

It's Kinda Like This...

Week 1 – The Seed and the Sower

Matthew 13

If you had to describe what God is like, what would you say? What qualities and characteristics would you highlight?

And, maybe as important as **what** you'd say is **how** you'd say it. How would you go about describing the indescribable and inviting people to respond to it?

Of the many things Jesus came to do, this is one of them. Jesus came to teach us what God is like and show us what life with him looks like. The life of Jesus gives us a glimpse of what it looks like when Heaven invades earth and the difference it can make. This is often times referred to as the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven. And, central to the message of Jesus is that this Kingdom has come near, and that we can enter into it through him. Through Jesus, we see a clear picture of what God is like and through Jesus, we can enter into His Kingdom and life with him.

And, Jesus' preferred method for teaching us about God and His Kingdom was through **Parables, these ordinary stories about an extraordinary Kingdom**. In fact, 35% of Jesus' teachings in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are parables.

So, what is a parable? The most common definition is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. They're like these extended similes; comparisons that turn into a story. So, Jesus says things like, "The Kingdom of God is kinda like these guests at a dinner party" or "It's kinda like this Samaritan who saw someone in need..." or "It's kinda like these workers in a vineyard" "The Kingdom of Heaven is kinda like this person who lost one of his sheep..."

These comparisons would usually turn into a story that people would be familiar with, but would help them discover something new about who God is or what He's like, or what it means to live for him and bring His Kingdom closer to earth.

Over the next few weeks, we're going to look at some of these parables together so that we can hopefully be drawn in and discover some of the same things. And, today, we're starting with the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13. So, if you have a Bible or a Bible app you like to use, turn there with me.

The reason we're starting in Matthew 13 is because this parable is foundational to all the parables Jesus tells. In fact, in Mark's account, when the disciples ask Jesus what it means, he says, **"Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?" (Mark 4:13)**

He's like, "If you don't understand this, you're not going to understand anything else I say!" So, it seems like this is a good place to start! And, within Matthew 13, Jesus tells us why he uses so

many parables. We could spend all morning just on this, but he basically says these stories help him present truth in a veiled way. So, if someone wants to know more about the Kingdom, they'll find it as they listen to and reflect on these parables. If not, they're just stories that will go in one ear and out the other.

Jesus taught this way because he knew that, in the crowds of people who were listening to these stories, there would be some who were genuinely curious and wanted to discover more. But he also knew there were others who were just there to see another miracle, or receive another meal. They were there because they saw a large crowd gathering, and they were curious. There were also some who were skeptical, maybe even looking for reasons to trap Jesus.

So, to those who wanted to hear and learn more, they would get what they desired as they listened to Jesus words, and the Kingdom of God would grow in their hearts and bear fruit in their lives. For those who didn't, these stories wouldn't really amount to anything. Charles Spurgeon once wrote about the parables, "The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay."

Jesus taught in parables because they had a way of revealing truth to those who were looking for it, while at the same time, concealing truth from those who weren't really listening or who didn't really care. And, as we'll see, that's why this parable in Matthew 13 is so foundational to all the others. It's a parable about how we listen to **and hear** Jesus. So, let's look at the parable. **Matthew 13, verse 3-8...(READ 3b-8)**

That's it! Jesus tells a story about something that would have been very ordinary to see in their agrarian society. They could probably picture...maybe even turn around and see...a person out sowing seed. They knew that some of that seed would land in places where it might not grow, some would become food for birds or would land amongst other plants and weeds. But, they also knew that the farmer's main concern was the harvest that would come from the seed that fell on good soil.

So, at face value, people would have understood what Jesus said, but what did he mean? Why did Jesus tell **this story** at **this time** and what does he want us to know? People might be asking some of the same questions you are after hearing that story. Who's the farmer? What's the seed? What does the soil represent? What's the harvest?

As a teacher and preacher, I'd want to tell the story and then go right into breaking down what it means. I'd craft my opening, pour over my transitions to make sure everything connects. I'd try to think of a story that better explains the story I just told, break it all down into 3 points of application, and then give an invitation at the end! But that's not what Jesus does. (Maybe I should preach more like Jesus!) Jesus just tells the story and then ends it like this in **verse 9...(READ 13:9)**

Jesus is putting the ball in their court and says, “If you’re here and really want to know about the Kingdom, pay attention to these words and give some more thought to them.” If you **really** want to know more about the Kingdom of Heaven, think about what I just said.

