



Title: Standalone Lesson – The Parable of the Sower

Text: Matthew 13:1-23

Date: October 30, 2022

Main Idea: The gospel goes forward and lands liberally, but only one soil bears fruit.

Personal Study Guide

READ ENTIRE TEXTS: MATTHEW 13:1-23

Note to Group Leaders: This is a standalone lesson, so it is a break from Romans. As we move into Govenber and hear from Jim Britts this morning, it is good to re-orient our lives around the call to sow the seed of the gospel, and trust that it lands on good soil.

Highlight – What stands out?

1. What does verse 1 say is the setting for this narrative? Look back at Matthew 12:46-50. What has just happened?
2. Who is Jesus speaking to when he begins the parable?
3. Use the table below to fill in the “characters in the parable.” Sometimes the character in a parable is not an actual person. Write down as many details as you notice about the character (there are four “characters”)

Character	Details about the character

Matthew 13:14-15 directly quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10. Read the passage and notice the similarities and differences.

In Isaiah, God tells Isaiah to go to a rebellious people and tell them this message, but in Matthew 13:14-15, Jesus says Isaiah’s prophecy is _____.

The Parable of the Sower comes up in every one of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). In every instance it marks the beginning of the parables for that book. It's always mentioned in the context of Jesus explaining the parables.

Read Mark 4:1-20 and Luke 8:4-15

1. What similarities do you see between these accounts and Matthew 13:1-23?

2. What are the differences?

Explain – What does this mean?

1. What is the seed the sower is sowing?

2. How does Jesus' statement about the prophesy of Isaiah being fulfilled help you understand his interpretation of the parable? Hint: Notice especially who Jesus is giving his interpretation to in verses 10-11. Does he give his interpretation to the entire crowd that he gave the parable to?

3. Do you think this passage is teaching that there are four ways to respond to Jesus' message? Use your observations from the Highlight section help you with this answer.

4. Who does Jesus speak at after he finishes the parable? This is who he gives the interpretation to.

5. According to verses 11-15, why does Jesus speak in parables?

6. Jesus actually provides the interpretation for the parable (which is helpful for us!) in verses 18-23. Fill in the table below with different soils and their explanation.

Soil	Result/Explanation

Apply – How does this change me?

1. If every Gospel writer who has parables (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) includes this parable first, and if Jesus uses this parable to explain all parables to us, then this section of scripture must be very important. The purpose of the parables is to reveal truths about Christ's kingdom and to conceal truths about Christ's kingdom. How have you seen God's word work in people's lives this way—either leading them to respond in faith or leading them to respond in rejection of him?

Respond – What’s my next step?

Missions Moment:

1. Where and to whom can you sow the seed of the gospel this week? This month? This year?

Pray:

1. Spend some time in your Group praying for Jim Britts and his work in San Diego.
2. Spend some time in your Group praying for the New York Team who is currently serving in New York this weekend.
3. Pray for our IMB Missionaries.

Go:

1. Participate in Goveber, meaning you grab a Passport from Matt Hubbard (matt@ibclr.org) or in the North Entrance on 11/6.
2. Pray about going on a Go Trip in 2023. There are family friendly trips (like the one to San Diego or NYC) and trips all over the world to assist our Go Partners in ministry.

Give:

1. The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering begins at the end of November. This supports the work of IMB Missionaries all over the world. Learn more at <https://www.imb.org/generosity/lottie-moon-christmas-offering/>

Commentary: Matthew 13:1-23 by David Platt

For many people, Matthew 13 is a confusing and perplexing chapter. Parables about sowing seeds and nets drawing fish to the shore can leave us scratching our heads. However, this chapter contains several keys to understanding our lives and the place where we find ourselves in history. These parables of the kingdom need to be understood and believed so that we might follow Jesus more faithfully and live for His kingdom.

Rather than treating each parable separately, taking each apart in great detail, we'll consider the parables in Matthew 13 collectively and then conclude by asking, "What does this mean, and why is it important?" Matthew 13:1 begins the third major teaching section from Jesus in this Gospel. The first major teaching section was the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7, and the second was Jesus' speech, or summons, to His disciples in Matthew 10. Here in Matthew 13, Jesus' teaching largely takes the form of parables.

