

THE SOWER

A Parable of Christ

By [The Analog Kingdom](#) | November 23, 2021

One of the more popular and well known of the many recorded parables of Jesus is the **Parable of the Sower** which is found in three of the four Gospels: Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8. Jesus' depiction of a farmer sowing seed is one of a plethora of agricultural themes in Scripture, which are typically used metaphorically to illustrate a truth or teaching with its roots reaching all the way back to the garden of Eden. In this study we will take a deep dive into the parable's meaning and show how it is the key to unlocking a full understanding of all the parables and teachings of Christ, what it means to bear fruit, and why the "good ground" is the only substance from which our hearts should be made.

COVERING THE GROUNDS

The premise of the parable is that the physical act of spreading or broadcasting seed will inevitably cause a portion of it to fall on different types of ground. Some will fall on the hardened path the sower walks on, some on rocky and shallow ground, some among thorns, and some on good ground. Thus, the results of sowing—what is or isn't reaped—will vary. Here is the parable from Matthew 13:

"Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matt. 13: 3-9)¹

The disciples then question Jesus about the parable and He explains:

"To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.'

"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in

time of temptation fall away. Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.” (Luke 8:10-15)

The parable, once explained, is pretty straightforward. The ground is a metaphor for man—which is an apt comparison since we were formed from “the dust of the ground” (Gen. 2:7)—but more specifically the heart of man. When the word is sown, it falls on various hearts though only one out of the four keeps and bears fruit. The other three don’t fare so well. It seems to show a progression of the fate of God’s word on the hearts of men. In the first scenario, the word fails completely to grow. In fact, it doesn’t even have a chance to sprout, for it is stolen away. In the second scenario, the word sprouts, and the person believes superficially for a while, but it withers away when temptation or trials come because they have no root. Now the third scenario seems to imply that the word grows a fair amount past a seedling, and, perhaps to a budding plant, but it fails to bring forth ripened fruit after being choked by the thorns: the cares of this life and world. And finally in the fourth scenario, the word finds good ground: a noble and good heart that keeps it (literally “to hold fast” in the Greek)² and brings forth fruit to maturity with “patience” or endurance, as the Greek word (*hupomonē*)³ here can mean either. In addition, the explanation given in Mark 4:20 adds, “But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit.”

Moreover, Jesus’ explanation recorded in Matthew reveals additional insight. In the first scenario, the reason why the word fails is because “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart” (Matt. 13:19). So there is a condition of the heart in this setting, which is a lack of understanding. He then expounds on the second scenario stating, “when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles” (Matt. 13:21). Here it is the very word itself that causes them to fail, stumble and fall because of their lack of root: a deeper understanding and belief. The explanation of the third scenario in Matthew is virtually the same as Luke’s, and the fourth brings in the condition of understanding again. However, this time the good and noble heart “is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit” (Matt. 13:23). So whether the heart fails to understand and believe, maintain or persevere in belief, the result is no fruit, or perhaps, at best, only some

unripened fruit produced.

As one of the earliest parables in the gospels and the first to come with an explanation, there is no doubt of the reason for this: It is the key to unlocking all of the parables. For when the disciples asked Jesus the meaning and why He spoke in parables, He not only provided the answer above in Luke 8:10, but He also countered with the question from Mark 4:13, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?” Fortunately for the disciples, understanding and the hidden truths (i.e., the “mysteries”) of the kingdom of God was given to them, but not to the unbelieving and hardened of heart, especially of Jesus’ generation (Matt. 11:20-27; 12:39-42; Luke 10:13-16; 11:29-32). Thus, we must be the soft, spongy good ground that accepts, keeps (i.e., holds fast to), and understands God’s word if we want to bear fruit and have eyes to see and ears to hear all of the parables and teachings of Christ. For some, this is a call to plow up the hard ground of their hearts and seek the knowledge of God through His word (Jer. 4:3-4; Hos. 10:12).

THE FRUITS OF LOVE

But what is the fruit, the crop that believers bring forth: some thirty, some sixty, some a hundredfold? And what happens to the unbelieving and those who fail to produce? In Luke 3, John the Baptist exhorts the people coming to be baptized by him to bear fruit, and then explains what good fruits are and what happens to those who do not bear good fruit:

“Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance...And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

“So the people asked him, saying, ‘What shall we do then?’ He answered and said to them, ‘He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.’ Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, ‘Teacher, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Collect no more than what is appointed for you.’ Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, ‘And what shall we do?’ So he said to them, ‘Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.’” (Luke 3:8-14)

Leviticus 19 echoes this teaching and adds:

“When you reap the harvest of your land, you are not to reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You must not strip your vineyard bare or gather its fallen grapes. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your

God.