It’s kinda like this...there are times my girls will say, “Dad, we’re hungry. Give us something to eat!” And I say, “You’re both 10 years old and you have two hands. You can find something!” They know how to make a sandwich or microwave leftovers. It doesn’t take much to find something to eat around our place and prepare it so, “She who has two hands, let her eat!” The Book of Dad 24:7

Sometimes, they’ll look at me, grunt, and go back downstairs to play without eating. Apparently, they weren’t actually that hungry!

When Jesus says, “Whoever has ears, let them hear” he’s saying, “Don’t just think about eating or say you’re hungry. EAT!” He’s saying, take my words, let them go through your ears, and invade your heart. And that’s really what this parable is about.

And, to make sure we get it, Jesus does something he doesn’t typically do. He explains the parable to his disciples and we get to eavesdrop on the conversation. Look at verse 18...(READ vs. 18-19)

So, the seed is the message about the Kingdom of Heaven. The Sower is the person who is spreading that message. And the soil is the hearts of those who hear it. And, at first, Jesus is THE Sower and the one sharing the good news about the Kingdom of God. But, by the time we get to the end of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus entrusts this role to us. We are the ones responsible for sharing the message about the Kingdom of Heaven with the world.

And notice, the farmer doesn’t give a lot of discretion about where he’s throwing the seed. He’s just tossing it around. He knows that **Our job is not to judge the soil, but to sow the seed.** We don’t always know the condition of someone’s heart when we share the good news of God’s Kingdom with them, but God does. He only asks us to be faithful in sharing it and leave the results up to Him. That’s what we’re responsible for. He’s responsible for the rest.

And sometimes, the message about the Kingdom of God will land on hard hearts where it’s easy to be devoured because it stays on the surface of their life. The truth is, the Word of God can be read and studied and discussed, people can memorize it and memorize facts about it, they can hear sermon after sermon about it, and yet never really allow it to be planted in their heart.

For Matthew, to understand something means to internalize it, to take it into your life and live by it, even submit to it. Some people don’t hear the message about the Kingdom of God because they **don’t want to hear it**. They don’t want to take it in and live by it. They certainly don’t want to surrender the throne of their heart to another King because that’s their seat! And so, the truth just stays on the surface and gets snatched up each time. That’s the first soil. Look at the second in verse 20...(READ vs. 20-21)

This soil is the heart that hears the message about the Kingdom of God and receives it with joy. They get excited about faith and following Jesus and the community they find within the Church, but before they have the chance to develop deep roots of faith, something happens that makes them fall away.

They go through a hard time. Someone doesn't respond as joyfully to their new faith as they'd hoped. They're asked a question they don't know how to answer. Maybe God doesn't come through for them the way they'd expected. When the environment or circumstances change, they walk away from their faith that once meant so much to them and brought them so much joy. The seed sprouted quickly because the environment was good, but as soon as it changed, their faith withered away. And so, what looked like real and genuine faith was just the product of a good environment.

As someone who served as a Youth Minister for nearly a decade, I can't tell you how many times I've seen this play out. A student grows up in a good environment that nurtures their faith. A good home, a strong youth ministry. They have fun, they're safe and secluded and protected. They're like a plant flourishing in a greenhouse during the winter. But, as soon as they step outside of that environment, their faith withers up. It's why so many students walk away from their faith after High School.

It's also why I appreciate our student ministries at Sherwood Oaks so much, and the work Grant and Sarah and Cheryl and Matt put in to get our students ready for real life and a lasting faith. They let them ask tough questions, wrestle with difficult topics. They create ways for them to experience life and faith outside their Christian bubble. Things like the mission trip to Honduras that 23 of our students and 4 adult leaders are going on over Spring Break.

It's why they worship with us during the 11:00 gathering and serve on ministry teams. It's so their faith isn't just dependent on a separate event and they don't know how to engage in the life of the Church after they graduate.

If you walk into Matt Limbrick's office...Matt's our High School Minister and Director of Student Ministries...you'll see his one word job description next to a bobble head Jesus! [\(Show picture\)](#) Develop LIFE-LONG Christ-led influencers. Not a strong student ministry, but strong students who will stay connected to Jesus long after they graduate from High School.

