

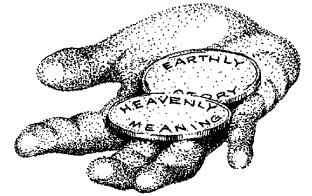
Journey Into Kingdom Living

LESSON 1 . . . What Kind of Heart Do You Have? (Matthew 13:3-23)

NOTES

The parables of Jesus have been called “The Greatest Stories Ever Told.” Seated in a boat anchored a short distance from shore on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus tells His first recorded parable to a large crowd. It is about a man sowing seed. After telling the story, Jesus’ disciples ask why He is speaking to them in *parables* (Mt 13:1-10). How does Jesus answer (13:11b)?

Parables teach us about **kingdom living**. Because of opposition from Jewish leaders, Jesus is forced to teach about *the kingdom of heaven* in *parables*. The word *parables* (PARABOLĒ, para-bow-lay’) means “to place beside.” A parable places something unfamiliar beside something familiar for the purpose of teaching. It uses familiar scenes and objects to explain spiritual truths. A parable is “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.”



This story has been called “The Parable of the Sower.” However, it is really about four kinds of soils. Therefore, it should be called “The Parable of the Soils.” In verses 18-23, Jesus explains the **sower** represents God, the **seed** His Word, and the **soils** four different kinds of hearts, one of which represents yours and mine. **What kind of heart do you have?** There are only **four** possibilities.

1. A Hard Heart (13:3-4, 19)

Jesus begins this parable by saying, “A sower went out to sow” (13:3b). In Jesus’ day, a sower would walk through his field with a sack of seed under one arm. He would take a hand full of seed and fling it out as he walked. Jesus continues: “*And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them*” (13:4). Jesus explains that the seed sown on the path represents one who hears God’s Word but “*does not understand it*” (13:19a). What happens to this kind of hearer (13:19b)?

In biblical times, the *path*, or road, went directly through the fields. Compacted by feet, hooves, and wheels, the soil was concrete-like, which made it impossible for seeds to penetrate. Therefore, they would just lie on the

surface, so birds would come and eat them.

This soil represents a **hard heart**. This is a person who repeatedly tunes out God. Such a person can sit through hundreds of great sermons and remain unmoved. What does Hebrews 4:7c-d say to such a person?



Every time God speaks to you through a song, a Bible study, a sermon, etc., and you refuse to respond, your heart gets a little harder. Eventually, the day will come when you can't hear Him anymore because your heart is so hard. Don't let that happen to you! If there is the slightest tugging in your heart to get right with God, then God's Holy Spirit is drawing you to Himself. Therefore, if you hear His voice, don't *harden your heart*."

Do you have a **hard heart**? Or, do you have . . .

2. A Superficial Heart (13:5-6, 20-21)

Jesus says of the second kind of heart: "*Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil,⁶ but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away*" (13:5-6).

Jesus explains this is someone who hears God's Word "*and immediately receives it with joy.*" However, this person doesn't allow the Word to take root. Therefore, this kind of heart "*endures for a while*" (13:20-21b). However, what eventually happens (13:21c-d)?



The *rocky ground* is shallow soil with rocks underneath. The plants grow well until the hot, dry season comes, causing them to wither. This soil represents a **superficial heart** that makes impulsive, or emotional, decisions for Christ. As a result, his or her commitment to Christ only "*endures for a while.*"

There is an old saying: "A faith that fizzles before the finish had a flaw from the first." The "flaw" is the superficial heart that makes an emotional, or superficial, decision that doesn't last. True disciples abide, or continue, in Jesus' Word. People with a superficial faith "fizzle" when "*tribulation or persecution*" comes. A superficial heart only follows Jesus when the circumstances are favorable. Just as quickly as this person commits to Christ, he or she defects, or "*falls away.*"

Do you have a **hard heart**? A **superficial heart**? Or, do you have . . .

3. A Crowded Heart (13:7, 22)

Jesus pictures this kind of heart: “*Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them*” (13:7). What effect do “*the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches*” have on this person (13:22d-e)?



The soil with *thorns*, or weeds, represents a heart where God’s Word has rivals. The seed takes root in good soil, but the weeds come up and *choke* out God’s Word. The *thorns* represent two things that *choke the word* in our lives.

1. “*The cares of the world.*” The word *cares* means worries or distractions. Satan uses worry to choke out God’s Word from our hearts. It crowds out biblical thoughts and distracts us from applying the Word to our lives.

Cares are problems and pressures we try to handle by ourselves. Evangelist Vance Havner said, “Worry, like a rocking chair, will give you something to do, but it won’t get you anywhere.” God only promises to take care of us one day at a time.

God will give us the strength to meet each day He gives us to live. However, nowhere in the Bible does God promise tomorrow’s strength today. Here is a great saying: “Nothing can happen today the Lord and I can’t handle.” Take your focus off your *cares* and concentrate on God’s love, care, and power. You can’t think about how great God is and worry at the same time. Worry chokes out God’s Word from our lives and so does . . .

2. “*The deceitfulness of riches.*” Money is deceitful because many people believe it will make them happy. As a result, they are so busy making a living, they don’t take time to make a life. That’s why Jesus asks what rhetorical question in Mark 8:36?

Thorns, or weeds, are signs of neglect. When you neglect prayer, Bible study, and worship services, weeds choke out the Word from your life. The important question is what is distracting you—what weeds are choking God’s Word from your life? It might be busyness, money, worry, etc.

Do you have a **hard**, **superficial**, or **crowded** heart? Or, do you have . . .

4. A Cultivated Heart (13:8, 23)

Jesus describes the fourth kind of soil: “*Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty*” (13:8). He explains the *good soil* represents “*the one who hears the word and understands it*” (13:23a-b). If this represents your heart, what does Jesus say you will do (13:23c-e)?



A cultivated heart lets God’s Word grow deep roots. It is cultivated by removing the “weeds” of worry. If you have this kind of heart, the Word “*bears fruit*”—spiritual *fruit*—in your life. This *fruit* is called “the fruit of the Spirit.” Galatians 5:22-23a lists the nine components of the fruit of the Spirit. Write them below:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
4. _____ 5. _____ 6. _____
7. _____ 8. _____ 9. _____

Love comes first because it is most important. It is the “fertilizer” that causes all the other components to grow. The fruit of the Spirit is just a word picture of the Lord Jesus. As these nine qualities grow in our lives, we become more like Jesus. Fruitfulness is the test of true discipleship. Why, according to Jesus in Matthew 7:20?

Jesus also says this kind of soil produces a harvest of a hundred, *sixty*, or *thirty* times what was sown. In other words, everyone is not equally productive.

This parable reveals why there are so many opinions about Jesus. Opinions about Jesus range from liar or lunatic to Lord. What you believe about Jesus is not a matter of the facts, but a matter of your heart.

You have heard the Word of God. How you respond will be determined by what kind of heart you have. Do you have a **hard heart**, a **superficial heart**, a **crowded heart**, or a **cultivated heart**?