

Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven

Matthew 13:1-23 | The Parable of the Sower

→ *Survey: Let's understand the background and context of the passage.*

Stories are integrated in all areas of our life, and have been since the beginning of time. People used to sit around and tell stories before the TV existed, but even movies and shows tell a story. We tell campfire stories and stories of our childhood. We debrief with friends or family through story. Even the music we listen to tells a story. Each story helps us make sense of ourselves, each other, and the world around us. It should be no surprise then that approximately one-third of Jesus' teachings in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) are in the form of stories - or as we know them - parables. Parables help deepen and reveal truth. Think of them as earthly stories with heavenly meaning.

So as we continue in the book of Matthew, we will be studying different parables of Jesus, starting with the Parable of the Sower. Remember that Matthew is written for a Jewish audience to highlight Jesus as the promised Messiah that they had been waiting for. Jesus taught those listening to him that the Kingdom of Heaven will look different than they expected, which we saw as we studied the Sermon on the Mount. True Kingdom people store up treasures in heaven and not on earth. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21).

Jesus invites us to be Kingdom people - to love God and to love others - and will continue to teach us about the Kingdom of Heaven through his parables. In all of these stories, we should be reminded that we are a part of God's story - a story where He is restoring and redeeming all things. Let's enjoy this story together as we read from Matthew 13.

Read: Matthew 13:1-23 (NIV)

→ *Observe: Let's take a close look at what the text is saying.*

1. *Let's set the scene (v. 1-3). Where is Jesus? Who is there? How does he speak to them?*
2. *In the parable, what is the farmer doing (v. 3)? What 4 locations does the seed fall (v. 4-8)?*
3. *What happens to the seed in each of the locations (v. 4-8)?*
4. *How does Jesus conclude this parable (v. 9)? What do the disciples ask Jesus (v. 10)?*
5. *In Jesus' reply to the disciples, what happens to those 'who have' & those who 'don't have' (v. 12)? What even is it that they possess?*
6. *Why does Jesus speak to them in parables (v. 13)? What had happened to the people in Isaiah (v. 15)? How does this contrast what Jesus tells his disciples (v. 16-17)?*
7. *What does the parable of the sower mean (v. 18-23)? What is the meaning of each of the 4 types of soil? Come up with a word/phrase that emphasizes why or why not the seed grew.*

→ *Interpret: Let's seek to understand the meaning of this text in its original context.*

1. What do you notice about why the bad soil doesn't lead to a crop? How can we translate this from crops to people - what does this look like today? Why does that happen? *Come up with a word or short phrase that describes the heart posture of someone with your soil.*
2. How is good soil different? Why does it lead to a crop? How can we translate this from crops to people - what does it look like for someone to hear the word and understand it?
3. According to the parable, what 3 things are required to produce a crop? Which of them matter the most when it comes to producing a crop? What or who does each one represent?

→ *Apply: Let's explore where the text intersects with our lives and our world.*

1. What is the state of your heart? Which soil best describes your situation? Why?
2. What does it look like practically to sow Kingdom seeds? Are you sowing? Why or why not?
 - Who can you help grow? Who can help you grow? How?
3. In what ways are you challenged by this parable? How does this parable help you when it comes to spreading the Gospel? How do the different types of soil help you understand how people might respond to you?