And, that's really what it's about for all of us. The goal of discipleship to Jesus is maturity over time. It's seeing the Word of God grow deep roots in our life and bear fruit. It's about so much more than an emotional experience in a safe environment. So, that's the second soil. The third is in verse 22...[\(READ vs. 22\)](#)

This is the person who accepts the message, shows growth, but then looks for meaning and value and security apart from God. The soil is good and the roots are strong, but it gets tangled

up and choked out by all the fears and pursuits of the world around it. And, there are two rival plants that Jesus mentions. Worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth.

Our faith, and the Kingdom of God growing in us, can so easily get overwhelmed by problems we can't solve and worries we can't overcome. They have a way of suffocating us and everything we know to be true about the Lord.

Last Thursday, I got together with a few ministry friends and we did a hike out at Fairfax. One of the guys asked, "What's the biggest worry on your plate right now?" Each of us shared while we walked through the woods. At the end of the hike, he read a Scripture about God's protection and provision. His faithfulness, even in the face of our fears. It was such a good reminder to me because worries have a way of making me forget about God's goodness and grace.

Our faith can also be choked out by worry, but it can also be choked out by the deceitfulness of wealth. Notice, Jesus doesn't say wealth, but the deceitfulness of it. It's what we looked at in our Strapped series a couple of months ago. Money has a way of making us think, "If I just had a little more, or a little better, or a little newer, THEN I'd be happy!" That's the deceitfulness of wealth. It's the drive that says, "If I just save a little more, then I'll be secure."

The truth is, money can't save you. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "You cannot serve both God and money." (Matt. 6:24b) The desire for one *will always* choke out the desire for the other. So, the person who's caught up in the worries and cares of the world won't be able to hear the message about the Kingdom of God because it's just one voice whispering amongst the many voices shouting for their attention. It's one influence in their life being choked out by all the others.

But, the fourth soil is different. Look at verse 23...(READ 13:23)

This is the heart that hears it AND understands it. And again, that word "understands" means more than just comprehend. This is the person who internalizes the Kingdom of God in their life. They take it in, submit and surrender to the Lord. These are the ones who bear fruit.

And, notice, this is the shortest description of the four. It's as if to say, being a fruitful follower of Jesus is not difficult. It just comes down to listening, receiving, and putting the Word of God and message of the Kingdom into practice. And anyone who gets the Word of God into them, that person cannot help but bear the fruit of God's Kingdom in how they live and act and love. This Jesus-way of life will just come pouring out of them in a way that others notice and enjoy, just like we notice and enjoy the fruit that grows on trees around us.

So, those are the soils. And Jesus is still planting His Kingdom into this world through His Word, and He's inviting us to hear His message and let it be planted into our hearts so it'll bear fruit in our lives and the lives of others.

As you think about these four soils, where do you find yourself today? The first soil did not receive the Word, even though they heard it. There was a hardness in their heart and they wanted no part of it. Maybe that's where you are. If so, let me ask you, is your life bearing the fruit you desire and others enjoy? Or do you wish there was more?

The second soil is the heart that received the Word with joy, but when life got hard, or expectations weren't met, or they felt some pressure because of their faith, they let it go and fell away. Maybe that's where you are today. Following Jesus isn't as easy as it once was and you're wondering if it's just time to throw in the towel.

The third soil is the heart that received the Word, but put their faith with all their other plans and priorities and it quickly took a backseat. Maybe you find that your faith is just one of your many passions and hobbies and pursuits. The Kingdom of God is in you, but it doesn't bear any fruit because there are other things that grab your attention and desire.

The fourth soil is the heart that receives the Word and makes it their priority. It is the influence in their life and influences everything else in their life and the Kingdom of God is growing and bearing fruit in them that they and others enjoy.

Where are you today? In my walk with Jesus, I've been all four, and if I'm honest, I probably find myself wavering between soil 2 and 3, even though I desire to be 4.

But, here's what I want to close with today...this isn't a parable about working harder or clearing out the weeds to prepare the right soil. This is a parable that calls us to have open hands, open minds, and open hearts ready to receive the words of Jesus and let them grow in our lives. And, if that's your desire, then you have ears to hear, and Jesus will teach you the rest.