

Noon Bible Study: Matthew 13 (Part 2)

Matthew 13.18-23: Explanation of the Parable of the Sower

In this section Jesus reveals the meaning of the parable of the Sower. But before we dive into the explanation, it is good to zoom out and note some important things about the parable. First, when the kingdom is spoken about in the gospels and the rest of the New Testament some verses speak of it as a present reality while others speak of it as a future reality. So, which it is? It's both, the kingdom of God is a present and future reality. Theologians call this the "Already/Not Yet" of the kingdom. The kingdom is already here but not yet fully. So, in chapter 13 there are 8 parables on the kingdom some refer to the present realities while others are future. The parable of the Sower describes a present reality of the kingdom, while the next parable is future oriented. Second, what is the primary purpose or focus of the sower? I believe the following quote answers this question, "the purpose of the parable of the sower is not to exhort believers but explain unbelief. Jesus and the disciples of faithfully proclaimed the kingdom message, but relatively few have grasped it." The opposition or apathy Jesus noticed is seen in 11.20, 12.2, 12.10, 12.14, 12.24. (David Turner, *Matthew: BECNT*, 341-42). Third, the audience for this explanation is not the crowds but the disciples. This parable explains to them why people are opposed or apathetic to the message they and their master preaches.

The Explanation

Jesus explains that the seed is the word of the kingdom. The four soils represent four categories of people and how they respond and receive the message of the kingdom. The sower first, applies to Jesus as the king who announces the kingdom's arrival, but it also has application to the disciples who also preached this message and finally the sower can be understood as you, me, and every faithful Christian who shares the gospel. This parable first has its application in Jesus' world and time but also gives understanding to our own world and experience in sharing the gospel.

Soil 1: Beside the Road (19)

This type of person hears the word. They may hear it on a Sunday morning, in someone's home, or on the street but while hearing they do not understand it. They understand the words being spoken to them, but they do not understand the spiritual realities they signify. As Jesus says in John 3.3 they cannot see the kingdom of God. And before the message has any chance of taking root, the evil one, snatches away

the message. This person's response to the gospel ranges from opposition, apathy, to confusion. The first roadblock to the gospel Satan.

Soil 2: The Rocky Places (20-21)

This type of person upon hearing the message receives it with joy, excitement, and eagerness. But they don't have any root. This response to the gospel may be emotionally driven or a desire to want the benefits of Christianity. But ultimately there's no substance in their understanding. This faith is light, shallow, and a counterfeit because when suffering and persecution comes, they fall away. This person doesn't see persecution as a blessing but something they want nothing apart of (5.11-12). The second roadblock to the gospel is suffering and persecution.

Soil 3: The Thorns (22)

This person hears the word, but the worries and riches of life compete for priority in his heart. This person is crushed and paralyzed by the uncertainties of life and doesn't see how the gospel gives them hope and security. Or this person looks to what this life can offer as a source of comfort, security, and pleasure, as opposed to the gospel. In either case the gospel has lower value when compared with the world. The third roadblock to the gospel is worry and wealth.

Soil 4: The Good Soil (23)

This person hears the word, understands it, and bears fruit. With this person they are rooted in the hope of the kingdom and know Jesus. This results in bearing fruit. In Matthew thus far fruit is understood to mean repentance (3.2,8; 4.17), answering the call to follow Jesus (11.28), and doing the will of God (12.50). In other words, fruit is demonstrating that one belongs to Jesus. Additionally, the fruit they bear is abundant. For this person, the roadblocks of Satan, suffering, and worry and riches to do not stand in their way.

Reflective Questions

- What does this parable teach us today?
- What are the roadblocks that stand in the way of the gospel? Have you encountered people who struggled with these things?