

## THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Week #1 of the 3-Week Series, "Parables of the Bible"

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So, Ervin Seale in his book, "Live and Learn," says that Jesus' greatest burden in his ministry was teaching the kingdom of heaven. Thirteen times in Jesus' parables, he began it saying, "*The kingdom of heaven is like ...*" And the kingdom represents a place that is ruled with an authority that is total and supreme power.

Now, the word "heaven" means that it is the spiritual, non-physical, invisible place and world. The kingdom of heaven is the power in the realm of the mind and spirit and consciousness. And Jesus was trying to teach us that we are all kings and rulers of our own kingdom. And the parables were to help us take control of our minds and our lives so we could bring forth the glory of God.

So, today we are going to begin a three-week series looking at the Sermon by the Sea, which is a sermon by Jesus that was entirely made up of parables, of stories. You know, the word "parable" actually means to compare ... and usually compare to simple everyday things like fish, coins, vineyards, flowers, seeds. Every parable has two stories: a literal story, and then also a deeper spiritual insight.

You know, parables are designed to be mental transformers to shift the mind of the reader or the listener. To see a simple story and get it like, "*Oh; that's what that's about.*" To awaken to something deeper and more profound through the simple. Not just being told what to believe, but to figure it out for ourselves and to be changed at a much deeper level.

So, today we're going to begin with the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13. So, I'll read it to you and we'll talk about it:

*"A farmer went out to sow his seed. And he was scattering the seed, and some fell along the hard path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among the thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown. To those who have ears, let them listen."*

It's a very, very simple story. And you could think, "*Oh, that's a lovely story about good farming tips or how to place seeds in soil.*" But it's actually more profound, which we'll check out in a moment.

Now, back in Biblical times, a farmer had to spread and sow seed by hand. And so, he would have a kind of case around his shoulder, and with his other hand, he would just throw the seeds on the field ... and throw them abundantly so that there would be enough and everywhere to grow and have a harvest. And it's actually called "broad casting." So, they would broad cast the seeds everywhere.

And seeds spiritually represent the unlimited goodness and abundance of God: the potential in all of its forms for peace and love and wisdom and guidance and inspiration and goals and dreams and harmony ... of all the good thing; all the good that we can think of. Seeds represent that potential goodness.

The parable talks about four types of soils, and we see how important the role soils play in growing seeds and producing a good crop. And those four types of soils really represent four mindsets that, like soil, play an important role in what we harvest and grow and achieve in our lives.

Now, as I mentioned, the seeds were broad cast all around. They were everywhere. And so, within a lack of seeds, the question is: what is the quality of the soil in our lives? The quality of our mind ... and is it ready to receive and to prepare to grow and to have a greater harvest?

So, we're going to look at the four types of soil where the seed fell and how it relates to our mindsets.

The first one says that there was **a hard path** and they fell on the path and the birds came and ate them up quickly. Now, the hard path means that it was well-traveled; that it was stomped on a lot; that it was really, really packed down; that it was impenetrable. So, a hard path really represents a mind that's of someone who might be a little bit hard-headed or stubborn. A mind that is maybe not open and receptive to new ideas; not really willing to listen to other ways of thinking.

How many people have ever been or ever known someone who might have been a little hard-headed? Maybe a little rigid, inflexible, or closed-minded? How many people have ever been or known somebody that was profoundly negative and would throw cold water on just about everything and think, *"Oh, that'll never work. That'll never happen."* You know, that level of negativity in the mindset would be equal to trying to grow something on that hard path. The conditions were not right, and it would not happen.

This kind of mindset also shows up in just choosing to do nothing and not trying anything new. This mindset also shows up as someone who might be cynical or pessimistic; dogmatic or skeptical. And what happens with a mindset like that often is: opportunities are missed. The chances just go by.

You know, it says that the seeds were eaten up. They were wasted. They were lost and unused in this kind of mindset. You know, new ideas, new opportunities and relationships cannot take root. And so, they get gobbled up in this kind of mental soil.

You know, sometimes we have a negative mindset or we're rigid in our outlook, and we wonder, "Why isn't my life getting any better?" Not realizing we are the ones that are stopping the growth. We are the ones that are stopping greater things coming forth.

So the second type of soil that the seeds fell upon was, it says that **rocky places with a little soil** that springs up and then gets scorched. How many people have ever been excited about some new goal, new project, new relationship, writing a book, some invention you got? And you're all juiced and jazzed about it, and then you find out how much work it really takes, and your passion fizzles? [Congregants laugh] Anybody ever have a pattern in your life that you get excited, and then it fizzles? You get excited, and then it fizzles?

You know, the rocky ground, it says, with the little soil springs up quickly and then dies. Now, having enthusiasm is a good thing. But having it quickly fade is not a good thing, because it shows there's no depth of soil. There's no really following up and really taking grasp of it.