In order to understand Matthew 13, we need to place ourselves in the broader context of Matthew's Gospel. In Matthew 3:2 John the Baptist announced, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" He had proclaimed that the King, Christ, would "baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (v. 11) and that a "winnowing shovel is in His hand" (v. 12). As Judge, Jesus would separate the wheat from the chaff. Then John baptized Jesus, the anointed Messiah, the One who had come to usher in the kingdom of God (vv. 13–17). Drastic changes looked to be imminent.

But now in Matthew 13, ten chapters later, very little substantive change has happened. Sure, Jesus has healed and taught some people, but most were keeping a safe distance from Him. Religious people in particular were standing up against Him, even plotting to kill Him (Matt 12:14). Following these parables in chapter 13, Jesus' neighbors were ready to disown Him (vv. 53–58). Needless to say, there were a lot of people very confused about whether Jesus really was the Messiah, including the crowds (chap. 12) and John the Baptist himself (chap. 11). Even the disciples must have been a little perplexed, as things weren't shaping up the way they had hoped.

Many Jews expected all of Israel to flock to the Messiah and rally around Him, yet only a few people were rallying around Jesus. And it certainly didn't look like He was ushering in a whole new kingdom. As chapter 13 begins, interest had grown and the crowds were gathered around Jesus, even to the point where He had to get into a boat and go out into the water in order to see all of them (vv. 1–2). And what did Jesus do? He decided to tell them some stories about farmers, seeds, weeds, bread, pearls, and homeowners. How's that for a message from the Messiah! We need to see what these words that confused crowds two thousand years ago mean to our lives today. To do this, we need to start by asking four questions.

Four Questions

What is a parable?

This is the first question we must answer as we approach Matthew 13. A parable is **a practical story, often framed as a simile** (a comparison using "like" or "as"), **that illustrates spiritual truth**. There are all kinds of parables in the Gospels, and some of them are famous, such as the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32), the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), and the Lost Sheep (Matt 18:10–14). These stories draw a comparison in order to illustrate a spiritual truth.

How do we understand parables?

This question is important because different parables have been interpreted (and misinterpreted) in different ways throughout the history of the church. Some people have tried to figure out the meaning of a parable by finding parallels for every detail.

For example, one understanding of the parable of the Good Samaritan makes the following connections: the man who was beaten is a sinner; the priest stands for the law; the Levite stands for the sacrifices; Jesus is the Samaritan who pays the bill; the inn is the church where believers are cared for; the two silver coins are baptism and the Lord's Supper; the innkeeper is the apostle Paul. Now that's certainly a creative interpretation, but there's only one problem: neither Jesus nor the Bible ever tells us that this is what the parable means. So how *do* we understand parables so that we are not abusing or misunderstanding them?

We should keep at least three principles in mind as we seek to understand parables: **listen from the hearer's perspective, look for the main point, and then let the truth change your perception.** We'll take those principles in order.

In terms of listening from the hearer's perspective, we've got to put ourselves in the shoes of people who first heard parables in order to understand what they were hearing. Jesus uses pictures and stories that are far more familiar to first-century Jews than twenty-first-century Americans. We need to ask ourselves questions such as, What would they hear? What would stick out to them? How would they respond at different points in the story? What kind of emotions would rise up when they heard the word "Samaritan?" I recall sitting in a Middle Eastern country sharing the story of the prodigal son with a Muslim man, and his eyes perked up when I said that the father went running to his son. He claimed that a father who had been offended like that would never run to his son. This man's reaction taught me more about the parable.

Next, in order to understand a parable, we need to look for the main point. There's usually one main point in any parable, or at most two or three, depending on the various elements in the story. As we read the parable, we should try to identify the primary truth the author is communicating.

Once we are able to discern the main point, we need to let that truth change our perception. After all, the whole point of parables is to challenge the way people think about something by using a kind of backdoor route—through story. This is exactly what Jesus was doing in Matthew 13.

