

“Taking Root in Good Soil.” (Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23)

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Every parable Jesus teaches and explains is meant to disturb us and introduce us to the extraordinary understanding of God's grace, freely available to us. The parable of the sower talks about who receives God's grace and becomes a true disciple, and produces a good harvest of winning souls and living a life of righteousness. The parable of the Sower is found in all three synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is in Matthew 13, in Mark 4, and in Luke 8. It is a unique parable because it is the first Jesus uses, and it is one of the few that explain. To understand the parable of the Sower, we need to ask some questions. First, what is the context of the parable, and why does Jesus teach? Is it a response to a controversy? Is it an issue involving the disciples? Or is he having a tension with the Pharisees? When Jesus was teaching, he was surrounded by four different crowds at any given time. This enables us to make the second point: the identification of the character in this parable. So, what metaphorical images in this parable represent different characters in real life? Who is the Sower? What do the seeds stand for? What do the different types of soil represent, and to whom do they represent? The different types of soil represent the different responses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ that he teaches. The wayside in the parable represents those who are hostile to the Gospel, particularly the Pharisees and other religious leaders to whom the teachings of Jesus never take root in their lives. The stony ground represents the

crowd. The Bible says that the multitude gathered to listen to Him were excited about His teachings until the pressures of life came on, particularly the pressures of discipleship. The thorns represent people like Judas. Judas holds on to the teachings of Jesus in his heart until he cares more about his politics and his desire to make money and gain worldly riches, which ultimately choke him and prevent him from consuming the word of God and transforming himself. Some of us, like Judas, are too focused on our career growth, our financial well-being, the future of our children, and our comfort and retirement, and eventually forget to live a life filled with God's grace, to keep away from worshipping God, and failed to become righteous in our lives. The good soil represents the eleven disciples who remained faithful. The word takes root in them, and they produced a good harvest. Finally, does that image or character in the parable that represents God challenge the kind of understanding we have about the word of God? Where do we find the extraordinary grace that God promises to us?

When we read the Parable of the Sower, we are often struck by the sheer extravagance of the Sower. He throws seed everywhere: on the hard-packed walking path, over jagged rocks, right into briar patches, and finally onto clear, rich earth. In the ancient agricultural world, seed was precious capital. No logical farmer would waste it on rocks. We may wonder why the farmer in the parable throws seeds on the wayside? Any good farmer will tell you that it is not right to throw seeds on the wayside, stony soil, or thorny soil. The farmer knows pretty well that if the seeds are thrown on stony or thorny ground, he will not reap the harvest he wants. Then, why throw seeds on the stony ground? Why throw seeds on the thorny ground?

Here is where we find the grace of God. The farmer in the parable represents God. Yet, our God scatters the word of His grace with beautiful, reckless abundance. He excludes no one from hearing the truth. God never judges the ability to produce our harvest based on our capacity in our lives. In other words, while granting His grace to humanity, God never judges human capacity but allows humankind to attain salvation. That is why it is seen as God's extraordinary grace. But how we receive that extraordinary grace in our lives is the message that the parable of the Sower conveys to us. How do we take root in good soil and produce a good harvest in our lives? In this parable, we have a sower, seeds, and soil. Seeds represent the word of God, and with all the soil we have, we have three different components: a struggle, sustainability, and a surplus. What prevents the seed from growing is the struggle. Sustainability is how long the seed takes hold in the soil, and the surplus represents the harvest resulting from the seed taking root in good soil.

But Jesus shifts our focus quickly from the Sower to the dirt. The seed is perfect; it contains the ultimate potential for life. The variable that determines life or death, harvest or famine, is the condition of the soil. Today, we must ask an uncomfortable question of our own hearts:

What kind of ground are we? And how do we ensure we are taking deep root in good soil?

