

Matthew 13 – The Parables of the Kingdom

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Parable 1: The Sower (v3-9, v18-23) – The Propagation of the Kingdom

The kingdom will be advanced by the widespread sowing of the seed of the Word of God.

Israel were “*a vine out of Egypt*” (Ps 80v8) that produced only “*wild grapes*” (Is 5v2).

There will now be fruit for God when the seed of the Word falls upon the good ground of hearts prepared to receive & believe the Word.

The Lord regarded this parable as the plainest of parables (see Mark 4v13); His interpretation (v18-23) provides general principles for understanding all the parables that follow.

The interpretation is given to all the multitudes without being requested (contrast with parable 2); a warning to all men, as to how man hears & responds to the Word of God (see v9,19,20,22,23).

A parable of universal application – the differing types of ground accounting for the hearts of all men, in terms of reception of & response to the Word of God.

There is here only one seed, “*the word of the kingdom*” (v19), the good Word of God.

v3: “*THE sower went forth to sow*”; the sower’s identity is not specified (contrast with parable 2).

It began with the Lord Jesus; it is continued by His servants – “*which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him*” (Heb 2v3).

The commission to the disciples; “*as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you*” (Jhn 20v21).

Our privilege & responsibility today is still to serve in the furtherance of the kingdom of God.

Evangelism is based upon publishing abroad the same “*word of the kingdom*”; see 1 Peter 1v23-25.

1. The Wayside Ground – The Disinterested Hearer, The Hardened Heart (v4,v19)

The hard ground of the trampled wayside – hearts that are not receptive, no response to the Word.

They “*understandeth it not*”; no appreciation that they are perishing in their sins (1 Cor 1v18).

The devil moves quickly to snatch away the seed, “*lest they should believe & be saved*” (Lk 8v12).

The devil has, right from the start, sought to undermine the Word of God (Gen 3).

2. The Stony Ground – The Casual Hearer, The Shallow Heart (v5-6,v20-21)

In the shallow soil of rocky ground, the seed quickly springs upward, but there is no growth of roots downward, no moisture to preserve, and it is soon withered by the heat of the sun.

Some make superficial professions, but the Word has never truly touched their heart.

They receive the Word immediately “*with joy*”; i.e. no real root of conviction regarding their sin before God, conscience not properly exercised, true contrition & repentance never expressed.

The prodigal expresses the humble & contrite spirit of one who is truly repentant (Lk 15v18-19).

There is profession of Christianity, but no true possession of divine life, no indwelling of the Spirit.

The plant withers because “*it lacked moisture*” (Lk 8v6); nothing of that which the Spirit supplies.

Shallow professions only last during good times; they prove to be rootless when tested by the adversity of tribulation or persecution because of association with Christ.

A true believer, indwelled by the Spirit of God, has the power of divine life within (Jhn 7v38-39).

The Spirit will strengthen & succour when times of persecution come, so that there will be no withering & no stumbling.

Continuance in the faith is the ultimate proof of reality; “*If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard*” (Col 1v23).

3. The Thorny Ground – The Distracted Hearer, The Deceived Heart (v7,v22)

Many are distracted & deceived by “*the care of this world*”, “*the deceitfulness of riches*”, “*the lusts of other things*” (Mk 4v19) & “*pleasures of this life*” (Lk 8v14).

Preoccupation with the temporal & material things of this age, to the exclusion of eternal realities. The rich man in hell (Lk 16) understood where “*the deceitfulness of riches*” had brought him. Earthly riches & pleasures will distract from the need of God’s salvation, and will choke the Word of God, to render it unfruitful; “*But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition*” (1st Tim 6v9).

For believers, there is the need for on-going reception of & obedience to the Word of God.

We are not to live for the things of this age, but for the things of Christ & His kingdom.

Moses made that choice; “*Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward*” (Heb 11v25-26).

4. The Good Ground – The Earnest Hearer, The Receptive Heart (v8,v23)

The Word of God is heard earnestly, it sinks down deeply into the heart, and the Spirit of God produces understanding in terms of true conviction, repentance, confession, the fruitfulness of faith, and with the indwelling Spirit of God there will be the fruit of the Spirit.

Differing quantities of fruit produced, “*some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty*”.

In an individual believer, the return of fruit is dependant on continuing response to the Word of God & proportionate to the varying light received & truth revealed.

In Matt 13, we have diminishing returns of fruit; contrasting with Mark 4v8 where there is the reverse order, i.e. increasing returns of fruit. In Luke 8v8, only a 100-fold return is anticipated.

Mark is the gospel of the servant; every servant of the Lord must strive for increasing fruit.

Matthew is the dispensational gospel, and the Lord views diminishing returns as this present dispensation proceeds, especially in relation to fruit from the Jewish people.

In the early apostolic period of the Church, beginning from Jerusalem, many thousands of Jews believed the gospel and were brought into the kingdom of Jesus Christ (see Acts 2v41, Acts 4v4, Acts 6v7). When the apostles went out to other places such as Thessalonica, Berea and Corinth, they began preaching in the synagogues of the Jews, and there were “*not a few*” (Acts 17v4,v12) Jewish converts. At Corinth, they “*testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ*” (Acts 18v5) and Crispus the chief ruler of the synagogues believed, along with many others (Acts 18v8,10).

Thus, in the apostolic period it was 100-fold fruit as the Word of God was sown. But how different in our day; a diminishing return of fruit, few indeed of the Jewish people get saved.

In Luke 8v8, it is only given as a 100-fold return of fruit, and that should be the challenge for us all in our own individual Christian lives. In Luke’s account of this parable, the Lord interprets the good ground hearer as “**they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience**” (Lk 8v15).

God is looking for the fruit of patient continuance, believers who continue steadfast in the faith, and who go on faithfully in submission & obedience to the Word of God.