Why do we have parables?

So far we've answered the questions "What is a parable?" and "How do we understand parables?" The third question we need to answer is, "Why do we have parables?" In other words, why not just state the main point instead of telling a story? This is exactly the question that the disciples ask Jesus in verse 10: "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answers them in the next verse: "Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to them" (v. 11). Jesus points to two purposes for parables, and these purposes are different based on two different kinds of audiences. This two-fold purpose is clear even in the way this chapter is structured, as these first four parables are told to the crowds, while the last four parables and their explanations are told only to the disciples.

First, **Jesus was revealing truth to those who were believing the mysterious.** For the disciples, the secrets of the kingdom of heaven had been given for them to know by God. These "secrets" of the kingdom may also be referred to as "mysteries" (NKJV). That word *mystery* or *secret* refers to something that was hidden in the Old Testament and now made known in the New Testament. It was no secret that God

was going to send the Messiah to usher in a kingdom; what was a secret was what kind of Messiah God would send, and how that Messiah would conquer—not through political struggle or physical force, but through selfless love and a sacrificial death on a cross. So for those who were trusting that Jesus was indeed the promised King, the parables were helping them understand what kind of King He was and what kind of kingdom He was ushering in.

The disciples were greatly privileged to hear and understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, for **this was evidence of God's mercy**. Jesus says, “But your eyes are blessed because they do see, and your ears because they do hear! For I assure you: Many prophets and righteous people longed to see the things you see yet didn't see them; to hear the things you hear yet didn't hear them” (vv. 16–17). God's grace is all over this passage. To the disciples it had been “given” to know these things (v. 11). Given by whom? By God! And more would be given by God (v. 12). If we ask why the disciples understood and believed while so many others didn't, the answer is that it was purely the mercy of God.

Have you ever wondered why you as a follower of Christ see forgiveness in the cross, when so many other people in the world see foolishness (1 Cor 1:18)? Is it because you are better, smarter, more humble, or more religious? No, it is only because God is merciful. He has opened your eyes to see and your ears to hear. You are also blessed to live in a time when we have the full revelation of God's Word as it points to Jesus Christ. Something Old Testament saints only could have longed for, believers now possess.

But what about those who were rejecting Christ, those who were refusing to see Him as the Messiah? The parables have a different purpose for them. Matthew gives us the second purpose of parables: **Jesus was concealing truth from those who were denying the obvious**. In spite of miracle after miracle, teaching after teaching, the crowds and religious leaders refused to believe in Jesus as the Christ. Jesus said that it “has not been given to them” to understand these stories (v. 11), and that even the understanding they had would be taken away (v. 12). Then in verse 13 Jesus tells us why He is doing things this way: “For this reason I speak to them in parables, because looking they do not see, and hearing they do not listen or understand.” Jesus follows this statement by quoting from Isaiah 6 where, right after the prophet's commissioning, God told Isaiah that he would preach but the people would not listen, for their hearts were dull, their ears were shut, and their eyes were closed (Isa 6:9–10).

Many people in Jesus' day saw His miracles outwardly, but they refused to see what those miracles said about Him. They heard what He had to say about being the Lord of the Sabbath, but they didn't understand the ramifications of such a pronouncement. Jesus knew that these parables would not be rightly understood, and according to Isaiah 6:9–10, **this was evidence of God's judgment**. Even though many had the person of Christ and the words of Christ right in front of them, they were rebelling against Him.

What is the kingdom of heaven?

All of these parables in Matthew 13 are about the kingdom of heaven, which leads to the fourth and final question. Matthew uses the phrase “kingdom of heaven” 32 times, and it plays an important part in His overall message. Much could be said here because this is a subject that spans all of Scripture. In short, the kingdom of heaven is

the redemptive rule or reign of God in Christ. The fundamental word is “rule” or “reign” because when we talk about the kingdom, we are talking about the authority and sovereignty of God as King. Notice also that God’s reign is “redemptive.” In one sense, we could say that God has authority and sovereignty over everything in the universe. The kingdom of heaven, then, could refer to everything in the world, because God has rule and reign over everything in the world. However, even though Scripture clearly teaches that God rules over all things, this kind of comprehensive rule is not the primary way that the phrase “kingdom of heaven” is used in Matthew’s Gospel. Instead, the kingdom of heaven is used to describe how God is asserting His authority in the redemption of sinners through Christ, the promised Messiah. A few examples may help clarify this point.