The Problem with the Seeds that do not grow and the Seeds that Take Shallow Root (Seeds on the Way Side and The Rocky Ground)

The seeds that fell by the wayside and on rocky ground struggle to grow. Now, what struggle is found in the wayside? What prevents the soil from taking root in the wayside? The birds

take the seed and feed on them. The bird represents Satan or evil that creeps into people's minds so that they do not listen to the word of God. Such people are non-believers, and they shut themselves out of the opportunity to receive God's grace.

Jesus explains that some seed falls on rocky ground. It springs up almost instantly because the soil is thin. But the moment the afternoon sun blazes, the plant withers because it has no deep root system. The seeds could not withstand the pressures imposed by the environment. It is another form of struggle. In our spiritual life we may experience momentary closeness to God and have the feeling of conversion of our hearts when we receive the word of God but are not ready to sustain it forever. The worldly pressures forces us to return to sinful life, and prevents us from becoming the disciples of Christ. We fail to realize that it is a shallow and transient faith and are not receptive enough to listen to and to receive the free grace available to us.

John Wesley often warned about this exact dynamic in early Methodist societies. He called it "enthusiasm" without substance—moments where people were deeply moved by an emotional sermon or a beautiful song, but lacked an enduring foundation.

A shallow heart is highly reactive. It loves the *benefits* of faith—the joy, the community, the comfort—but flees its *costs*—discipline, repentance, and standing firm during trials. If your faith only exists when life is smooth, your roots are merely scraping the surface of the rock. Good soil requires depth. It requires letting God dig past our emotional surfaces and break up the hard, hidden stones of pride and self-reliance.

The Choked Root (The Thorny Ground)

The next environment Jesus warns against is the thorny ground. Here, the roots reach a bit deeper, but they are competing for survival. As the good seed grows, weeds and briars grow right alongside it, blocking the sunlight and choking out the nutrients.

Jesus explicitly identifies these thorns as two things: *the cares of this world* and *the deceitfulness of riches*.

In his notes on Matthew 13, John Wesley wrote that "cares are thorns to the poor; wealth to the rich." He observed that money and anxiety are profoundly deceitful because they slowly steal our spiritual focus while convincing us we are perfectly safe.

Many of us are not in danger of abandoning our faith out of hatred for God; we are simply in danger of crowding Him out. We choke our roots with endless digital distractions, career anxieties, and the pursuit of material comfort. The plant looks green for a while, but it remains utterly barren. It yields no fruit because it has no room to breathe.

Cultivating the Good Soil

Finally, we look to the good soil. Luke's version of this parable tells us that the good soil represents those who hear the word, *"hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience."*

Notice that good soil is not something we naturally possess; it must be actively prepared and maintained. Cultivating good soil requires three specific habits:

1. **Daily Tilling (Openness to Truth):** We must approach God's word with humility, allowing His truth to convict us and break through our daily stubbornness.
2. **Weeding (Intentional Renunciation):** We must actively prune away the minor anxieties and excessive desires for material things before they can strangle our prayer lives.
3. **Patience in the Dark:** Root systems grow underground where nobody can see them. True spiritual maturity takes time, consistency, and quiet discipline.

When a crop takes deep root below, it naturally bears fruit above. It yields a harvest—thirty, sixty, or a hundred times what was sown. This fruit shows up as love, joy, peace, long-suffering, and an active desire to do good to everyone around us.

Conclusion: Where Are Your Roots Located?

Brothers and sisters, the Sower is still sowing today. The seed of the Gospel is falling right now into the fields of our minds and hearts.

Do not allow the enemy to snatch it away from a hardened mind. Do not let superficial emotions give you a temporary, rootless faith. And do not let the frantic pace of this world choke out your potential.

Let us clear the rocks. Let us pull up the thorns. Let us anchor our lives so deeply in the love and grace of Jesus Christ that, when the storms come and the sun blazes, we do not wither. Instead, may we stand firm, deeply rooted, bearing rich fruit for the Kingdom of God.

Amen.