



THE COMPASS

RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Compass:
Encounter-Examine-Explore-Embrace God's Word
On
Your Discipleship Path

Sermon Series: "Parables."
(Pentecost, 2026)
"A Soul Check" Text: *Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23.*

□ Day #1—Monday, July 13th. Read: Matthew 13.1-3. —Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?

The immediate context surrounding Matthew 13 finds Jesus teaching the increasingly large crowds. As we discussed in the sermon, as a master teacher, Jesus employs the use of *parables* as a way of teaching the "secrets" (mysteries) of the Kingdom of God. The parables that Jesus will use, here and elsewhere in Matthew, summarizes the contrasts between the common assumptions, particularly among the Jewish people, about God and His coming Kingdom, with the *true nature* of God's character and coming Kingdom that has arrived in and through Jesus Christ.

It is here in this text that Jesus begins His method of parabolic teaching in the Gospel of Matthew. The word "parable" comes from two Greek words (*para* and *ballō*), which together literally means, "to throw alongside" or "to throw together." Jesus' parables contain experiences and practices from every day, first-century life, through which Jesus "throws alongside" a deep, spiritual truth about God, His will and His ways (the Kingdom of God). In most cases, Jesus' parables are intended to clarify spiritual truths for those who have been called to follow Jesus; though at the same time, these divine truths are not always simple and often, very challenging. Case in point: The parables of the Good Samaritan and Prodigal Son. In these cases, Jesus seems to indicate that God works in ways that were (and are) opposite from the cultural and religious expectations and ways of the ancient world (a father who takes back his son who publically shamed him, as well as a hated Samaritan who does God's will as opposed to a Jewish Priest and Levite).

In the first of seven parables in this chapter, Jesus describes a farmer who sowed seed in his field. The emphasis in the parable is on *the results* of the sowing; for the seed fell on four kinds of soil: *along a path* (*Matthew 13:4*), *on rocky places* (*v.5*), *among thorns* (*v.7*), and finally on *good soil* (*v.8*). Consequently, the farmer had four kinds of results. Notice in this case, the Parable of the Sower does not begin with, "The kingdom of heaven is like..." because it describes how the kingdom *begins*. It begins with the preaching of the Word (sowing the seeds), amidst the conditions of the human heart (the soils).

As Jesus will explain, the seed is God's Word; the various soils represent different kinds of hearts; and the varied results show the different responses to the Word of God. The disciples themselves experienced this reality; they had responded so enthusiastically to Jesus, but not all welcomed Him in the same way. The three unproductive "soils" (*the path*, *the rocky places* and *the thorns*) are interpreted in *vs. 19–22* as representing different three types of hearers: those who simply will not listen, those whose response is superficial and those who are preoccupied with other concerns. What we will see with all of Jesus' parables is this: What was true then is true today! Jesus knows the human heart!

Consider/Reflect: What is your initial reaction to this parable? Do you find Jesus' parables helpful in your understanding of God and God's ways?

□ Day #2—Tuesday, July 14th. Read: Matthew 13.4-6. —Examine: The Text and its Message.

Today and tomorrow, our structure will be a bit different: I am going to provide for you a translation of *vs. 4-9* from a resource entitled, "*Word Pictures in the New Testament*."¹ This resource will describe for us the exegetical and cultural background of this parable. You will notice the original Greek text is given, followed by a transliteration of the Greek passage, and then the

¹ A.T. Robertson. *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1993).

interpretation/description. As you will see, the resource uses an older translation of the Bible. Read from your Bible and compare it with these translations:

Matthew 13:4: “As he sowed” (ἐν τῷ σπειρεῖν αὐτόν [*en tōi speirein auton*]). Literally: “in the sowing as to him;” a neat Greek idiom unlike our English temporal conjunction. Locative case with the articular present infinitive. **“By the wayside”** (παρὰ τὴν ὁδὸν [*para tēn hodon*]). People will make paths along the edge of a ploughed field or even across it where the seed lies upon the beaten track. **“Devoured”** (κατεφαγεν [*katephagen*]). “Ate down.” We say, “ate up.” The sower sows freely in the midst of threats. God gives to the world the message of the Gospel, knowing that there will be many who will reject it. As we will see in Jesus’ interpretation, the devil (the birds here) will try to take away the “seed” (the Gospel message) from those who hear it. Yet, God still calls all to follow Jesus (sowing the seed). The point is this: God does not limit His love: He offers it to all in the midst of any situation.

