; the things of this world take his time and attention away from the Word, and he ends up having no time for it. The good ground portrays the one who hears, understands, and receives the Word—and then allows the Word to accomplish its result in his life. The man represented by the "good ground" is the only one of the four who is truly saved, because salvation's proof is fruit (Matt. 3:7-8; 7:15-20).

To summarize the point of the Parable of the Sower: "A man's reception of God's Word is determined by the condition of his heart." A secondary lesson would be "Salvation is more than a superficial, albeit joyful, hearing of the gospel. Someone who is truly saved will go on to prove it." May our faith and our lives exemplify the "good soil" in the Parable of the Sower.

I John 2:3-4 We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

Luke 8..."The Bible Exposition Commentary" by Warren W. Wiersbe

Luke 8:1-21 The word *hear* is used nine times in this section. It means much more than simply listening to words. "Hearing" means listening with spiritual understanding and receptivity. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). With this in mind, we can understand the three admonitions Jesus gave His followers.

Hear and receive the Word (vv.4-15)

Initially, the Sower is Jesus Christ, but the sower represents any of God's people who share the Word of God (John 4:35-38.) The seed is the Word of God, for like seed, the Word has life and power (Heb. 4:12) and can produce spiritual fruit (Gal. 5:22-23). But the seed can do nothing until it is planted. (John 12:24). When a person hears and understands the Word, then the

seed is planted in the heart. What happens after that depends on the nature of the soil. Jesus called this parable "The Parable of the Sower" (Matt. 13:18), but it could also be called "The Parable of the Soils." The seed without the soil is fruitless, and the soil without the seed is almost useless. The human heart is like soil; if it is prepared properly, it can receive the seed of the Word of God and produce a fruitful harvest.

Jesus described four different kinds of hearts, three of which did not produce any fruit. The proof of salvation is fruit and not merely hearing the Word or making a profession of faith in Christ. Jesus had already made that clear in His "Sermon on the Mount" (Luke 6:43-49; Matt. 7:20).

The hard soil (vv. 5,12). This soil represents the person who hears the Word but immediately allows the devil to snatch the seed away. How did the heart become hard? The "wayside" was the path that ran through the common field, separating the plots; and the foot traffic hardened the soil. Whatever goes into the ear or eye finally enters the heart, so be careful who is allowed to "walk on your heart."

The shallow soil (vv. 6,13). His soil illustrates the emotional hearer who quickly responds to the message, but his interest wanes and he does not continue (see John 8:31-31). In many parts of the Holy Land you find a substratum of limestone covered with a thin layer of soil. The shoot can grow up, but the roots cannot go down, and the sun withers the rootless plant. The sun represents the testing that comes to all professing believers to prove their faith. Sun is good for plants if they have roots. Persecution can deepen the roots of a true Christian, but it only exposes the shallowness of the false Christian. The sun represents persecution that comes because of the Word. Persecution helps believers grow. But the sunshine will kill a plant with no roots. This explains why some "believers" do not last: Their faith was weak, their understanding was meager, and their decision was not sincere. It is possible to "believe" and yet not be saved (John 2:23-25). Unless there is fruit in the life, there is not saving faith in the heart.

The crowded soil (vv. 7,14). This soil illustrates the person who does not repent and "weed out" the things that hinder the harvest. There is enough soil so the roots can go down, but not enough room for the plant to grow up and produce fruit. The plant is crowded out and the fruit is choked. "Cares, riches, and the pleasures of this life" are like weeds in a garden that keep the soil from being fruitful. The person with the "crowded heart" comes closest to salvation, but he still does not bring forth "fruit to perfection."

The good soil (vv. 8,15). This soil alone is fruitful. It illustrates the individual who hears the Word, understands it, receives it within, is truly saved, and proves it by patiently producing fruit (see 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:22-25). Not everybody produces the same amount of fruit (Matt. 13:8), but all true believers will produce some fruit as evidence of spiritual life. That fruit may include winning others to Christ (Rom. 1:13), money given to God's work (Rom. 15:25-28), good works (Col.1:10, Christian character (Gal. 5:22-23), and praise to the Lord (Heb. 13:15).

This parable shows that Jesus was not impressed by the great crowds that followed Him. He knew that most of the people did not really "hear" the Word and receive it in their hearts. He gave this story to encourage the disciples in their future ministry, and to encourage us today. When you consider how much teaching, preaching, and witnessing goes on in the course of a month or a year, you wonder why there is such a small harvest. The fault does not lie with the sower or the seed. The problem is with the soil. The human heart will not submit to God, repent and receive the Word, and be saved. It is possible to "believe" and yet not be saved (John 2:23-25). Unless there is fruit in the life, there is not saving faith in the heart.

Comment from Pastor Art Dykstra, Calvary Chapel St.Petersburg

Here is a great verse that sums up: Well, then, how do I know if I was sincere then when I prayed the prayer? How do I know then if I was deceived or not in my heart: **I John 2:3-4** We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.