You know, sometimes we can tell people about all our dreams, our goals, our dreams. *"Oh, I've got all these great plans!"* And then do nothing to support it and make it happen. And sometimes we can start off so ambitious and just be on fire; then something goes wrong and we get discouraged. Something goes wrong and we feel down. Something goes wrong and we just want to give up.

Or this mindset is a mindset that can also just choose to never start. Can just make excuses, procrastinate. You ever know somebody who says, *"I've just got to get all my ducks in a row. Just as soon as I get it all perfect and ready, then I'll start."*

This kind of mindset, really like spiritual teachings -- like knowing that we are creators, but just haven't grasped the depth of commitment and passion to actually follow through on it, to see it in the times

where growth may not be happening. You know, they don't trust it enough to actually just keep following through and enduring.

Now, the third type of soil that the seeds fell on says that it was **good soil, but they were among the thorns** that sprang up and choked the plants. So, it's saying there's some good soil here; that there were some talent and success and, you know, positive ideas. There was connection. All these good things that we have going for us. But somehow, these thorns ended up choking and killing the good work that we did.

You know, sometimes we succeed in our lives, but allow something to distract or even undermine the good work that we've done, because there's something deeper in us represented as this thorn, you know, that can kill it, that impacts us. And probably the greatest thing for all of us is fear. You know, the fear of failure; sometimes the fear of success scares us. And we end up sabotaging our own success because of fear. Sometimes our own self-doubt, thinking, *"Oh, I'm never going to be able to do this. Who am I kidding?"*

Anybody, everybody heard of the imposter syndrome? I mean, I was talking to somebody just last week that is a success in my eyes, and they were saying, *"There's a little part of me that's scared they'll find out I'm not really that good; that I'm really not as great a leader or not as great at whatever."* It is amazing the thorns that we have that are buried deeper in us!

Even with all the talents that we have; even with all the achievements and all the success, there's a little something. And whether it's fear, whether it's a lack of belief in ourselves; maybe it's our over-concern about other people's opinions. Maybe we're holding on to some pain in the past. Maybe there's some grudge. Maybe there's some shame. Or maybe there's some regret. And what it's really saying is that we can't let all the great talent and all the good stuff that's in our lives be ruined by the thorns of fear and negativity and self-doubt and unworthiness. That we need to do some work on ourselves. I mean, even with good (soil), thorns can actually kill our dreams and minimize the level of success ... or at least reduce it.

You know, one of the stories I've told a couple of times about Jerry Rice, the great wide receiver for 49ers. How he said at his Hall of Fame induction; he said the one thing he really regrets is that he was always in fear that somebody would catch him; that somebody would take his job. And he said he did it so much that he didn't enjoy a lot of the success that he had. So sometimes, even with success, sometimes these thorns can stop us from enjoying it. Not just achieving great things ... but even when we achieve great things, it can rob us from enjoying the journey and the experience.

I've shared this, but it's one of my favorite Charlie Brown cartoons. And Charlie Brown is coming in from the outfield with the ball, and he's about to hand it to Lucy, who's the manager. And he says, *"Sorry I dropped that easy fly ball, manager. I thought I had it. But then I remembered all the ones I dropped before. I guess the past got into my eyes."*

Sometimes we let the past get into our eyes: the mistakes that we've made or the hurts that we've gone through or the failures that we've experienced. And we let that color now. We let it shape now. We have it diminish our experience now.

So my question for all of us to ask ourselves: In what way is my mind undermining my own peace? Undermining my happiness? Undermining my success? Undermining my own progress? What are the thorns in my life that I really need to take a look at? Is it fear? Is it shame? Is it unworthiness? Is it the past? Because good soil should not be spoiled by a few thorns.

And then the final one is seed fell upon good soil. And it said it yielded 100 times. One yielded 60 times. One yielded 30 times. And it's really showing that the quality of the soil – the higher the quality, the higher the yield. The Scripture says we shall reap as we sow.

And based on what we're reaping in our lives now, how happy are you with what you're sowing?

And the good news is: we can always improve what we're sowing and how we're sowing. Now, good soil is represented by a mind that is open, that is receptive, that is positive, that is optimistic, that is wise, that is understanding, that is grateful, that is creative, that is loving, that is caring, that is nurturing, that is kind, that is patient, that is grounded, that is hopeful, that believes, that is generous, that is childlike, that is disciplined and a constant learner ... just to name a few. [Congregants laugh]

And the point I'm trying to make is: it is unlimited – the mental power and potential that we have within us.

I remember I saw Zig Ziglar a million years ago. Remember Zig Ziglar, motivational speaker? He was amazing. And one of the exercises he had us do was get an 8-1/2 by 11 (piece of paper), and you had to write down all the qualities that you'd like to have, that you could possibly think of. And he'd have, "*I am a good finder,*" and "*I am positive,*" and "*People really like me.*" You know, "*I am good at this,*" or "*I smile all the time.*" "*I'm a positive person.*" "*I have a happy outlook on life.*" "*I like people.*"

And it had to be both-sided. And I, at the end of the exercise, was amazed at how many positive things are available for us. And I probably didn't even come close to filling up the card. So, the point I'm trying to make is that: our minds are unlimited! We just need to expand and open them. They're fertile soil! They can grow amazing things! We have amazing mindsets and potentials.

