

6/25/23 The Parable of the Sower: How Does Your Garden Grow?
Pastor David Pranga, Brewster Baptist Church *Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23*

Good morning and welcome to Brewster Baptist Church. My name is Pastor David Pranga, and I am one of the pastors here on staff. I would like to welcome you to our services today. Whether you are watching online, or joining us here in the sanctuary, we are very glad you are here with us.

I would like to thank our teens for helping with the service this morning; it is always nice to have our youth participate. We are in a new series entitled “Parables: Lessons for Living.” In the next few weeks, we will be looking at different parables that Jesus taught. This morning, I get to share with you about the Parable of the Sower.

Story: Agriculture was a very important part of life for my parents and the community that I grew up in. I was raised in northern Wisconsin, which was considered “potato country”. There were a lot of potato farms where I grew up, and there were a number of dairy farms, too. My parents both grew up on farms. They enjoyed having huge vegetable gardens every year. Each spring, my dad would get the soil ready. He would bring out the rototiller that would break the hard, compact soil into loose, finely broken-up dirt that could be used for planting. As a family, we would plant the seeds in the ground, cover them with dirt, and then water the garden. We would plant all different types of seeds. There were beans – green beans, wax beans, and even purple beans – and rows of lettuce, beats, cabbage, and carrots. Of course, we would have tomato plants, zucchini, peppers, corn and much more.

When seeds are planted, they germinate together. At first, the seeds grow roots to take hold. It was always exciting to see plants pop out of the ground. In very rare cases, nothing would grow. Either the soil was not good enough, the seeds were bad, or most likely, we, as kids, put too much dirt on the seeds. As the plants began to grow, something often happened – weeds came up out of nowhere. It was up to us to remove the weeds. If we failed to take away the weeds, the weeds would crowd the plants, and eventually take over the garden. It would be a mess. Believe me, it happened on rare occasions. As a kid, and even today, the best part of gardening must be the harvest – picking the crops, seeing how much they produce and eating the produce. Not only was it the way of life when I was a child, it is still something I enjoy doing today.

Just as I shared about my family and their garden, Jesus talks about seeds, plants, how things grow, and producing fruit. God wants to grow you in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control. These are areas that we want to grow, yet sometimes it just does not seem to be happening – or it does not happen as quickly as we would like. Just as a seed takes time to grow and blossom to produce fruit, sometimes it takes us time to grow in our relationship with Him.

Today’s parable is that of “The Sower”. I entitled this message, “How Does Your Garden Grow?” Jesus shares this parable with those who are following Him. A parable is a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. Parables would have one or two simple

points. Hannah read earlier from *Matthew 13:1-9*. I just want to paraphrase the first part of the parable for you.

Jesus went out of his house and sat by the lake. A large crowd began to gather. Some people had taken off from work for the day. Some people came to see Jesus do physical healing; others came to see Jesus do another miracle. Some just came to hear Jesus teach. The crowd swelled in great numbers. The gathering was so large that Jesus got into Peter's boat and began to speak to the large crowd of people. Jesus began by telling a parable; he drew from the commonplace practice of agriculture to illustrate his kingdom principles. The crowd was very much aware of farming techniques – it was a way of life for many of them. Jesus told a parable about a farmer, seeds, and four particular types of soil. When the seeds were sown, in each type of soil, there was a radically different result.

Jesus told of a farmer who went out to scatter seed on four different types of soil. The first seeds fell along a path, and birds came along and ate the seeds. The second seeds fell on rocky soil. They sprang up quickly, but when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no roots. The third seeds fell among the thorns; they grew for a time, but were choked by the weeds. Finally, the last seeds fell on the good soil, where they grew and grew and produced an unbelievable harvest.

The Parable of the Sower reflects what happened in Jesus's day, and what still happens today – Jesus and his message about the kingdom of heaven are not universally embraced. In the parable, Jesus is the Sower. He scatters seed by hand as He walks through the fields. The seeds represent God's Word and the gospel. There are four different types of soil; each soil represents how people respond to the Word of God at various times in their lives. What's important for us to understand is that we are responsible for how we listen and hear. God wants to grow each of us into the person He wants us to be. In this parable, there is a progression from the worst case to the best case.

Jesus begins to share with the disciples the meaning of the parable in verse 18.

“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” (*Matthew 13:18-23*)

As Jesus shared the meaning of the parable, He told the disciples that some would see and understand, and others would not. In every case the seed is the same; the difference is found in the soil.

