

Jesus' Parables in Chronological Order

Parable #11 — Matthew 13:3-23 — Four types of soil

³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear.”

¹⁰ The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”

¹¹ He replied, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹² Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. ¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

“ ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. ¹⁵ For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. ¹⁷ For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. ²² The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

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1. When was the last time you “tuned out” a speaker?
2. Why would a farmer allow precious seed to land on the path, or rocks, or among thorns? Is he an irresponsible farmer scattering seeds at random?
3. What happened to each group of seeds?
4. How did Jesus conclude his parable? What did he mean by that? (13:9)
5. How much of the parable did the people understand? How much did the disciples understand? (13:9-10)
6. Why didn't the people or the disciples understand this parable?
7. Did Jesus design his parables to have trick meanings, hidden meanings, or more than one basic interpretation? Why do some listeners discover the truth in a parable and others do not?
8. Why do you suppose that this was among the first parables that Jesus told?
9. What kind of people today might be represented by the seed that fell on the path? (13:19)
10. Why couldn't those who received the word with joy stay faithful? (13:20-21)
11. What choked those who were represented by the seed that fell among the thorns? What other things (or people) might the thorns represent? (13:22)
12. Why is perseverance necessary for all who receive the Word? (Luke 8:15)
How long did it take for you to understand the gospel of Christ?
13. What kind of soil do you most resemble right now? What worries or temptations have hindered your growth as a Christian recently?
14. How could you listen more faithfully and intently to the voice of God? What will most help you be responsive to God in your study of the Bible?