How many people have heard of the work of Carol Dweck and her research about fixed mindset and growth mindsets? Actually, you introduced me to her. A growth mindset is defined as this: It is a belief that intelligence and abilities can be developed with effort, with strategy, and with persistence. And conversely, a fixed mindset believes that things are just the way they are. That they are not going to get any better.

A growth mindset individual embraces challenges, because they believe they can learn and improve and get better, where a fixed mindset person wants to avoid challenges. You know, a growth mindset person persists through setbacks, while a fixed-minded person just wants to give up. A growth-minded person sees effort as a path to mastery, and not just something that is frivolous or shows a sign of low ability.

Growth-minded people learn from criticism; fixed-minded people feel threatened or hurt. Growth-minded people find inspiration in other people's success, while fixed-minded people feel threatened and feel diminished by other people's success.

So, my question for all of us is: Are you closer right now to a growth mindset or are you closer now to a fixed mindset? Is your mind as good of a soil as you would like it to be for whatever it is that you're facing in your life now? How would you like to improve the soil of your mind to better handle what's going on in your life and to be able to progress to greater levels of success?

You know, this parable is warning us: Don't be hard-headed. You know, things don't grow in that kind of mindset. It doesn't help us. You know, don't just get excited and then fizzle and excited and fizzle, and then give up. Don't let your genius and the talents that you've got be spoiled by whatever thorns that might be in your subconscious. And use the good soil. Keep cultivating your good soil.

I saw something that said, two prisoners behind bars; one saw mud and the other stars.

And the question is: When you look out the window of your life, what are you seeing? Are you seeing mud? Are you seeing stars? Are you seeing happiness and success? Are you seeing frustration and lack and limitation?

I love what John Milton said. He said, *"The mind is so powerful that it can make a heaven of hell or a hell of heaven."* I mean, are we making our lives hellish or are we making it heavenly?

A young minister gives his first sermon at his new church, and it was fantastic. They loved the sermon. The congregation loved him, and they were excited about the future with this new young minister.

The next Sunday, he gives the exact same talk. People were a little surprised, a little stunned. They said they still liked it, but obviously not as much as the first time they heard it the week before.

Third week comes' he gives the exact same talk again. Everyone is puzzled. They're concerned. *"Maybe we hired the wrong guy!"* Complaints started going to the board, and one of the board members went up to the new minister and said, *"What's up? The same sermon three times in a row? Three weeks in a row?"*

And the new minister says, *"Well, I was waiting for you all to practice the first one before I moved on to the second one."* Was it that bad?

So, what the parable is saying is: Your mind is your kingdom, and you are the ruler of your kingdom.

You know, I was reading an article about gardening, and it said that the soil is 90% the secret of a successful garden. And I would say the mind is 90% of a successful life.

You know, the soil needs four things: water, sunlight, weeding and some fertilizer. And I would say the mind needs that, as well. The mind needs water, which is to immerse your mind in the Mind of God. Quiet and relax your mind, because when you're immersed in the Mind of God, all that is not of God falls away. And then you are at one with the peace of God, the love of God, the wisdom and the allness and goodness of God.

The second one the mind needs is sunlight. Use your eye to see – to see the seeds of possibilities. What do you see for your life right now in five years or 10 years? What is your life calling you to create? In what way can you improve or heal certain areas of your life to bring the sunlight of your vision to see greater possibilities? That is good for the soil of your mind?

The third thing good for the soil of your mind is to make sure you weed it. You know, there's a line in Proverbs that says, *"Weed your mind like you weed your garden. Get rid of the things that are draining and blocking and sucking the nutrients and taking up extra space and blocking the flow of good."* Sometimes we hold on to resentments and bitterness and blame and pain, and we need to forgive. We need to release. We need to let go. We need to cleanse and purify our hearts. That is like weeding of the mind.

And finally, it's to fertilize it. You know, Jesus said, *"It is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom."* That means God isn't withholding anything from us! So, the only thing that ever limits the amount of good in our lives is how worthy we feel of receiving.

So, think about the amount of love in your life right now. And how worthy do you feel of experiencing even a fuller level of love and a deeper level of love? Think of the amount of prosperity and joy and success. How much can you open up to feel more worthy of success and prosperity and love and the best life you can think of?

You are God's beloved child in whom God is well pleased. God will not withhold. The question is: How much are you open to receive? And do you feel worthy? Because you are.

The message in the Parable of the Sower is to awaken the kingdom of heaven within us through the soil of our minds.

God bless you all.

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