

MAIN POINT

Our response to the gospel message indicates whether or not we have heard the message at the level of our hearts.

INTRODUCTION

Today we begin a study though some of the parables of Jesus. During His earthly ministry, Jesus frequently taught in parables because He understood the power of a simple story. Through these stories, Jesus imparted truth and helped people see their true spiritual condition. Jesus was teaching more than simple facts about God. His teaching went beyond the facts directly to the heart of God by showing His disciples what it means to live in the kingdom of God.

Describe a time when you misheard someone and it got you into trouble.

What is the connection between hearing and responding?

No matter how true a message is, it cannot be believed unless it is first heard. The key to Jesus' parables is that they must be heard and understood. Nowhere is this more clear than in the parable of the seeds and the soil, which is also known as the parable of the sower. Jesus told His disciples that the truth contained in this parable was essential for understanding all other parables. Jesus shared about four seeds planted on four different types of soil. In so doing, He described the different ways we hear truth and diagnosed the things that keep truth from taking root and bearing fruit in our lives.

UNDERSTANDING

> READ MATTHEW 13:1-9.

Who was listening to Jesus as He taught this parable? What does this tell us about the following Jesus had at this time in His earthly ministry?

What happens in this parable? Re-tell it in your own words.

How many seeds are sown by the sower? What types of soil do they land on? How does the type of soil affect the growth of the seeds?

What is this parable really about? The sower, the seeds, or the soils? How do you know?

At this point in Jesus' ministry, He had amassed quite a large following of people. Word had spread of the charismatic and popular teacher who heals sickness, performs miracles, and forgives sin. To this crowd of followers and fans, Jesus told a story using imagery that would have been familiar to all His listeners. A sower took four groups of seeds and spread them on four different types of soils. The focus of this parable is really on the soil, because it is the only variable—the seeds and the sower are the same. The soil changes everything. In the next section, Jesus interpreted the parable for His disciples.

> **READ MATTHEW 13:10-23.**

What shift did Jesus make in verse 10? What did He reveal to His disciples that He would not reveal to the crowd? What does this teach us about what it means to follow Jesus?

What did Jesus mean when He quoted the prophet Isaiah in verses 14-15?

How does truly being able to hear and receive the parables of Jesus distinguish His followers from the crowds who are only interested in the benefits He provides?

After telling the parable, Jesus withdrew from the crowds to spend time with His disciples. Through quoting Isaiah, Jesus explained the reason He spoke in parables was to separate those who were following Him from those who were merely fascinated with Him. The disciples were "blessed" because they were able to hear and understand the words from Jesus' teaching (v. 16). For truth to be heard, it must be received in the soil of a welcoming heart.

How did Jesus interpret this parable? Who is the sower? What is the seed? What did each soil represent?

What are some examples of thorns that choke out fruit in our culture? How do we prune these thorns so that they do not choke the life out of our faith?

What made the fourth seed different from the first three? What does this teach us about what it means to hear and receive truth?

Does it surprise you that so many of the seeds bore no fruit? Why or why not?

The call to follow Jesus is the call to listen, consider, hear, and receive truth from Him. His truth is the one we long for. Fertile soil is the only soil that bears fruit. All hearts that truly hear and receive the seed of the gospel bear fruit. Jesus says that the identifying mark of someone who has found his or her life in Him is the evidence of fruit. Some people will have more fruit than others, but there will always be fruit where truth is heard and received.

APPLICATION

How is hearing the truth of God's Word bearing fruit in your life?

How can we help each other to identify the ways that Jesus is bearing fruit in our lives? Why is it helpful for us to recognize and appreciate the ways God is working in others?

When we speak truth to people, we cannot know which soil will receive the truth. Why should we keep spreading seeds of faith even though some of the seeds we sow won't bear fruit?

PRAY

Pray that Jesus would give us ears to hear the truth from His Word. Confess that it is God who gives growth; ask that by His Spirit, His Word would take root in your life and bear fruit beyond what you can imagine.

MEMORIZE

Anyone who has ears should listen! –Matthew 13:9

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 13:1-23.

13:3-9. The word parables can refer to a wide variety of figurative speech. Although many interpreters insist that Jesus' parables were simple metaphors that teach only one main truth, Jesus' interpretation of His own parables may suggest that many of them were allegories that carried multiple points of symbolism, teaching several related truths.

13:10-13. Jesus' parables had two distinct purposes: (1) to reveal truth to those who were willing to hear and believe, and (2) to conceal truth from those who willingly rejected truth because of their calloused hearts (v. 15). The hiddenness component of Jesus' teaching may seem harsh, but since greater exposure to truth increases one's accountability to God in judgment (11:20-24), the concealment may represent God's graciousness toward those whom He knew would be unresponsive.

13:14-16. Matthew frequently explained how Jesus' ministry fulfilled prophecy. Here Jesus Himself described the fulfillment of Isa 6:9-10. The application of this text to Jesus' contemporaries probably implies that Israel's hardened rejection of Jesus was not permanent, since Isa 6:11-13 showed that the hearts of the people would someday be softened and that God would preserve a righteous remnant in Israel. The word "never" (Gk ou me) in the phrases never understand and never perceive means "will absolutely not" rather than "never will." Thus the picture is of stony resistance, not permanent resistance.

13:17. The OT prophets and saints had eagerly awaited Messiah's coming (see 1Pe 1:10-12).

13:18-23. The four types of soil represent types of people and their differing responses to Jesus. The first three types represent those who reject Jesus outright (7:26-27) and those who falsely claim to be His disciples (7:15-23; 10:35-39). These are all unfruitful. Only the last type does bear fruit. Since bearing the fruit of good deeds is an essential expression of discipleship (3:8,10; 7:16-20; 12:33; 21:18-19,33-41), only the last type is a true disciple. A harvest of 10 to 20 times what was sown was considered a bumper crop, given the primitive agricultural technology of the period. The amazing harvest described by Jesus' parable (100... 60... 30) shows that true disciples bear fruit in a miraculous quantity.