

Your Kingdom Come

PART 9: 'PARABLE OF THE SOWER'

"And the disciples came and said to (Jesus), "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered and said, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given." (Matthew 13:10-11)

There are actually 60 parables of Jesus in the Bible. Some of them are repeated in the Gospels and so the number of individual parables is 43. Some of those parables are specifically about the kingdom of heaven and they are grouped together in Matthew chapter 13 and Mark chapter 4. The first of those parables is the parable of the sower.

This is one of the most well-known of Jesus' parables and arguably the most important. That's not my opinion, Jesus Himself said in the Gospel of Mark, *"Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables?"* (Mark 4:13). So Jesus is suggesting that the parable of the sower is the key to unlocking all the other parables and so I want us to look at this parable today because it contains some foundational truths for kingdom living.

In this parable we have the illustration of the nature and the purpose for the Word of God. Now I really value the voice of God, more than I can explain, but my value for the voice of God has to be represented in my value for Scripture. If I value the voice of God above Scripture, then I am open to deception. The voice of God will never contradict Scripture.

In a day when it's so easy to have the Bible in print and on our devices and in many different translations - there's absolutely no excuse for Biblical illiteracy. So we all should give ourselves to the study of Scripture, but it is the voice of God through the Holy Spirit that brings the Word of God to life for us and in us. Without the voice of God, through the Holy Spirit, the Bible is just a dusty old book with no power to change us or the world around us. So in this parable Jesus says that if we are to know what all His other parables are about we need to understand this one. Now the Word of God is the seed and the human heart is the soil. Tender soil receives the Word deeply and the life of God then brings about the change that God intended. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul writes this:

"For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe." (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

In the original Greek language behind this verse, the word of God actually represents or contains the energy of God. So when God speaks to us, it comes in seed form and the energy of God, brings forth the fruitfulness that He intended. So the heart is the soil and the seed is the Word of God. Most people read the parable of the sower in Matthew 13. But today I want to read Mark's version in chapter 4 of his gospel. But before I do that, I want to take you to a couple of other verses first – in Hebrews chapter 5 and James chapter 1. I just want to set the stage here for a few minutes before we get into the main text.

I am sure you will have heard all this before but it's good to be reminded. My favourite saying from Martin Luther is, *"We need to hear the gospel every day, because we forget it every day."* Hearing the gospel is what recalibrates the compass of our heart, so we know exactly where 'true north' is; so we know why we are alive; so we know what we're on the earth to do; so we know what's important in God's eyes and what needs to become important in our eyes.

All of that is defined by hearing the simplicity, the purity and the power of the gospel every day!
Hebrews chapter five, reading from verse 12:

“ ... by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” (Hebrews 5:12-14)

So the Word of God comes to us in several forms, or the Word has several different roles or assignments, if you like. One is the ‘milk’ of the Word. The milk of the Word is that which comforts and encourages. The ‘meat’ of the Word is identified here as the Word of righteousness. The meat of the Word is that which provokes and brings about change. It's the transformational Word of God. It provokes us to recognize what God is telling us needs to happen and it brings us into a place where we yield to the purposes of God. So there's the milk – which comforts and encourages. Then there's the meat which confronts, exhorts and provokes us to change.

But the third role of the Word is in the area of promise. There are actually over 7,700 promises of God in the Scriptures. Time and time again the Word of God deposits promise in us and defines our hope-filled future and what is possible for us when we live on earth as it is in heaven. Now the Word of God may come in many forms, but these are three that we need to really clear. There is the comfort of the Word - the milk - that which soothes, gives peace and encourages us; then there's the Word of righteousness - that which exposes what's in us that needs to change and gives us the motivation to pursue that transformation. Then there's the third form in which the Word of God comes – the promise for a hopeful future.

Now verse 14 of Hebrews 5 then says that solid food belongs to those who are mature. That is those who by constant use have their senses trained to discern both good and evil. This is a really great verse and it so violates Western culture. It would be a lot easier in Eastern culture to adapt to this particular verse. Other translations say these mature people have ‘trained their senses’ to discern between good and evil. This verse basically says that your maturity as a believer is going to be measured by your ability to train your own senses to recognize a difference between good and evil. Our senses - sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch – all trained to discern. Everything about you was perfectly designed to recognize and fellowship with God. Everything about you - that includes every sense; every personality trait; everything in you that God put in you was designed so that you can recognize Him and commune with Him and enjoy fellowship with Him and minister with Him. Let's look at one more verse which we find in James chapter one.

“Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” (James 1:21)

Receive with meekness the implanted word. This is a wonderful picture that James is giving us here. The New American Standard Bible puts it this way, *“In humility (that's a condition of heart) in humility, receive the word implanted, which is able to save your soul.”* The ability is in the Word of God. The life is in the Word, not the soil. But the soil creates the condition, the atmosphere, but the energy of God is in the seed. The energy of God takes root in a person to illustrate who God is - it's always to reveal Him. Now let's go to Mark chapter four and look at the parable of the sower.

“Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”

And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of heaven ..." (Mark 4:1-11a)

Say this out loud with me: **To me it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of heaven.** God has already given us a key to perceive unseen realities. Skip down to verse 13.

"Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time.

When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful."
(Mark 4:13-19)

And then He goes on to talk about the seed that's planted in good soil. Ok, so the seed thrown on the wayside - this should be an obvious picture. It's on trampled ground, it's a hardened surface, it doesn't receive the seed, that seeds sits there on the surface so it's easy for the birds of the air to come and steal that seed. When there's hardness of heart in us, we may hear all the right things, but there's no breaking of the soil of our own hearts to receive that seed. So it's very easy for the enemy to come and take it away.

The second image is of rocky soil. Rocky soil should also be fairly easy to understand. The rocks in our soil, in our heart, are things like regret, resentment, bitterness and all the issues of heart that just never get dealt with season after season. Those things actually become part of our life and our personality and form barriers to the life-giving Seed of the Word of God. We may hear the Word, but there is no depth in us to receive what God is saying because the rocks are blocking the seed from going deep where it can germinate and grow and bear rich fruit.

Then there is the one which I want to talk to you about today, it's in verse 18 and that's when the seed is sown among thorns. This represents those of us who hear the Word, but then the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things, enter in and choke the Word. Listen to this carefully: you and I, with our thoughts, our attitudes and our appetites, have the capacity to put a stranglehold on the promise that God has given. Jesus is talking here about us giving thorns an opportunity to grow.

We all know from our own lawns and gardens that thorns and weeds grow bigger, faster and stronger than the good plants we want to grow. It's a weird thing – it's probably another result of the fall – I doubt there were any weeds or thorns in the Garden of Eden – but we don't know. In this parable, the meaning is clear. Here Jesus says the thorns of the world choke the Word of the Lord if we let them. That means the promise on your life can actually be choked or strangled by the deceitfulness of riches, the cares of this world, and the desire for other things.

Let's break down those three things. The term 'cares of this world' actually comes from two words in the Greek. The first means 'divided' and the second is 'mind.' So the thorn to avoid here is a divided mind. A lot of people experience anxiety, confusion and stress because their mind is divided. They have too many options; they have Jesus and all these other options. And that creates a conflict for them which ultimately chokes the good seed – the clear, unambiguous Word of God.

Years ago I remember reading a story about this guy who was a great athlete and loved competition. He loved sports of all kinds. He ended up in a horrible accident and lost an arm. He spent a lot of time after that trying to find some kind of a sport that he could be involved in with only one arm. He ended up choosing the sport of handball. Now if you have ever played proper handball you will know it's quite painful. And it's a very intense and competitive sport. Well this one-armed man became quite good over time and was crowned the club champion and ended up competing at a state level where he finally won first place.

Following his championship match, a newspaper writer wanted to interview him. His first question was this: *"How is it that a man with only one hand can defeat all your opponents who can play with two hands?"* He said, *"That's easy: options."* The newspaper guy asked him what he meant by 'options' He said, *"Well, when the ball comes off the wall, my opponent has to decide what hand he's going to use, whereas I only have one option. My decision was made for me when I lost my arm – so I only have one option and that means it's easier for me to win."*

Friends, I believe many of us allow ourselves too many options and at that point we invite confusion. When you invite confusion, you actually create the atmosphere for anxiety, worry, and unnecessary stress. Just like that handball champion, we will always have the upper hand, when we only have one option. Our only option should be, *"I'm hungry for the will of God. I don't care what it tastes like in the moment. It's what I'm hungry for. It's what I want."* In John 4:34 Jesus said, *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work."* Now I am sure you know that sometimes the will of God brings a sour or bitter taste to the mouth – but it's always pleasant to the stomach. The will of man is often sweet to the taste - but it turns sour in the stomach. There's something about the will of God that nourishes and strengthens us deep down – even if it's not pleasant at the time.