In Matthew 6:9–10 Jesus says, “Therefore, you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, Your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Jesus is telling the disciples to pray that God would assert His redemptive rule and reign across the earth in Christ. Matthew 6:33 communicates a similar idea: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.” Jesus was instructing His disciples not to worry about their basic needs, but rather to seek and submit to the redemptive rule and reign of God in every facet of their life. The things that seem to be so worrisome—food, clothing, etc.—will be provided for them by God. Finally, in Mark 10:15 Jesus says, “I assure you: Whoever does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” The point is that followers of Christ must, like a child, receive and embrace the rule or reign of God through Christ in their life. This perspective on the kingdom of heaven helps us understand why Jesus’ teaching on the subject is so important.

Before leaving the topic of the kingdom of heaven, we should also note its timing. There’s a sense in which the kingdom of heaven is **a present reality: The King is here, and His kingdom is advancing.** That’s what we’ve been reading about in Matthew—God’s rule and reign over disease and disasters and death is being asserted redemptively through Christ. So there is a very real sense in which the kingdom of heaven is at hand; it is present. At the same time, there’s also a sense in which the kingdom of heaven is still **a future realization: The King is coming back, and His kingdom will one day be complete.** That particular theme of the future aspect of the kingdom is one of the main purposes of the parables in Matthew 13. The redemptive reign of God in Christ is infiltrating the world now, but His kingdom will not be consummated until later, when Jesus returns. We are, in a sense, living between the times.

After Jesus had died on the cross and risen from the grave, His disciples asked Him, “Lord, are You restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?” (Acts 1:6). In reply, Jesus reoriented their perspective: “It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (vv. 7–8). After saying this, Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father, and two angels told the on-looking disciples that Jesus would return (v. 11). Then the rest of the New Testament involves these disciples bringing people into the kingdom by proclaiming the redemptive rule and reign of God in Christ all over the world.

Now, two thousand years later, we are still called to extoll God in Christ as King and to live our lives proclaiming His redemptive rule and reign to our neighbors and all

over the nations. God is advancing His kingdom now, and one day He will fully and finally establish His kingdom over all things in Christ. On that day, followers of Christ will dwell in a new heaven and a new earth, where sin and suffering will be no more (Rev 21:1–4). We look to that day with great anticipation.

Eight Parables

MATTHEW 13:1–52

Once we understand our place in the outworking of God's purposes and the establishment of His kingdom, the parables of Matthew 13 should begin to make more sense. Matthew's organization of these eight parables is masterful, as He gives us a clear structure and a clear overlap in meaning concerning how these parables relate to one another. The end result is a picture of God's kingdom that defies human expectation.

The parable of the Sower (vv. 1–9, 18–23)

First, Jesus tells the parable of the Sower. In reality, this is not the parable of the *Sower* as much as it is the parable of the *Soil*, because the soil is the key variable in the story. The sower and the seed never change. Gratefully, we have Jesus' explanation for this parable in verses 18–23, so we don't have to wonder what point He's trying to get across. Here are the different elements of the parable with the benefit of Jesus' commentary.

The sower is the Son of Man and the seed is the message of salvation. Jesus is clearly the sower, either directly proclaiming the message while He was on earth or indirectly proclaiming the message through His disciples. That message is the message of salvation—the good news of the kingdom—that God will save and redeem sinners through Christ. Next, Jesus tells us that **the soil is the human heart**. This is an important part of the story in terms of understanding its importance in the context of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was teaching and preaching the good news of the kingdom, yet many people were either rebelling against what He was saying or else they were casually responding to Him. This kind of reception probably left the disciples puzzled.

