

The Sower

The parable of the sower could be the most important parable Jesus gave. This is because He holds it forth as the key to understanding all other parables. I have recently learned new things regarding this parable that I will share in this article.

“And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?”—*Mark 4:13*.

Comparing the Accounts

The parable of the sower appears in three of the four gospels. You will find it in Mark 4, Luke 8, and Matthew 13. By comparing these three accounts and noting their differences, we can learn more about the parable of the sower. The parables of Jesus fall under the classification of analogous information. The best way to understand and retain this information is to critique it. We do this by identifying which information is applicable to the analogy and which is not. We begin the critique by asking, “What is the seed?”

“The sower soweth the word.”—*Mark 4:14*.

“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.”—*Luke 8:11*.

The word of God is like a seed, and your heart is like soil. The seed has power in itself to grow—It has life, but that life must find soil to grow in. If it does not, it will not succeed in its mission of bearing fruit.

Jesus illustrates the different conditions of the heart through different soil types:

“Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.”—*Luke 8:12*.

“And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.”—*Mark 4:15*.

“When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.”—*Matthew 13:19*.

While the King James calls the first soil the “wayside,” it is more accurately translated as

“road.” This fact can be determined by Jesus’ description in Luke 8:5:

“A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.”

Imagine seeds falling to the road only to be trampled underfoot by a traveler whose thoughts are elsewhere. The road is not a place for a seed to be nourished and cared for. Eventually, the birds come and snatch the seed away.

The birds are an analogy for the work of Satan. If you have ever taken a moment to analyze the parable of the opossum on the well-driven road, you’ve probably seen similarities. I’m sure the sight of several birds pecking at the ground while one watches overhead to warn the others of danger was a fairly common sight during planting season in Israel. I once visited a spring in Florida that had a whole herd of vultures. They roamed like a band of villains in trench coats. I spent several minutes defending someone’s lunch from them before I gave up. I discovered that when you chase away vultures, you will turn around and find them already landing again to eat the food. This analogy of Satan highlights his opportunistic persistence. Satan knows if the word remains in the heart, it will certainly bear seed, so he invents unnumbered schemes to occupy the mind. His goal is to keep you from understanding, because if he can, he can take the word of God from you. If you understand that the Holy Spirit will recall it to your memory, and thus it can never be forgotten or lost.

The well-trodden path is an analogy for the mind of a pig. Let me explain. Rather, let Christ explain:

“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”—*Matthew 7:6*.

The road hearers are also symbolized by the pigs in this short parable. Notice how they trample the pearls underfoot, just like the seeds on the path are trampled. The pearl was an incredibly valuable treasure, known to come from

2 the east and prized for its rarity. Jesus uses it as a symbol of the word of God, and in his parable about the pearl of great price, it symbolizes the treasures of heaven—Christ. The path hearers are of the class that does not care to understand the word of God and have no desire to obey. Jesus has said:

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”—*John 7:17*.

The heart that is willing to obey God will understand, because the Holy Spirit is present to guide every earnest seeker into Truth. But the wicked who delight in their abominations will never learn. The word of God, to them, is just as important as pearls are to swine—because they do not understand, Satan is present to steal the truth away from their hearts lest they should understand, believe, and be saved. We can avoid being of this class of hearer by continually searching the scriptures with the question, “What must I do to be saved?” Then God can work on our hearts and give us understanding. Of all the truths that are trampled underfoot, the truth of the Sabbath is the most profaned. God even has to tell His own followers to remove their feet from the Sabbath.

How should we react if we come in contact with wayside hearers? If the ground is trash, it needs cultivation. If they won’t read the Bible, let them read you. A godly life can exert a sanctifying, preserving influence on wayside hearers. God has appointed us to be salt, and salt affects things around it. A salty Christian makes people thirsty for the Water of Life.

The Stony Ground Hearers

The word of God can fall upon a stony heart. Jesus tells us:

“But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.”—*Matthew 13:20-21*.

“And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended.”—*Mark 4:16-17*.

“They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time

of temptation fall away.”—*Luke 8:13*.

