



About ... Seed & Soils



Response to What Jesus Says

- ❑ The past several weeks we have been studying what Jesus has said (or says) from many different passages in the Gospels (the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), as he taught the crowds and his closer disciples. In Matthew 13:1-23 (also found in Mark 4 and Luke 8), Jesus teaches that it is important not just that someone hears what Jesus has said (or says), but that they receive (understand) and respond to the teaching as well.
- ❑ Jesus teaches this lesson using a parable¹, or parallel story, about a farmer who plants seed on four different kinds (or conditions) of soils. Although the seeds that are planted are all the same, the result is quite different! Even though we may not be able to see the difference at the surface, the result is the measure of the true condition of the soil in which the seed is planted.



The Parable of the Sower

- ❑ Read Matthew 13:1-9. What appear to be the important elements of this story?²
 - 📖 The Bible tells us that workers of that time were employed in farming, sheep-herding, carpentry, and fishing, among other occupations. According to Vos³, the majority of the Jewish population “lived off the land” as farmers, so those listening to Jesus would have been familiar with the concepts illustrated in this story.

¹ The literal meaning of the word used for parable is something like “to place one thing alongside another,” which implies a comparison is being made between the things. In the case of Matthew 13:1-23, something familiar (a farmer planting seeds on different soils) is placed alongside something unfamiliar to his listeners (how the hearers of Jesus’ words will respond to those words) in order to illuminate the unfamiliar thing.

² Observations and thoughts on the elements of the parable:

Seeds—I don’t notice any difference between the seeds that are sown on the different soils, so the difference must be in the soils.

Soils—Jesus contrasts the condition of the 4 soils: **along the path** (v. 4)—the soil along a path would be packed down and hard, and the seeds wouldn’t penetrate and take root, making these seeds an easy target for the birds; **rocky places with not much soil** (v. 5)—this describes a thin soil with shallow, closely underlying bedrock—usually found on hilltops and possibly side-slopes, not the fertile lower slopes and bottoms (at least that’s the case with forest soils ☺)—here the plants might spring up above ground quickly with little room for root development under the surface, but without the well-developed root structure, they would wither quickly when things dried out; **among thorns** (v.7)—weed-infested soils can contain hundreds of millions of viable weed seeds per acre, waiting for even 40 years to emerge when conditions are right and disperse their own abundant seeds; and **good soil** (v. 8)—this soil would be deep, not compacted, nutrient-rich, and free of weeds, where the seeds could establish a suitable root structure to provide nutrients and water for optimum growth and fruitfulness.

Yield of the seeds—Ultimately, only the *good soil* would provide for a fruitful crop that could provide grain to support the farmer’s family, while also providing a seed source for the next crop.

Birds—Birds probably would be following closely behind the farmer, waiting to devour any easily accessed seeds.

³ Vos, Howard F. 1999. Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Manners and Customs: How the People of the Bible Really Lived. Thomas Nelson Publishers. Nashville. 661 p.

Why Speak in Parables?

- ❑ Read Matthew 13:10-17. “The disciples came to him and asked ‘Why do you speak to the people in parables?’”
 - v. 11—“The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.” “Secrets of the kingdom” are truths not previously revealed, but which were now made known to those who believed in him, and to whom was given the *spiritual* insight to understand. This spiritual insight was not given to those who rejected him.
 - v. 11-13—So why does Jesus speak in parables? Parables would illuminate “kingdom” concepts and challenge those who believe in him and have ready, humble hearts (“whoever has”). Those who rejected him, because of their disbelief and hardened hearts would not be able to understand (and what was revealed to them would be taken away—like the birds snatching the seeds).
 - v. 14-15—Jesus quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10. God told Isaiah that people would not accept the message he brought as a prophet, and Jesus gets the same kind of response.
 - v. 16-17—The disciples were privileged to hear and see (understand) truths that O.T. prophets and “righteous” people longed to hear and see (see also 1 Pet 1:10-11).

Jesus Explains the Parable

- ❑ Read Matthew 13:18-23. Jesus explains that the four soils represent the following responses to the message of the kingdom:
 - along the path (v. 19)—This is one who hears the word, but due to a hard heart (not realizing and acknowledging their spiritual need) does not understand.
 - rocky soils (v. 20)—This is one who initially accepts the word enthusiastically, but when difficulties come (because of the message) he/she quickly abandons it.
 - among thorns (v. 22)—This is one who hears the word, but worldly worries and wealth choke it out, and leaves only unfruitfulness.
 - good soil (v. 23)—This is the one who hears and understands the word, and bears much fruit.
- ❑ What is the “word,” and what do each of these soil conditions look like in a person’s life?

Reflection/Application

- ❑ Do you recognize any of these “soils” in your life? Have you accepted the kingdom message, believing that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, and that he rose again from the dead, giving hope of eternal life in him? If that message has found *good soil* in your heart, is it producing a fruitful crop in and through your life?
- ❑ If you find that your heart is hard soil from unbelief, shallow and rocky due to neglect of God, please consider asking him to plow and soften that hard or rocky ground of your heart and make it receptive to his word. If you find that your heart is infested with weedy concerns of the world, ask him to cleanse you of worldliness and receive him without reservations.