Jesus' diagnosis of this situation is that the problem of rejection is not with the seed (the gospel of the kingdom) and not with the sower (Jesus); the problem is with the soil (the human heart). Jesus points to four different kinds of soil representing four different heart-responses to the message of salvation. The first kind of soil on which the seed fell was **the hard heart**. Verse 4 describes seed that had fallen “along the path” and had been eaten up by birds. This kind of soil represents those who hear the message of the kingdom but reject it, and thus the Devil comes and snatches the good news of the kingdom away.

The second kind of soil Jesus mentions is **the superficial heart**, and this is represented by the “rocky ground” (v. 5). This kind of heart receives the message and responds to it, but there's no root enabling it to grow and develop. When pressure and persecution come, the person falls away. You can't help but think about “easy-believism” that was rampant in the first century and is now rampant in the twenty-first century—“just pray this prayer, and you will be saved.” But then a year or two (or maybe more) later, it becomes clear that that heart never truly received the message

of the kingdom and that it failed to submit to the rule and reign of God in Christ. This scenario has continued to play out across church history.

George Whitfield, the passionate and powerful preacher of the First Great Awakening, used to preach to massive crowds numbering in the thousands, and people were greatly affected by his evangelistic message. When Whitfield was asked how many people were saved, he would say, “We’ll see in a few years.” The point is not that people needed to earn their salvation, but rather that it would take time for true salvation to be demonstrated. This is a very different approach than we hear of today, where the number of decisions is often touted boldly. We need to be careful in light of Jesus’ clear teaching on the superficial heart.

Third, Jesus alerts us to **the divided heart**. The divided heart hears the Word, but there is no room for it because the cares and wealth of this world are too consuming. This is a clear warning for Christians today, especially those who live in prosperity, which is to say a majority of people in the Western world. We must watch out for the cares of this world lest they choke our hearts, for Jesus speaks of “the seduction of wealth” (v. 22). There’s a subtle danger implied in the imagery here: a thorn does not choke suddenly, but gradually, almost unknowingly. The desire for and consumption of money and things divides and eventually destroys the heart.

Finally, there is a fourth kind of soil that Jesus refers to as “good ground” (vv. 8, 23). This is **the fruitful heart** that hears the word and understands it and then bears fruit. The measure of that fruit may be different from person to person—notice the 30-, 60-, and 100-fold increases in verse 23—but there is fruit nonetheless. The fruit of the Word will be evident in people’s life in the world.

The question then becomes, What kind of heart do *you* have? Are you rejecting the message of the kingdom? Did you make a decision or pray a prayer years ago that has no real meaning in your life today? If so, I urge you to receive the good news of the kingdom today. By the mercy of God, soften your heart toward Christ.

There is also an application here for those who have already received the good news of the kingdom. One of the ways we bear the fruit of the kingdom is by sowing the seed of the gospel in the lives of others. Jesus’ disciples had already been sent in Matthew 10 to sow seeds of the kingdom by spreading the message of salvation, and undoubtedly, just as Jesus had promised, they had faced resistance. It’s encouraging to hear Jesus tell us to keep sowing the seed. This is also a good word for parents with rebellious children, for those with spouses who are hard-hearted toward the gospel, and for those with friends and coworkers who seem apathetic to the gospel. And finally, for missionaries around the world who serve in extremely difficult areas where there seems to be no receptivity to the gospel, Jesus’ message is this: Don’t stop sowing the seed. Yes, there is an adversary who is at work to rip that seed from hearts; and yes, there are pressures, persecutions, worries, and wealth to keep people from receiving this message. Nevertheless, keep sowing the seed. Then hope and pray and trust that the Lord of the harvest will indeed bring about the fruit of the gospel.¹

¹ David Platt, [*Exalting Jesus in Matthew*](#), ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2013), Mt 13:1–52.

Additional Resources:

Article: [Matthew 13 and the Function of the Parables in the First Gospel by Jonathan Pennington](#)

Message: [Jen Wilkin on the Parables of the Kingdom](#)

Extra Commentary: Article written by Courtney Reissig

No one would ever accuse me of having a “green thumb.” I’ve never been able to grow anything. I don’t really like to get my hands dirty. I don’t even like being outside very much. So when I come to passages that talk about seeds, soil, and how things grow I’m at a loss. Horticulture is a foreign language to me.