Those who grasp the value of the word of God cannot help but accept the Truth with joy. This is a heart that rejoices in the beautiful treasures of truth contained in the Bible, yet, their rocky heart does not develop a root of faith. When the sun of persecution, trials, and temptation arises in their lives, they whither away. Their joy is turned to bitterness and their praises to complaints. The hard, rocky soil illustrates a life that is resistant to the work of the Holy Spirit. They do not abide in Christ, and thus they receive no nourishment. The sun gives plants energy; without it, there can be no growth. The same with trials, temptations, and persecutions in the life of a Christian. They are essential to Christian growth. However, if these come into the life of a Christian who lacks the moisture of the Holy Spirit, and who fails to cling to Christ by faith, that which was ordained for life will be found to be unto death. Christ must abide in the heart by faith, or the life is defenseless against sin. Ellen White tells us something fascinating about this class of hearers:

“The seed sown upon stony ground finds little depth of soil. The plant springs up quickly, but the root cannot penetrate the rock to find nutriment to sustain its growth, and it soon perishes. Many who make a profession of religion are stony-ground hearers. Like the rock underlying the layer of earth, the selfishness of the natural heart underlies the soil of their good desires and aspirations. The love of self is not subdued. They have not seen the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the heart has not been humbled under a sense of its guilt. This class may be easily convinced, and appear to be bright converts, but they have only a superficial religion.

The roots of the plant strike down deep into the soil, and hidden from sight nourish the life of the plant. So with the Christian; it is by the invisible union of the soul with Christ, through faith, that the spiritual life is nourished. But the stony-ground hearers depend upon self instead of Christ. They trust in their good works and good impulses, and are strong in their own righteousness. They are not strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Such a one “hath not root in himself”; for he is not connected with Christ.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pg. 46-47.

Having seen these important truths for ourselves, let us look deeper at the stony ground hearers through the lens of a different parable.

“The class represented by the foolish virgins are not hypocrites. They have a regard for the truth, they have advocated the truth, they are attracted to those who believe the truth; but they have not yielded themselves to the Holy Spirit’s working. They have not fallen upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, and permitted their old nature to be broken up. This class are represented also by the stony-ground hearers. They receive the word with readiness, but they fail of assimilating its principles. Its influence is not abiding. The Spirit works upon man’s heart, according to his desire and consent implanting in him a new nature; but the class represented by the foolish virgins have been content with a superficial work. They do not know God. They have not studied His character; they have not held communion with Him; therefore they do not know how to trust, how to look and live. Their service to God degenerates into a form. ‘They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as My people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.’ Ezekiel 33:31. The apostle Paul points out that this will be the special characteristic of those who live just before Christ’s second coming. He says, ‘In the last days perilous times shall come: for men shall be lovers of their own selves; ... lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.’ 2 Timothy 3:1-5.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pg. 411.

Did you catch that? The foolish virgins are also stony ground hearers. The heart has been cracked but not humbled and broken. Self has not been subdued, the heart has not learned self-distrust. They are the ones who hear the words “I never knew you.” They trusted in their own works; like Judas, they viewed themselves as essential to God’s cause.

“The worker for God often regards the activities of life as essential to the advancement of the work. Self is mingled with all that is said and done.... The worker looks upon himself as a necessity. God says, ‘This poor soul has lost sight of Me and My sufficiency. I must cast My light and My vitalizing power into his heart. I must prepare him to receive truth by anointing him with the heavenly eyesalve. He sees too many things. His eye is not fastened on Me....’

Sometimes the Lord makes His path to the soul by a process painful to humanity. He is compelled to fortify the soul against self-esteem and self-dependence, in order that the worker shall not regard the failings and infirmities of

his unsanctified nature as virtues, and thus be ruined by self-exaltation.”—*Our High Calling*, pg. 315.

Temptations will come, all who live godly will suffer persecution, we have a heaven to win and a hell to shun. But these are the means by which God breaks the hardened hearts of man. Each is designed to teach that our sufficiency comes from Christ. Sometimes we have to go through a painful process to learn that our failings are not virtues. These failures are designed to humble our self-trust, leading us to cast ourselves at the feet of Jesus.