Matthew 13:5: “The rocky places” (τὰ πετρώδη [*ta petrōdē*]). In that limestone country, ledges of rock often jut out with thin layers of soil upon the layers of rock. “Straightway they sprang up” (εὐθὺς ἐξανέτειλεν [*euthēs exaneteilen*]). “Shot up at once.” Double compound (ἐξ [*ex*], out of the ground, ἀνά [*ana*], up). The growth begins but does not last.

Matthew 13:6: “The sun was risen” (ἡλίου ἀνατείλαντος [*helion anateilantos*]). Genitive absolute. “The sun having sprung up.” The same sun causes growth and death. The difference is in the depth of soil: can the seed find root? Matthew Henry describes this reality about the lack of depth and rootedness when the Gospel is heard but not taken seriously: ...inwardly they are no more affected than a stone; they have no root, they are not by faith united to Christ who is our Root; they derive not from him, they depend not on him... Where there is not a principle, though there be a profession, we cannot expect perseverance. Those who have no root will endure but awhile. A ship without ballast, though she may at first out-sail the laden vessel, yet will certainly fail in stress of weather, and never make her port.²

Consider/Reflect: What type of “soil” describes your life right now? Every day this week, pray for God to change your “soil” and/or deepen the good soil in your life.

☐ **Day #3—Wednesday, July 15th. Read: Matthew 13:7-9. –Explore: The background to this text(s).**

We continue with the historical/exegetical background of the parable of the sower.

Matthew 13:7: “The thorns grew up” (ἀνεβησαν αἱ ἀκανθαί [*anebēsan hai akanthai*]). Not “sprang up” as in verse 5, for a different verb occurs meaning “came up” out of the ground, the seeds of the thorns being already in the soil... **“upon the thorns”** (ἐπὶ τὰς ἀκανθὰς [*epi tas akanthas*]) rather than “among the thorns.” [The] thorns got a quick start as weeds somehow do and **“choked them”** (ἀπεπνίξαν αὐτὰ [*apēpnixan auta*], effective aorist of ἀποπνίγω [*apōpnigō*]), “choked them off” literally. Luke (8:33) uses it of the hogs in the water. Who has not seen vegetables and flowers and corn made yellow by thorns and weeds till they sicken and die?”

Matthew 13:8: “Yielded fruit” (ἔδιδου καρπὸν [*edidou karpon*]). Change to imperfect tense of δίδωμι [*didōmi*], to give, for it was continuous fruit-bearing. **“Some a hundredfold”** (ὁ μὲν ἑκατον [*ho men hekaton*]). Variety, but fruit. This is the only kind that is worthwhile. The hundredfold is not an exaggeration (Gen. 26:12). Such instances are given by Wetstein for Greece, Italy, and Africa. Herodotus (i. 93) says that in Babylonia grain yielded two hundredfold and even to three hundredfold. This, of course, was due to irrigation as in the Nile Valley.

Matthew 13:9: “He that hath ears let him hear” (ὁ ἔχων ὦτα ἀκουέτω [*ho echōn ōta akouetō*]), so also in 11:15 and 13:43. It is comforting to teachers and preachers to observe that even Jesus had to exhort people to listen and to understand his sayings, especially his parables.