But agrarian language is really common in scripture, in large part because this was imagery that resonated with people in biblical times. They had to sow seed in order to eat dinner! So we need to keep that in mind as we read parables like this one. What is happening in the text would have meant something to them, probably even more so than it does to those of us who do not. In the parable of the sower (or the parable of the soils, depending on your translation) Jesus is showing us how a kingdom starts by using imagery they would understand—how a garden starts.

This parable would be confusing for us without Jesus’ interpretation. But as you saw this week, the interpretation tells us something very important about how we respond to his message. I might not know a lot of about growing plants, but I do know one thing—there is only one way for a plant to grow, and that is under the right conditions. No amount of effort on the part of the gardener will make seed grow if the soil isn’t ready and able to receive it. This is the message of the parable—there will be some who reject immediately, some who reject over a lifetime, and some who will receive it and bear fruit in keeping with repentance (Matt. 3:8). But there is only one truly saving response to Jesus’ message. It might not always be the one who receives it immediately (13:5). It might not always be the one who bears fruit right away. But the one who bears fruit over a lifetime is the one who received Jesus’ message rightly.

The entire message of scripture is that there are only two heart responses to the message of God—you either hear and believe, or you don’t hear and reject. The ultimate rejection by the rocky and thorny soils is because they were not good soil. They were not hearts that were receptive to the kingdom of God. Even if they look like they are bearing fruit for a time, the ultimate test is over a lifetime of fruitful living, not a one-time ascent to faith or short period of belief. And this is why this parable is here at the beginning, because as we will see all throughout the parables in this study—there will come a day where the fruitful and the unfruitful will be divided out—and judgment will come. But sometimes you can’t tell the difference. As the disciples take the message of the kingdom forward, it’s incredibly important for them to see and remember and believe that the seed of the word will bear fruit. The fruit comes from the soil and we know that even the best soil takes time to grow

sometime. This drives home the fact that this kingdom is an upside kingdom that doesn't always look like it is flourishing.

Notice that Jesus doesn't say immediately the good soil bears fruit. That's telling considering that the other soils had immediate fruit. As people who are waiting to see fruit in our own life, and in the lives of others, we need that reminder. Immediacy doesn't always mean fruitfulness. But lack of fruit doesn't always mean unbelief. The message of the soils is to wait, be patient, keep sowing, and trust the seed and the soil to do its work.

There is also something interesting that this parable helps us see. The people who respond to the message of the kingdom aren't always the ones we expect. Jesus was rejected by his family right before he gave this parable to the crowd (Matt. 12:46-50). Whenever we are working to interpret a parable, looking before and after the parable helps us determine the context for it. In this parable, Jesus is showing us the "origins of the kingdom,"² or how the kingdom begins. As the kingdom begins small, with seed, it doesn't always include those nearest and dearest to us. In that culture, Jesus' hearers would have been astounded by that reality. His family rejects him, even as he is preparing to tell this parable about the way one enters his kingdom. Those who enter the kingdom hear him, respond in faith, and bear fruit. In Christ's kingdom, it's not always the ones we expect.

Maybe someday I will become a great gardener. Or maybe I'll spend the rest of my life admiring people's gardens on Instagram. Even with little knowledge of the process of gardening, I do know one thing—the only way a plant grows is if the soil is ready for the seed. There is only one way for growth. The same is true for Christ's kingdom. There might be multiple ways you can reject him, immediately like the seed that fell on the path, or over time like the seed that fell on rocks and thorns. But there is only one way you can receive him—the soil of your heart must be ready.

² *The Parables of Jesus*, James Montgomery Boice, Moody: Chicago, IL, 1983, 16.



Group Study Guide

*This lesson is for the Group Leader to use to teach the lesson and facilitate the discussion. It is not intended that you will use every question in this guide during your group time. You will likely only be able to cover 4-5 questions, depending on how discussion goes. This guide is longer than what you will need but provides the freedom and flexibility to pull questions out for discussion that will best serve your group time.

