

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Matthew 13:3-8; 18-23

I. INTRODUCTION

A. This morning we are continuing our study on the Sermon on the Sea. A great multitude of people had gathered together on the seashore to hear Christ preach to them from a boat a few feet off shore. The design of Christ's sermon was to teach seven parables which illustrate the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

B. The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven deal with the operation of the kingdom when the King and His kingdom are not physically present. The mystery about the kingdom promised in the Old Testament was that it would be postponed because of Israel's rejection of the King and it would be held in abeyance until the second advent of Jesus Christ. Another aspect to this mystery is that this kingdom would still have subjects loyal to the King even if the kingdom was not physically present on this earth. These loyal subjects would serve the King in this present age until Christ returns in his second advent. The kingdom is now present in the hearts of all who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord, Master and King. The kingdom is present in a spiritual sense in the hearts of all who yield to sovereignty of Christ over their lives.

C. These parables of Matthew 13 constitute a view of this present age between the first advent and second advent of Christ. These parables take the Christian behind the scenes of history and show him how the kingdom program will develop while the King is absent. NOTE: If we want to understand what is going to happen in and to the Church of Jesus Christ in this present age, then we should try to understand these parables.

II. THE PARABLE 13:3-9

A. This parable is about a farmer who walks around in his plowed field sowing seed. Perhaps Christ took this illustration from a real life scene. It was springtime and it would not be an uncommon sight to see a farmer sowing seed. The multitude could actually see a farmer throwing seed everywhere. They could see the paths beaten across the fields and the birds coming right behind the farmer picking up the seeds. They could see the rocky ground, the thorns and thistles and the good soil.

B. The Parable of the Sower was designed to teach us about the different responses people would give to Christ and His kingdom in this present age. Whenever the gospel message goes out, we can expect four different responses to the truth that Christ is Savior, Lord and King. These four responses will be true until the end of this present age which will culminate at the second advent of Christ.

C. The crux of this parable is found in the condition of the soils into which the seed is dropped. There are four kinds of soil on which the word can fall. The soil, of course, represents the human heart, so the word of God falls on four different types of hearts. NOTE: It is very important to note that this parable is about salvation and three out of four of the soils represent people who are not genuinely saved. Only the good soil is

really a saved person because there flows fruit from the life which is the real evidence of true saving faith. NOTE: Some Bible teachers try to make the rocky ground hearers and the thorny ground hearers to be carnal Christians but it does not match the context of the Biblical teaching of the perseverance of the saints.

D. Notice that Christ ends this parable with the words, “He that hath ears, let him hear!” When Christ had finished this parable, the disciples asked Him, “Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” Christ then gave a profound answer (13:12). He spoke in parables to conceal truth from the unresponsive and to reveal truth to the responsive. Christ said that to him who has truth more will be given and that in abundance, but he who does not have truth, even that will be taken from him. Our Lord is speaking about the possession of truth and acting upon that truth. If we respond to truth, we shall get more truth. If we reject truth, we shall have the truth taken from us. NOTE: Our Lord’s point is that those who believe these parables and act upon them by faith and obedience shall be given more truth. Those who reject these truths shall have truth taken from them. He who has ears, let him hear!!

Matthew 13:12: For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

III. THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLE 13:18-23

A. The Sower: We are not specifically told in this parable who the sower is but it is logical to conclude he is Jesus Christ Himself. He sowed the seed of the gospel during His ministry on earth and He sows it at this very hour through Christians, who are His representatives on earth. NOTE: Any time any Christian witnesses for Christ to a lost world, he is sowing the seed in the name and authority of Christ.