Nineteen times in Matthew 13 we find the word “hear.” In each one, the closing admonition is different. It is important that we hear God’s Word, because “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (*Romans 10.17*). Jesus said, “Who hath ears to hear” (*Matthew 13.9*), “Take heed *what* you hear!” (*Mark 4.24*), and “Take heed *how* you hear!” (*Luke 8.18*) Hearing in this sense has the added expectation that what is heard is understood and lived. If I truly “hear” what someone is saying to me, especially if this message is from someone close—a close friend, spouse, or child, then I am both taking seriously what they are saying and desire to fulfill what they are seeking from me. The same is true for the Christian life. Truly *bearing the Gospel* is taking it *seriously* and *desiring to do what Jesus asks of us*!

Consider/Reflect: How does Jesus' challenge in *v.9* help explain *Matthew 13:11-12*? How does faith open you up to more and more spiritual insight?

☐ **Day #4--Thursday, July 16th. Read: Matthew 13.18-23.—Explore: The background to this text(s).**

In Jesus' interpretation of the Parable of the Sower, He compared the four results of seed sowing to four, human responses to the Kingdom message. Again, the seed sown is the Word of God, here called "the word of the kingdom" (*v. 19*). I made the point on Sunday that I believe that the "word of the kingdom" or the "Word," can be equated with Jesus Himself and His salvific work. Jesus is the both the *message* and the *messenger*!

We can see why Jesus compares the Word, the Gospel message, His work for our salvation, to "seed." This is because God's Word is "living and powerful" (*Hebrews 4.12*), the Word grows and has life in itself. The truth of God must *take root* in the heart, be cultivated, and permitted to bear fruit. Isn't it amazing that in this parable, Jesus points out that three out of the four soils did not bear fruit? Jesus is honest that for many in our world, the Word of God is simply rejected. Even in His ministry, while great multitudes followed Him, they ultimately left Him. Only a few were His true disciples.

Additionally, the sower that scatters the seed is God. It could also be a reference to Jesus Christ (we see this specifically in *see v. 37*). The ground in which this seed is sown are the hearts of humankind. Like soil, human hearts are capable of bearing good "fruit" but only if the "seed sown" in the heart is good; and, like soil, the heart must be cultivated; we call this *spiritual growth* (*Proverbs 24.30*).

When one hears the message but does not understand it, the devil (evil one; *Matthew 13.38-39; 1 John 5.19*) snatches away the Word that was sown. It is important to remember that Jesus is describing non-believers here, not Christians. While a Christian's heart can become hard, hence the need to always "check our soil/soul," the devil cannot "snatch" Jesus away from us. However, the devil can tempt us to believe that we can live the Christian life on our own—we can save ourselves and/or that we are pretty good people really, we do not need Jesus. This would be like seed sown on the path.

The next two results—represented by seed on rocky places that had no root and by seed among the thorns (worries and wealth) that choke it out—speak of hearers' initial interest, but with no genuine, heartfelt response. The seed on rocky soil speaks of a person who hears the Word but "falls away" (the Greek word is "*skandalizetai*;" through which we get our word, "scandalized" (See *Matthew 13.57; 15.12*). This describes a person who gets "offended" by the message of the kingdom! ("How dare you tell me that Jesus is the "only" way to God—you are so judgmental!") Only the seed that fell on good soil produced the intended result with an increase of 100, 60, or 30 times what had been sown. The one who believes Jesus' Word and trusts Jesus as Lord and Savior (the one who hears the Word and understands (trusts it) will then receive and understand, greater Gospel-truths and live more and more faithfully (*Matthew 13.12*)!

Consider/Reflect: How "rooted" is the Gospel in your life? Are there other things/concerns crowding out the Gospel? Ask God to "root out" or "pull the weeds" from your heart. Pray for those who you know that are rejecting the "seed" of the Gospel. Ask God to use you to help "cultivate" their "soil" so that the Word may take root.