I love that Jesus scatters seed everywhere – it did not matter what soil the seeds landed on, Jesus just continued to scatter the seed. I love the thought that Jesus never gives up on us. He is generous in giving seed to the people – no matter what soil we are, no matter the state of our heart, Jesus continues to scatter seed. Jesus wants each of us to listen, hear, and understand this message and grow in our faith in Him. In every case the ultimate issue was the human heart – the condition of our hearts means everything when it comes to receiving the Word of God, just as the soil means everything to the fate of the seed.

Let's begin with a few questions: What is your heart towards Jesus? What type of soil are you cultivating? Is your seed growing closer to God?

The first and worst case is the seed that falls on the path and is eaten by the birds.

Four Soils:

1. The Path – Hard Heart

“When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.” (Matthew 13:19)

Here, Jesus is equating birds with the work of the evil one. The evil one, which is Satan, recognizes the power of the Word, even when humans don't see it. What does Satan want to do? He wants to destroy God's work. Satan is there snatching away the seed before one can fully understand it.

When we don't have God working in our lives, our hearts can become hard, not caring about the ways of God. What is a hard heart? It's a heart that is not easily moved. It's a heart that is not moved by God's Word. The message of salvation and God's Word make no impression or are dismissed because the person does not understand them. God will never impose his will or his gifts on those who are unwilling to receive them. Even though Jesus continues to scatter seed along the path, the soil (or the person) is rejecting the seed and the Word of God.

We all know people who have been so hardened by life that their hearts become hardened toward God. Some have doubts or things they cannot manage to get over. There are some who outright reject the claims of Jesus – they have no interest in discussing this with anyone; their hearts have become callused and hardened. *Proverbs 28:14* says, “Blessed is the one who always trembles before God, but whoever hardens their heart falls into trouble.”

Unfortunately, the hardened heart is not hungry for the Word of God or the gospel; it only finds satisfaction in other foods and other things. This desire, hunger, is the essence of sin. Sin is finding satisfaction in other things, at the expense of God himself. This person has a hard heart that is far from God. This is not the soil you want to have.

The second response to Jesus is seen in the seeds sown on rocky ground.

Four Soils:

1. The Path
- 2. Rocky Ground**

“The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.” (Matthew 13:20-21)

Next, Jesus scattered seed which fell upon the “rocky ground”. This refers to the person who hears the Word of God and at once receives joy from it. They heard the good news. They have great enthusiasm, and joy comes upon them. They are excited about their faith. Unfortunately, it does not last long. Their commitment to God is short-lived. The gospels tell the stories of many people who came to Jesus with great enthusiasm, only to disappear when the cost of following Him was too much.

Many of us know people who hear God’s Word and become followers, and then, in a few months, or a few years, are no longer seen following Him. Their faith has not taken root. When trouble or persecution comes into their lives, they quickly fall away. They put Jesus on the back burner.

When you look at church membership across the country, the lists include countless names of people who made a commitment to follow Jesus, serve, and be active in the church – yet so many of them have fallen away. They are initially excited about Jesus; they want to grow and serve in the church – but over time, the excitement dies. Why? They did not develop roots. They came to church for the wrong reasons. In order to develop roots, we need to engage in the Word of God. We need to be around other believers and break bread with them. Relationships need to be developed. It is so important to be growing in our faith by reading the Bible, praying, joining a small group, or serving on a ministry team.

For some, it might also be that the commitment was just too much at the time. The idea of having Jesus as Lord over their lives was difficult. The idea that their thoughts, beliefs, or habits would have to change was just too much for them. When trouble or persecution came, and it did, their enthusiasm and joy were diminished, and unfortunately, these people just disappeared from their faith.

The first soil was hard and solid. The second soil was shallow and superficial. This leads to the third soil, and it has the potential for growth.

Four Soils:

1. The Path
2. Rocky Ground
- 3. Thorns**

“The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.” (Matthew 13:22)

When you think of a garden, what is the one thing you wish would never come up in your garden? Weeds. Weeds can be a massive problem, especially if you don’t tend to them. Once again, we see the gardener scattering seeds. This time, the seed lands among soil crowded with

thorns. The thorns represent someone hearing the Word of God, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke it, and it cannot bear fruit.

Jesus warns specifically about two things: (1) the worries and cares of life, and (2) deceitfulness of riches and wealth. They both can “choke” God’s Word from our lives. Jesus gives us a powerful picture that our growth in Him can be choked by the worries of life and materialism.