Tip: You may want to pull one question from each section for discussion or spend more time on a particular section than another on. It's totally up to your discretion.

Introduction

Icebreaker Question: For the gardeners in the room, can you think of a time where you sowed seed and it didn't bear fruit? What was the problem?

OR

Can someone share a story about when they shared the “seed” of the gospel and saw fruit? Or didn’t see fruit right away?

READ ENTIRE TEXTS: MATTHEW 13:1-23

Note to Group Leaders: This is a standalone lesson, so it is a break from Romans. As we move into Govenber and hear from Jim Britts this morning, it is good to re-orient our lives around the call to sow the seed of the gospel, and trust that it lands on good soil.

Highlight – What stands out?

1. What does verse 1 say is the setting for this narrative? Look back at Matthew 12:46-50. What has just happened?
2. Who is Jesus speaking to when he begins the parable?
3. **Note to Leaders: You could use a white board in your room to do this exercise.** Use the table below to fill in the “characters in the parable.” Sometimes the character in a parable is not an actual person. Write down as many details as you notice about the character (there are four “characters”)

Character	Details about the character

Matthew 13:14-15 directly quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10. Read the passage and notice the similarities and differences.

Explain – What does this mean?

1. What is the seed the sower is sowing?
2. How does Jesus' statement about the prophesy of Isaiah being fulfilled help you understand his interpretation of the parable? Hint: Notice especially who Jesus is giving his interpretation to in verses 10-11. Does he give his interpretation to the entire crowd that he gave the parable to?
3. Do you think this passage is teaching that there are four ways to respond to Jesus' message? Use your observations from the Highlight section help you with this answer.
4. According to verses 11-15, why does Jesus speak in parables?
5. **Note to Group Leaders: You could do this exercise on a white board as well.** Jesus actually provides the interpretation for the parable (which is helpful for us!) in verses 18-23. Fill in the table below with different soils and their explanation.

Soil	Result/Explanation

Apply – How does this change me?

1. If every Gospel writer who has parables (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) includes this parable first, and if Jesus uses this parable to explain all parables to us, then this section of scripture must be very important. The purpose of the parables is to reveal truths about Christ's kingdom and to conceal truths about Christ's kingdom. How have you seen God's word work in people's lives this way—either leading them to respond in faith or leading them to respond in rejection of him?
2. Jesus calls the "seed" the message of the kingdom. His kingdom is his rule and reign over all things, but to be part of his kingdom you have to become one of his subjects by repentance and faith. You have to respond to the message. Think back to your conversion. How did the message of the kingdom work in your life like it does for the good soil in verse 23?
3. Jesus isn't saying that those who are truly saved won't ever worry, or won't ever fall back into sin. He talks elsewhere about how we are kept by him, growing in the good soil. Read John 15:1-8. What is our basis for bearing fruit? How do we keep bearing fruit?
4. Is there a person in your life who has heard the message of the kingdom and has responded like the other three soils? Write a prayer for them in the space below, asking God to make the soil of their hearts receptive to his message.
5. Look back at your answer to question 1 in the Highlight section. Does it surprise you that Jesus redefines who is his family? What does this mean for you and your family once you follow Jesus and receive his message of the kingdom?

Respond – What's my next step?

Missions Moment:

1. Where and to whom can you sow the seed of the gospel this week? This month? This year?

Pray:

1. Spend some time in your Group praying for Jim Britts and his work in San Diego.
2. Spend some time in your Group praying for the New York Team who is currently serving in New York this weekend.
3. Pray for our IMB Missionaries.

Go:

1. Participate in Goveember, meaning you grab a Passport from Matt Hubbard (matt@ibclr.org) or in the North Entrance on 11/6.
2. Pray about going on a Go Trip in 2023. There are family friendly trips (like the one to San Diego or NYC) and trips all over the world to assist our Go Partners in ministry.

Give:

1. The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering begins at the end of November. This supports the work of IMB Missionaries all over the world. Learn more at <https://www.imb.org/generosity/lottie-moon-christmas-offering/>