So here we have this issue of the cares of this world – which equates to a divided mind and it always leads to anxiety and worry. So think about it this way: every moment that you and I spend in worry and anxiety, we are actually feeding the thorns, the weeds that strangles that promise over our lives and our destiny. Every moment that I spend in worry and anxiety, I'm actually feeding the beast that is working to put a stranglehold over the promises of God for my life. The devil cannot read our thoughts but he can certainly read the thoughts he puts into our minds. And he can tell before we can when one of his suggestions, the Bible calls them fiery darts, has made it past our shield of faith, because it affects our countenance. Such is the result of the thorn of the cares of this world, or more precisely the divided mind.

The second thorn is the deceitfulness of riches. Notice it doesn't say riches. It says there's a deceitfulness that can come with riches if we are not alert. Now riches includes money, resources, income, what we own and all our possessions, but it also includes our position, title, accomplishments and the abundance that we have our life. The deceitfulness that comes with riches is when it makes a rich person think they have power. This affects us all because on a grand scale, we are all rich and with riches there is often an illusion of power and personal significance. That increases with greater possessions and more money. But neither are true. Neither riches nor poverty create our heart attitude – but they can reveal our heart. Let me say that again: neither riches nor poverty create heart, they reveal heart.

People ask the question, 'how much is too much money?' It depends on your heart. It's whatever amount causes you to not trust anymore. For one person, having \$10,000 in the bank may cause them to no longer trust God because they only trust Him when they're in constant need and constant prayer and constant dependency. As soon as they get a little nest-egg it can so easily replace trust. How much is too much? It's whatever amount replaces trust. For another person, it literally could be \$100 million - because their life may be more designed around trust.

True spirituality is a relationship of trust. It's not what I own or don't own. So much wealth is used to create image and image is just the soul-less attempt to create identity. It's the counterfeit role of creating identity in the life of a believer. My identity is not in what I own. It's not in my title. It's not even in how God uses me. It's none of those things. I am a child of God who was adopted by the Most Gracious father and my identity is in the One who called me to Himself. That's it entirely. Everything else is a bonus. Everything else is extra. Everything else is secondary in importance and will never define who I am. But the deceitfulness of riches will create a sense of entitlement and a sense of identity that is deceiving.

And that leads right into the third thorn which will grow up and choke the Word of God in our heart and that's *"the desire for other things."* This is when we desire and pursue things outside of the dominion of God. 'If I could just have this position; if I could just have this marriage; if I could just have this bank balance; if I could just have this education; If I could just drive this car; if I could just have this spiritual gift . . . then I know I would be happy.' We pray for it because we want it to be God's will for us but that appetite pulls us out of our lane and away from God's best for us. It's the appetite itself which creates the thorns which choke the promises of God over our life.

What I'm hoping and praying for is that you and I would grow profoundly in this area of trust. I long for us all to come to a place where we would say, *"I only want what comes from God's hand. I will not pursue anything in life that is not in His heart, His plan, His will for me."* It's the desire for other things which chokes the actual destiny of God over our life. It has to do with appetite. It has to do with stewardship. It has to do with the divided mind. These are the areas that, monitored well, keep us in our lane, so that when our journey ends we will hear those incredible words, *"Well done, good and faithful servant."*

I've been praying that over my own life that I will see every word God has promised fulfilled; that He will be revealed for Who He is through every thought, every word and every deed in my life. I pray that over you too, I pray that the Lord would help us all to be good stewards of the Word. If we truly want to see God's kingdom come and God's will done in us, through us and around us, then we really need to get this parable. If we want to live 'on earth as it is in heaven' every moment of every day, then we need to understand what Jesus is teaching here about the priority of the Word of God.

We need to receive the truth which Jesus gave His disciples that day and the truth He is giving us today through His Holy Spirit when He says: *"To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of heaven."* So let's personalise that again and say this together, out loud:

To me it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of heaven.

Brothers and sisters, I believe that a lot of the mystery of the kingdom of heaven has been revealed in the eight sermons thus far in this teaching series. So I really encourage you to go back and re-visit all that teaching and let God open your eyes, your ears and your heart to the wonder, the glory and the life-changing reality of truly living on earth as it is in heaven.

However, I need to warn you that the real meat of this teaching is still to come. I expect the next sermon in particular will contain some rather large chunks of juicy spiritual meat upon which to chew – and large enough to choke some of us if we have not allowed God to prepare us through these first eight sermons. So if you have the courage to continue this journey as we explore what really happens when the kingdom of heaven becomes a reality in us and around us, then I look forward to us wrestling with some hard truths when we are together again.