☐ **Day #5— Friday, July 17th. Read: Matthew 13.19-23.—Explore: The background to this text(s).**

In this parable, Jesus makes the point that the difference in the results of the seed and the soils was not in the *seed*, but in the *soil on which the seed fell*. As the Gospel of the Kingdom was (and is) proclaimed, the message was (and is) the same for all—God's Kingdom is here—enjoy! The difference was in the individuals who heard (hears) that Word. Jesus was not saying that an exact 25 percent of those who hear the message will believe. But He was saying that a majority will not respond positively to the good news. This parable illustrates one reason why the Pharisees and religious leaders rejected Jesus' message: They were not "prepared soil" for the Word. Of course, we still witness this today. However, the "seed," the Gospel message, is still being "sown" by God through His church to those who have "ears to hear."

One way of thinking about the ministry of Red Hill is to consider our work as both "seed sowing" (Word and Sacrament) and "soil cultivation" (preaching/teaching/RHLS/prayer/care/outreach). While Jesus was primarily describing the response of *unbelievers*—those who will hear and will not believe the Gospel and follow Jesus, at the same time, even Christians struggle with hearts (soil) that are "hard," "rocky," and "thorny." We must be aware of our spiritual health and the need to find "nutrients:"

Worship, God's Word, prayer, Christian community, and Servanthood, all prepare the "soil" (hearts) in our lives. When we practice these spiritual disciplines, it is like adding water, fertilizer, and sunlight into the soil. When the "seed" of God's Word falls into good soil, it will be productive. Notice, even in the good soil, there is room for some variation in the degree of productivity, whether it is a hundred, sixty or thirty times as much. In other words, disciples do not come in only one size, shape, or ability, and there is room in the kingdom of God for the ordinary as well as for the spectacular. The church is made up of many parts and many members; all are different and all necessary.

Consider/Reflect: Can you *bear* and *see* Jesus at work in our world today? In your life? If not, does something need to change as far as your "*soil*?"

☐ **Day #6-Saturday, July 18th. Read: Again: Matthew 13.18-23.—Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.**

We will end this week with some further thoughts on how to have "good soil" in our lives so that we may be "fruitful." It is important to remember that "good soil" does not mean that we are perfect (there are no rocks or thorns in them), but rather that these do not hinder the seed and that we are always "cultivating our soil." As I mentioned yesterday, Christians in this world are not perfect; we still sin and struggle with "rocks" and "thorns" and "path-like" hard hearts. However, these do not *define* our lives—Jesus and His Word (seed) do. Consequently, the life of a discipleship, cultivating our "soil" means...:

Listen to Jesus. We are to hear the Word (the Bible), understand it, and obey it; we seek through the power of the Holy Spirit to understand not only the sense and meaning of the Word, but the intersection of our lives with the Word. God, in and through his Word, deals with people as people, in a rational way, and God desires the possession of our will and affections by opening our hearts and minds to His Word. At Red Hill, God's Word is taught and proclaimed on Sunday mornings in worship, Bible studies, small groups, and service-outreach opportunities.

Bear fruit. The fruit of a seed is inside it; a product of its heart and life. The "seed" of God's Word has a power and life that, when believed and obeyed, will bear the fruit that is inherent in the Word: forgiveness, hope, comfort, challenge, conviction, and direction. When we are bearing fruit as disciples' of Jesus, we are witnesses to God's power in and through our lives (*Matthew 7.16*). This would include Christian character (*Galatians 5.22–23*), good works (*Colossians 1.10*), sharing our faith with others (*Romans 1.13*), sharing what we have (*Romans 15.25–28*), and praising God (*Hebrews 13.15*).

Reflect and Pray: Ask God to help you cultivate good "soil" (your heart) in your life. In what ways could you begin (or continue) to nurture the "soil" in your life? (See above)

Pray and Prepare for Worship Tomorrow...

Sermon Series: "Parables."

Scripture Texts:

Isaiah 44.6-8

Romans 8.18-27

Matthew 13.24-30, 36-43