

THE BOOK - HOW WE GOT IT AND HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF IT - Part sixteen

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THE SOIL MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE - HOW WE DETERMINE TRANSFORMATION BY WHERE WE DRAW THE LINE OF OUR HEARING

Matthew 13:1-9 - "That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. [2] And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. [3] And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. [4] And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. [5] 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. [7] Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. [8] Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. [9] He who has ears, let him hear."

We're going to take most of the teaching time today *introducing* the important theme of this parable. So don't panic if my first point comes near the end of this message. When it comes to *how to get the most out of God's Word*, I can't think of any passage more central in importance or nearer to the heart of Jesus.

The very first words of **verse 1** tell us something important about the background of this, perhaps the most famous of Jesus' parables - "**That same day...**" What day? It was the same day containing the events of Matthew *chapter twelve*.

Matthew thirteen deals with the *entry and development* of the kingdom in our lives. The main point of this parable is quite simple. The seed sown is the Word of the Kingdom - the message of the gospel - the *Word of God*. Jesus identifies that for us in **verses 19 and 22** - "**When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path....[22] As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.**"

So we see the Word, though powerful in itself, doesn't have the same *effect* in every life. The potential of the Word to produce change and fruit is determined by the quality and readiness of the soil - *the heart that hears the message*.

And it's right at this point that those opening words of Matthew thirteen reveal an amazing truth. "**That same day...**" These ideas from Jesus didn't just pop out of the air. He had encountered some *rugged opposition* to His Word and His work the very same day He spoke this parable. And that opposition is recorded in detail in **Matthew chapter 12**.

Jesus performed *miracles* the day He gave this parable of the sower - incredible demonstrations of His divine power. First, He spoke to a man with a *withered hand* - "**Stretch out your hand!**"(12:13). And the man did. Second, He healed a demon possessed man, who was both *blind* and *mute*. And immediately the man both spoke and saw (12:22).

Then the unbelievable happens. The scribes and Pharisees came to Him and said, in effect, "We really would like to take you seriously. Could you just give us some *sign* - any sign at all - that might back up your claim to being the Son of God?"(12:38). The people wouldn't believe Him even though he worked wonders right in front of their eyes. The people asked Him for greater and greater signs but wouldn't hear His words.

And that's why it's very important to note the way Matthew emphasizes these words from Jesus about being ready to *hear* when He spoke, took place this "**same day**"(13:1). This was the very *same* day Jesus had to warn the religious leaders about *the unpardonable sin* - about blaspheming the Holy Spirit (12:31-32).

In other words, this was the *very same day* Jesus, in word and deed, was scattering the seed of His kingdom all over the place. People had wonderful opportunities this *same day* to have their hearts transformed and stretched and healed. But many *refused to hear* and *refused to see*. That's why, after the parable of the sower, Jesus had some scathing words of judgement that have troubled many people:

Matthew 13:10-15 - "Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" [11] And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. [12] For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. [13] This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. [14] Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is

fulfilled that says: 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. [15] For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'

Verses 10 and 11 are the troubling ones. The disciples obviously realize many of the people aren't getting Jesus' meaning. This leads them to question why Jesus was using the method of teaching He was using. Specifically, why was He teaching in parables? Were these parables Jesus was telling a *help* to the people's understanding, or a *hindrance*? Were the parables making the truth *plainer* or more *obtuse*? That's the issue burning in the disciples minds.

And **verse 11** seems particularly harsh: "And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given."

Those words hardly seem fair. In fact, they're so troubling that a whole school of interpretation, known as "*dispensationalism*" arose with the popularity of the *Scofield Reference Bible*. The idea was that the New Testament had to be read remembering God was, and is still, working with *two* peoples, rather than *one*. And so certain things were reserved for God's *Jewish* people, and other truths were specifically geared for the *Church* age only. And this, according to dispensationalism, is what Jesus was keeping in mind when He spoke these words. The meaning was hidden from *one* crowd and made clear to the *other*. And if you've never heard of this before, don't worry about it. You don't need to be side-tracked by it right now. My own view is this is a *forced* interpretation. It's an *interpretive grid* that people bring *to* the Scripture, rather than taken *from* the Scripture.

So what did Jesus mean in those separatist sounding words in verse eleven? I think Jesus fully intended to tell His disciples that He was teaching in parables both to *reveal* and *conceal* life giving truth. But the division didn't fall along the fault line of *Jew and Gentile*. It fell along the fault line between those *willing to hear* and those *unwilling to hear*.

We learn that the entrance of God's rule and reign in our lives - at least for now - isn't a *forced* entrance. Yes, the kingdom is truly *present* now in powerful potential in our lives. But it isn't an *irresistible* presence. Its power is *dependant* upon the response of the *hearer*.

This is all made clear in **verses 12-15** where Jesus tells us *why* His words were hidden from so many in these parables - "For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. [13] This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see [Remember the Pharisees and their request for a sign?], and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. [14] Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. [15] For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'"

"*This people's heart has grown dull*"(15). I need to apply those words regularly to my own life. It can happen to very religious people - church goers - board members - clergy. Does Jesus see our hearts as increasingly humble and alert to fresh hearing?