The stony ground hearer is in great danger. That which God has ordained to heal their condition is the very means that Satan uses to separate them from Christ. The heavenly eye salve must be applied before this condition can be recognized. Thus, we can see that, among all the soils, stony ground most accurately describes the Laodicean church.

What is the solution for rocky soil? This class of hearers does not know how to trust; they do not look to Christ, but to self. They have not seen the exceeding sinfulness of sin—they trust in their good works and good impulses, and are strong in their own righteousness. They do not know that the power of sin corrupts every good desire and motive—that when we would do good, evil is present in us. Without Christ, we can do nothing. Their stony hearts have not been humbled; they have not seen their true condition. The messenger to the Laodicean church has the only cure for the stony ground hearers.

The Thorny Ground Hearers

These are, perhaps, the most interesting class of hearer. This is largely because they succeed at bearing fruit for a time.

“And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”—*Mark 4:18-19*.

“He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.”—*Matthew 13:22*.

“And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.”—*Luke 8:14*.

4 Here we find a Christian who is choked with cares, temptations, lusts, and the deceitfulness of riches. Because of this, they become unfruitful, or rather, their fruit is strangled before it is perfected. This class is represented in another parable:

“But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken.”—*Matthew 24:48-49*.

Eating and drinking with the drunken means that these servants have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. Perhaps at first they do not join in, but as thorns grow slowly, fellowship with the world will eventually corrupt them. At last, they become more than unfruitful; they become hostile towards the true servants of God.

As a small thorn plant grows, its thorns are not immediately hard. Often they are soft and rubbery, bending easily when touched. This is a perfect illustration of the deceitfulness of riches and the pleasures of this life. It isn't until sin is mature that it becomes painful to the heart, but by then it is well established and incredibly difficult to remove. Mature sin proceeds to do battle with the word of God that has been planted in the heart. This key deception will play a crucial role in the destruction of the world. When no man may buy or sell except they receive the mark of the beast, it will be shown just how deeply rooted the thorns Satan has sown are. The thorny hearers will have fellowship with Babylon: eating, drinking, and being drunken because they let those little, soft, rubbery thorns wrap themselves around the word of God. Because they were not faithful in the little things, they will not be faithful in the big things. They will find it too painful to let go of riches, pleasures, and the cares of this life for the cause of God.

The Key to a Fruitful Life

In order for a seed to bear fruit, it needs several things: water, good soil, sunshine, and time. Each of these is essential for growth. In the same way, the Christian must have the Holy Spirit, trials, temptations, and persecutions, and a humble heart that recognizes its own insufficiencies.

“But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.”—*Luke 8:15*.

More Food for the Little Flock —

The key to growth is patience. Jesus tells us, “In your patience possess ye your souls.” The key characteristic of the 144,000 is their patience. “Here is the patience of the saints.” Paul writes to the Hebrews, “For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” James tells us, “But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” *Luke 21:19, Revelation 14:12, Hebrews 10:36, James 1:4*.

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.’ The purest joy springs from the deepest humiliation. The strongest and noblest characters are built on the foundation of patience, love, and submission to God’s will.”—*Acts of the Apostles, pg. 319*.

Conclusion

At every step, Satan seeks to destroy the word of God that is springing forth in the heart. First, he tries to keep us from understanding the value of what we have. If that fails, he tries to keep us from recognizing our own condition and great need. He wants us to be content with where we are; he works to draw our attention to ourselves and to what we can do. Satan knows if we trust in God, we will have power, so he seeks to lead us to trust in ourselves. If this fails, he sows pleasures, temptations, and the deceitfulness of riches in our lives to choke out the Word. Only by careful vigilance and continual self-inspection will we have any hope of recognizing our defects. Thankfully, God often allows us to pass through difficult experiences that teach us our own defects. When we are brought into straight places, we should ask God what lesson He is intending to teach us. Maybe we will find some rocks in the soil of our hearts that need breaking, or some soft, rubbery thorns to pull out. We might even find ourselves trampling on truth. These are good things to discover now; it would be to our eternal loss if we discovered them after probation closes.

For a finished work

Jonathan Taylor

Wisdom is justified of all her children. -Luke 7:35