

Parable of the Sower

by John Edmiston

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Matthew 13 explains the parable of the sower in great detail, how the seed is the Word of God, the four soils are four kinds of different hearers with different responses to the gospel and how the Devil interferes through stealing the Word, persecution and making us full of the cares and anxieties of this life. But it leaves me with a few questions such as:

1. Why didn't the sower just sow into the good ground?
2. Why is the Devil allowed to mess with our spiritual growth?
3. Are the four soils (spiritual states) predetermined or can we change from hard ground to good ground?
4. What does it mean to bear much fruit?
5. How come some bear thirtyfold while others bear sixty or a hundredfold?

Here are some of my answers. God allows the sower to 'waste' the Word of God on hard and unproductive ground in order to display the justice of God. Everyone gets a chance to hear. Nobody should be able to say to the Lord "I never was told about there being a good God who made all things and who requires reverence and awe and a life of love." Even the heavens themselves declare the glory of God. The existence of God should 'be obvious'. Paul even says that they are 'without excuse':

Romans 1:18-20 MKJV *For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, (19) because the thing which may be known of God is clearly revealed within them, for God revealed it to them. (20) For the unseen things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being realized by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, for them to be without excuse.*

Romans 10:18 MKJV *But I say, Have they not heard? Yes indeed, their voice went out into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.*

This last quote is Paul quoting Psalm 19 which concerns the general revelation of God to man (particularly in Creation). So the word goes out, but it is not heard because of the hardness of heart and the dullness of the spiritual senses of humankind. Jesus states this directly in a question and answer interlude in the middle of the parable of the sower:

Matthew 13:10-15 MKJV *And the disciples said to Him, Why do You speak to them in parables? (11) He answered and said to them, Because it is given to you to*

know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but it is not given to them. (12) For whoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance. But whoever does not have, from him shall be taken away even that which he has. (13) Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not; nor do they understand. (14) And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which said, "By hearing you shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing you shall see and shall not perceive; (15) for this people's heart has become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and they have closed their eyes, lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

In the justice of God all must hear. So the Sower must sow, even on the hard soil and in the stony places. But the justice of God also operates on how we hear. Those who are spiritually receptive will receive even more, while those who turn away from the gospel will have even what they have taken from them!

This leads to my second question "*Why is the Devil allowed to mess with our spiritual growth?*" The Devil does not mess with those who have a good heart, but with the others he is very successful: a) stealing away the word from their minds, b) discouraging folk so they quickly give up on the Christian life and c) distracting them with concerns over money and the things of this life.

Why do such tests come? Does God want people to perish? Certainly not! His will is that none should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). But God wants us to develop true faith and true faith must necessarily be tested. Those tests may involve suffering and other challenges to our priorities in life.

The first test is – do we care at all about spiritual things? Do we want to learn? Do we even realize we have a problem with sin and need to change? If we don't care less about spiritual things the Devil has an easy job. He just picks up the seed of the Word from our hearts and minds and flies away with it. It's gone, never to bother us again.

The second test is – do we really believe that God is good even when life is bad? Is our faith precious to us? This is the test of persecution and hard times which come because of the Word. If we throw away our faith when life becomes difficult then we never really valued it in the first place.

The third test is – do we value God enough to make Him first and foremost, even above our worldly concerns and daily priorities? And do we believe that He is sufficient for every need – or will we try and do everything in our own strength? This is the test of

'the cares of this world' – of anxieties and worldly pursuits. If we are God absorbed we can get the eternal perspective and focus on the Kingdom and on His righteousness, but if we are self-absorbed then we cannot focus on such things or bear much fruit at all.

These three are the tests of our priorities and of our true faith. God wants real saints who depend on Him for all things and who have godly priorities. The quality of our souls is proved by the quantity of our testing.

Jesus allowed Peter to be severely tested:

Luke 22:31-32 MKJV *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired you, that he may sift you as wheat. (32) But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not. And when you are converted, strengthen your brothers.*

The testing broke Peter completely so that he wept bitterly, yet after he had been restored by Jesus (meeting Him on the shores of Lake Galilee) Peter became a much greater and more gracious servant of the Lord.

It seems that there is more to it than just testing. The testing can produce change in the nature of the soil. It can deepen it like a plow does when it breaks open a new field of ground. Many a person has said "I used to be a shallow Christian until I was broken and now I have a much deeper and more real Christian faith".

This helps us to answer the third question – can the nature of the soil be changed or is it fixed and hopeless? As one who has battled with shallow topsoil and lots of clay in his own small garden I can tell you that soil can be changed! You create lots of compost and dig it in. Eventually even totally useless soil can grow a productive fruit tree. The farmers of Israel knew this as well. They knew the soil of their lives could change – it just takes a lot of work.

This leads to our fourth question – *what does it mean to bear much fruit?* The first place to go is to Galatians:

Galatians 5:22-23 MKJV *But the fruit of the Spirit is: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, (23) meekness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

The most important fruit of Christ within us is Christ-like character. If we are so busy in ministry that we are impatient, unkind, unloving, restless, peace-less and unable to suffer the slightest inconvenience at all – then we are out of God's will. We need to slow down, take Sabbaths, spend time in prayer and get back our godliness.

Perhaps this is related to what Jesus meant when he addressed some with powerful ministries of exorcism and prophecy and said to them 'Depart from me ye workers of iniquity for I never knew you'. They seem to have gone off track ethically and in their character and in their doctrine (Matthew 7:16-23). Quantity cannot replace quality.

That is also why Paul says that working in precious things of quality (gold, silver, precious stones) is more important than having low quality structures made out of wood, hay and stubble which will be burned up on Judgment Day (1 Cor 3:10-15).

A lesser known verse is: **Ephesians 5:9 MKJV** *(for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth),*

Here the ethical aspects are emphasized – goodness and righteousness and truth. The fruitful person is the truthful person. See also Hebrews 12:11 and James 3:18 which talk about 'the fruit of righteousness'. The righteous and good life is the fruitful life.

Similarly Romans talks about 'bearing fruit to holiness': **Romans 6:22 MKJV** *But now, being made free from sin, and having become slaves to God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end everlasting life.*

The fruit of your life is primarily found in the quality of your character.

The final question is: How can some bear *thirty-fold, sixty-fold and a hundred-fold*? A good character produces abundant good works, just as a gentle person does many gentle deeds of kindness and a patient loving person makes many feel accepted by God and by man. The good works flow from the good character like oranges from an orange tree.

A wise person of good character does more good works than an unwise person of the same good character because he or she thinks carefully about how to do things best. This is what Paul means when he writes:

Ephesians 5:15-17 MKJV *See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, (16) redeeming the time, because the days are evil. (17) Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

Goodness finds its maximum fruitfulness when wisdom is added to the mixture.

Jesus tells us that prayer is part of producing the abundant and fruitful life:

John 15:7-8 MKJV *If you abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done to you. (8) In this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, so you shall be My disciples.*

If the Christian is of good character and abides in God's will and commandments then prayer becomes a multiplying factor. It enables the obedient saint to 'ask whatever you will' for the glory of God.

So the fruit God seeks is the fruit of a good character, doing good works in all wisdom, and prayerfully asking God for even more fruit for the glory of God the Father. That is the 'hundredfold' life!

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