We need to remember the events of *this very day* to see what Jesus had in mind when He spoke those words. The idea in this parable is if people didn't *respond to, and embrace the truth He gave them, they would lose the capacity to receive anything more*. This is what I meant earlier when I said the purpose of these parables was *both to clarify* and to *hide* the truth.

The religious people - the people who *should* have known the *most* - had just taken His works of healing and deliverance and attributed them to Satan. Jesus was surrounded by people who only wanted to see Him do neat stuff, but couldn't care less about His authority over their lives.

Jesus is very clear in His words on this subject. That's why, in **verse 13**, He doesn't just say these people *do not see*. He's very careful to say, "*Seeing, they do not see*." And He doesn't just say they do not hear, but "*Hearing, they do not hear*." And we're meant to see those words used in *two* different ways. These people weren't physically *blind*. And they weren't physically *deaf*. So in the physical sense they could both see and hear, but in another, more important sense, they *freely chose* to be blind and deaf toward God. These weren't people who lacked *information*. These were people who habitually *trivialized* and *rejected* revelation and truth.

This is clearly the meaning of the words Jesus quoted from the prophet Isaiah in **verse 15** - "For this people's heart has

***grown* dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes *they* have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'"**

This is obviously burning deeply in Jesus' heart. He takes the time to gather His disciples around Him and explain the meaning of this parable to them. He does that because He's soon going to send them out with the **same** message of the kingdom that He had been proclaiming. And just as He saw the different results to His **own** proclamation, and just as the crowd thinned out when the demands of the His kingdom rule and reign were pressed, **Jesus was bracing them for the same kind of response when they were continuing His work.**

I have scores of books telling me if the people living around this church don't find the message of this church appealing, we must be doing something wrong. If the unchurched don't think we're just the neatest, coolest, place in Newmarket, then we're not presenting our message with proper method. And Jesus and a host of New Testament passages, tells me that isn't so.

Now let's look at this wonderful parable:

1) **THE POTENTIAL FOR ALL GROWTH IN CHRIST JESUS BEGINS WITH THE SEED OF GOD'S WORD PLANTED IN THE HUMAN HEART AND MIND**

If you want to grow spiritually, this is the starting point. What Matthew records more **indirectly**, Mark records very **directly** - **"The sower sows the word"**(Mark 4:14). The seed is the Word. Everything that grows **starts** with seed. The **soils** vary, but the **seed** is constant.

I grew up on the prairies. Imagine the foolishness of a farmer who comes complaining about the barrenness of his land. He comes to you and says, "I've borrowed a small fortune to buy this land. The previous owner told me it was **good** land. But I think he lied. I've worked that soil. I've irrigated it. I've invested in the best fertilizers known to science. I've been spraying insecticides and pesticides. I've worked from sunrise until it was dark. **And nothing is growing on that land!"**

You say to your farmer friend, "That's very odd. I know the farmer who sold you that land. I know him and can't imagine him cheating you. You should be getting **something** for all your effort. What did you plant?" "Plant?" "That's right, what **seed** did you sow?" "**Seed?** What do you mean, **seed?** I didn't know you had to plant **seed!**"

If you want to **harvest** - **any kind of harvest** - you have to **plant seed**. True, as Jesus will show in this parable, there are other factors too, but for **sure**, nothing will happen without seed. The irreplaceable first step in growing anything is planting seed. Life can't emerge if there is nothing to germinate in the first place.

But what is obvious in **farming** is never quite so obvious in **spiritual growth**. People aren't as interested in **sowing** as they are in **harvesting**. They want to go to church less and less. They don't want to spend time studying the truth of the Scriptures. They find themselves too busy with other things to spend extended time in prayer and meditation. But they want good **marriages**. They want God's blessing on their **home and kids**. They want God to **prosper** their business. **Harvesting** they like. It's the **sowing** they're not crazy about.

So the very forming of this parable is so masterfully designed by Jesus, the loving teacher, who, in the very act of picturing spiritual fruitfulness, underlines the fact that we are so prone to disconnect the **sowing** of the Word and the **harvesting** of a life. But they can't be disconnected. Just because harvesting doesn't follow **right on the heels** of sowing - just because the link isn't **immediate** - doesn't make the link any less **essential**.

Jesus uses this parable to knit together two things that we don't always mentally connect. Think about what you're sowing into your life. Compare the time spent in front of the TV with the time spent studying and memorizing God's Word. Compare the accumulated hours spent in restaurants and bars and health clubs with the hours spent in God's house each week? Eventually - not immediately - **that's** what will determine the fruit that you will one day harvest.

That's the first great **lesson** and the first great **warning** of this parable. **Let nothing but the Word of God take center place in your life**. Let no other authority or custom or the pressure of the crowd steer your life. Root yourself, renew your mind, regulate your actions and attitudes by Divine Revelation.

Psalm 1:1-3 - **"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [2] but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. [3] He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season,**

and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

The counsel of the ungodly is everywhere. It crops up like weeds and thorns. Jesus said clearly these weeds will **choke out** the place of the Word if you're not careful. But the Word of truth, properly received, will bring unlimited blessing into all of your life - **“in whatever he does he prospers.”** That's because the Word is the seed that brings growth.