B. The Seed: We are clearly taught that the seed is “the word of the kingdom.” In the Apostle Luke’s Gospel, the seed is said to be “the word of God” (Luke 8:12). The word of the kingdom is the good news of the gospel. The message to be preached is, “Repent and accept Jesus Christ, as Savior and King so that you may have a part in His kingdom which now is in the hearts of all true Christians and shall be a reality at the second coming of Christ.” NOTE: No person can have a part in Christ’s kingdom until that person is born of God’s Spirit and submits himself to the King. If you do not have Christ in your heart, then you will have no part in His kingdom which is surely coming to this world at the second advent. NOTE: There is a kingdom now in a spiritual sense. It is an invisible, spiritual kingdom in the hearts of all true believers in Christ. Christ wants men to know that all of life is not contained in what we see, touch, smell, hear and taste. There is more to life than the physical. There is a spiritual kingdom beyond what we can experience with our five senses. This spiritual kingdom contains the answers to the most perplexing problems of man: where did I come from? Where am I going after death? What is my purpose for life? This kingdom also satisfies the deepest longings of the human heart. The “word of the kingdom,” then, is about Christ, the King - His death, resurrection, His salvation, His reign and His kingdom. NOTE: The seed of the gospel is being sown everywhere in this present age. This powerful seed is being dropped into human hearts all over this world. Millions daily are being exposed to the gospel of Christ through radio, TV, books, tracts, sermons and personal witnessing by faithful Christians. The seed is penetrating into the hearts and minds of multitudes and there are always four responses to the gospel of the kingdom. NOTE: Today we are going to deal with two of

these responses and next Sunday we will deal with the other two.

IV. THE WAYSIDE HEARERS (13:19)

A. The wayside hearers are those who are hardened to the truth of Christ. It is quite easy to visualize a farmer who would make paths around or through his field in order to throw the seed on good ground. These paths would be narrow and hardened because of constant walking on them. When the seed fell on this type of ground, the birds would pick it up right away. The wayside hearers have hardened hearts to the truth of Christ. When they hear the message of Christ, it is immediately rejected because they have hearts that are hardened by sin. They have absolutely no spiritual understanding of the truth. NOTE: This parable is dealing with human responsibility. Every man is held accountable to respond to the truth. The idea is not that they could not understand the truth but they would not understand the truth. They would not because men love darkness rather than light and they love their sins. NOTE: These wayside hearers are really materialists. They do not think that there is anything beyond the physical and they deny the spiritual dimensions of life and the supernatural. They have a humanistic, liberal and atheistic heart. They will not take time or cannot be bothered to understand the gospel when it is presented to them. They really are not interested in spiritual matters at all. NOTE: The message of Christ will penetrate the mind and the heart of the wayside hearers, and for a moment they may be challenged to think about Christ and His claims. Perhaps they will give a fleeting thought as to the reality of Christ and His kingdom. But then they immediately throw these thoughts of their minds because further contemplation would require more thought, more self-evaluation and a changed life. Because they die hardened to their own sin, the thoughts of Christ and His kingdom are repugnant to them. They shrug off any thoughts of Christ as being true and the Devil snatches the truth from their hearts because there was no good soil in which the gospel could take root (II Cor. 4:3, 4). NOTE: Luke's account of the Parable of the Sower says that the Devil snatched the truth from the hearts of the wayside hearers that they "may not believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). The Greek has a purpose clause here and it means "in order that they may not believe." Perhaps this is saying that the Devil so steals the truth out of the wayside hearers heart that he may never believe the gospel and be saved. This rejecter of the truth opened his heart to Satan rather than to Christ. Humanly speaking it is possible to repeatedly reject truth until that truth can no longer be received!! ILLUSTRATION: John Bunyan

II Cor. 4:3, 4: But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

ILLUSTRATION: Did you know that this teaching on the wayside hearers was the means God used to bring John Bunyan to Christ? Most of us remember John Bunyan for his famous book Pilgrim's Progress. What most of us don't know is that Bunyan for thirty years of his life was a blasphemous old tinker in Bedford. He was known as the most godless man in his village and was regarded as so hardhearted and committed to godlessness that no Christian had any hope for him to be saved at all. But he heard this story of the sower and these very words seized upon his heart. He said to himself, "Even the devil knows that if a man believes the word he will be saved!" So John Bunyan believed and he was saved.

B. There are three basic enemies to Christ and His Kingdom: the world, the flesh, and the devil. The wayside hearer fell victim to the Devil, for in his rejection of Christ he

lined himself up with Satan and His kingdom of darkness.