The first thing that Jesus talks about is the worries of life. Our worries can choke the good things that God wants to do in our lives. I don’t want to minimize the things we worry about. We all have everyday worries: bills, jobs, dating relationships, families, marriages, health, and the future. The problem is when our worries and distractions take over our lives. Instead of putting God first and growing closer to Him, our focus centers upon the worries of life – worries become a bigger part of our lives than God. Our worries can be all-consuming. God may want to grow our faith, but it does not happen when we are constantly focused on the worries of life. The truth is, worrying cannot change anything. There are times when we need to give God our worries and struggles. Then, we must trust in Him and move forward. The worries are there, but they cannot dominate our lives.

The second thing Jesus points to is the “deceitfulness of wealth”. The deceitfulness of wealth is when you care more about money and need more money in order to be happy; you need more and more toys to find fulfillment. The accumulation of wealth or toys never fulfills our hearts; the notion that money alone will satisfy us won’t ever be true.

I want to share with you one disclaimer. I will say, some of the most generous people I know are committed Christians. They have recognized that the wealth they have is from God. They have put their trust in Jesus. Some of the wealthy Christians, who I know, look at their wealth as an opportunity to share joy by blessing others, and by furthering the kingdom by using their gifts of stewardship to help the church.

Let me ask you a few questions: What is one area of your garden that you want to begin weeding and begin turning over to God? What do you need to give over to God this morning?

God already knows the things we hang on to. He is willing to help us, but we need to ask for His help and then turn over the worries and materialistic things to Him. This is very hard. It is not easy. Jesus is there for us. We can put our hope and trust in Him. Or we can put our trust in ourselves and in things.

The fourth and final response is the one we are all striving for: the seed sown on good soil.

Four Soils:

1. The Path
2. Rocky Ground
3. Thorns
- 4. Good Soil**

Finally, we get to the climax of the parable, the seed that falls on the good soil. That is what everyone was waiting for. Let’s turn to verse 23.

“But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” (Matthew 13:23)

The seeds sown on good soil are those who hear the Word and understand it. Hearing and understanding are more than just your mind comprehending what Jesus is saying. To hear and understand is to desire Christ over all things; it is to experience Jesus and desire Him more.

To hear and understand the gospel and God’s Word is to develop an appetite for Jesus that grows throughout your lifetime. Hearing and understanding are fundamentally tied to your response to Christ and will also affect your heart.

When I think of people who are growing, these are people who are reading their Bibles, taking part in Bible study, going to church, serving in a ministry, and loving people. They are seeking God out, in the midst of their daily lives, and putting Him first before themselves.

It is our responsibility to prepare the soil of our hearts to receive the Word of God. That seed will produce fruit in us, and through us. Jesus wants our seed to grow, grow, and grow some more, until it produces fruit.

What does Jesus say? Those who hear the Word and understand it will produce fruit. The fruit will yield 30 times, 60 times or even 100 times what was sown. I think what scripture is telling us is that God’s supernatural power is at work when our soil is cultivated with Him. When we think of this parable of the Sower, we need to realize that we need to listen, hear, and understand the Word of God. God’s Word produces a changed life in heart. Life change can happen in a significant way when our hearts are given to the Lord. It’s putting God first in our lives.

I would be doing a disservice to you if I ended things here. When you read about the harvest, it is not just about you. God wants to use you for his kingdom, too. Jesus is not looking for the perfect garden. God understands our dirt. He will work through the messiness of our dirt. I believe God uses imperfect people as instruments to reach more and more people for His kingdom. I believe that God has put us in positions and vocations to touch others with the love of Jesus Christ. Just as God is producing fruit in our lives, we can help others, as well. God has entrusted us to be the Sower and scatter seed to our neighbors. We need to exhibit love and grace to those who do not know Jesus Christ, in the hope that, one day, our friends and family members will know Jesus.

Prayer:

Blessing:

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 36:26)

Questions for Discussion & Reflection:

1. What kind of gardening have you done? If you could plant a garden, what would you have in it?
2. How do stories, illustrations, and parables help us to understand more clearly the message of the Bible?
3. What does the Sower (gardener), seed, and various soils represent in the parable? What are the characteristics of each of the soils? What happens to the seed in each of the soils?
4. What do we learn about God in this story? How do you think the audience might have felt when Jesus shared the parable with them?
5. Who planted the “seed” of the Gospel in your life? What were the factors that helped you take root and blossom? What period of your life did you grow the best spiritually?
6. What “thorn of worry” is trying to choke your faith? What do you need to do to develop stronger roots? Which of the four soils best describes the condition of your heart right now?
7. What can you do to make “hearing, understanding, and acting” on God’s word a priority in your life? How can you help others grow in their faith?