V. THE STONY ROCK HEARERS (13:20, 21)

A. The stony rock hearers are those who hear the message of Christ and His kingdom and at first get all excited about it; yet later turn away from the truth they have learned.

B. We might get the idea that this was pure rock but obviously nothing could germinate on rock. The idea here was that there was an inch or two of dirt over a broad shelf of bedrock. This was shallow soil with hard rock underneath. NOTE: The stony rock hearers are those who have a shallow religious experience that never really takes spiritual root. They initially get all excited about Christ but they never seem to stabilize. They are constantly flitting from one experience to another, never satisfied, never content with anything very long. No matter what their profession of Christ might be, they are restless, searching and groping for reality. These are what we might call Christian faddists or enthusiasts but they have no spiritual root to their profession of faith. ILLUSTRATION: Wonderful, Thrilling, Exciting!

ILLUSTRATION: Many of us have had the experience of being around people who have just made their initial profession of faith in Christ. They are all excited about their new found faith. In fact, they are higher than a kite. This is especially true of young people. It is not uncommon to hear the words, “It’s wonderful, exciting, thrilling, marvelous and beautiful.” Unfortunately, many of these professions are shallow and sham, and after the initial excitement of a new religious experience wears off many turn back and go into the world. They were never saved because they did not have true saving faith and were not touched by the grace of God.

C. Stony rock hearers “endure for a while” but their profession is only temporary and will pass with time. The stony rock hearers are not saved because Luke in his Gospel says of them, “which for awhile believe” (Luke 8:13). NOTE: There is obviously a faith in Christ that is not saving faith. True saving faith involves right understanding of the gospel with the mind, genuine commitment to the gospel with the will, and a true love of the gospel with the emotions. It is possible to give intellectual assent to the gospel or have an emotional religious experience without being genuinely saved (cf. John 2:23-25). NOTE: These stony rock hearers had an emotional experience but they in actuality had no reality of Christ, proving themselves to be rejecters of the true gospel of Christ.

John 2:23-25: Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

D. The stony rock hearers “endure for awhile”, and the Greek word actually means “seasonal.” When it is seasonable and fashionable to believe the gospel they do, but their whims change like the seasons and shift like the winds. They are shallow in heart and understanding. They have a surface kind of Christianity but there is no real desire to evaluate their lives and go deeper into the Christian faith. ILLUSTRATION: Revivals and Young People.

ILLUSTRATION: In our modern day revival meetings and among the many thousands of young people who are supposedly coming to Christ, there is much shallowness, emptiness and sham.

Multiple thousands are professing and showing initial excitement about Christ but they are “seasonal.” When the season changes they will go back into their old patterns of life. Their faith had no depth; it was surface faith and based on emotion. They are what we might call “fair weather Christians.”

E. What was it that caused these stony rock hearers to stumble or withdraw from following Christ and His kingdom? It was tribulation and persecution from the world because the world hates the word of the kingdom. These stony rock hearers begin to feel the opposition and pressure that comes when one truly follows Christ. They begin to feel the sting of criticism and the loneliness of rejection and conclude that following Christ is not worth it. They find out that it costs to follow Christ and they are not willing to pay the price of discipleship. NOTE: No matter what a person’s profession, no matter how much excitement he displays upon initially trusting Christ, if there is no lasting fruit, then the seed of the gospel did not take root. When the trials, crises, tribulations, afflictions and persecutions come, he will stumble and withdraw from Christ because there was no true saving faith in the first place.

F. It was the enemy of the flesh that lured the stony rock hearers from the Lord Jesus Christ. These professors of Christ received the word in the enthusiasm of the flesh. At first they manifested great interest and zeal but turned away from Christ because of persecution, indicating that their faith was only of the flesh and not of the Spirit.

VI. CONCLUSION

A. What is the condition of your heart? Have you hardened yourself to the truth of Christ and His kingdom? Do you feel as though you could never trust Christ and be saved? You cannot soften your own heart but God can soften it.

B. Nothing is impossible with God. He can plough up the rough ground of your heart so you will be eager and willing to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior. Ask God to soften your heart so you can turn to Christ and acknowledge Him as your Savior and King.