“You must not steal. You must not lie or deceive one another. You must not swear falsely by My name and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.

“You must not defraud your neighbor or rob him. You must not withhold until morning the wages due a hired hand. You must not curse the deaf or place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God. I am the LORD.

“You must not pervert justice; you must not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the rich; you are to judge your neighbor fairly. You must not go about spreading slander among your people. You must not endanger the life of your neighbor. I am the LORD.

“You must not harbor hatred against your brother in your heart. Directly rebuke your neighbor, so that you will not incur guilt on account of him. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against any of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.” (Lev. 19:9-18)

All these fruits can be easily summed up by the commandment: “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39). And when we keep this commandment we not only show our love for our neighbor, but also our love for God. As Jesus states, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15), which is the first and greatest commandment:

“‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matt. 22:37-40)

The Apostle Paul sums it up nicely in Romans 13:

“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” (Rom. 13:8-10)

Jesus again affirms this doctrine when He says:

“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” (Matt. 7:12)

In fact, the fruits of love are so central and paramount to Christianity that Jesus even issues a new commandment:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35; cf. Matt. 7:16-20)

However, some may ask, as they asked Jesus, who is my neighbor? It is clear from the passage above in Leviticus that our neighbor includes foreigners, the poor, the disabled, workers, our people (countrymen), and, of course, our brothers and sisters. In fact, according to *Strong's Concordance*, the definition for both the Greek (*plésion*) and Hebrew (*rea*) word for “neighbor” used in the text can mean: “another, fellow, near, or close by.”⁴ Thus, it does not simply imply to those who are close to us in relationships, but also to those who are close in proximity (e.g., the stranger sitting next to us on a bus or airplane). Jesus also answered this question in another famous parable, The Good Samaritan, and in His sermon on the mount, which extends this concept to even our enemies.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matt. 5:43-48)

THE INNER FRUITS

So what are some other types of good fruits? And what, as John exhorted the people, are fruits worthy of repentance? Repentance, which in the Greek (*metanoia*) literally means: “a change of mind,”⁵ must begin internally with the changing of our hearts and minds. Jesus makes this clear when He rebukes the Pharisees in Matthew 23:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, so that the outside may become clean as well.” (Matt. 23:25-26)

And again, when He explains to His disciples that defilement comes from within, from the heart:

“...those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man...” (Matt. 15:18-20)

We all have weeds of defilement sown in our hearts that need to be rooted out so that the word of God may grow unimpeded and bring forth fruit worthy of repentance: a changed vessel cleansed from the inside out. Some have suggested that Jesus introduced a new level of righteousness by teaching a puritanical inner righteousness such as looking at a woman with lust being equal to adultery, and anger or hate against your brother as murder in your heart. However, as we can see from Leviticus 19:17: “You must not harbor hatred against your brother in your heart,” and Exodus 20:17: “you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife,” these were not new concepts. Jesus was merely bringing attention to these rules of the law that had been severely neglected for far too long, especially by the religious elite, and refocusing the minds and hearts of the people on true repentance so that they could bring forth fruits worthy of repentance.

Let us, therefore, be transformed from the inside out by renewing our hearts and minds so that we may present ourselves as a living sacrifice acceptable to God. For this surely is good and pleasing fruit to Him. As Paul instructs us in Romans:

“...present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” (Rom. 12:1-2)

Then we can genuinely “walk in the Spirit,” as Paul calls us to do in Galatians 5:16, and manifest the inner fruits: the “fruit of the Spirit” which “is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). But only if we die to our carnal self and worldly life crucifying the defiling works of the flesh that bears fruit to death (Rom. 7:5-6; John 12:24-25).

CONTINUE THE CULTIVATION

Finally, one of the obvious ways for believers to bear fruit is to continue the cycle by sowing more seed. Growing in the knowledge of God is truly good fruit to bear, but if we possess the gift to pass that knowledge on, we, through the grace and power of God, can change the hearts and minds of others. Moreover, by sowing the seed of God’s word in the lives of others, such that when it falls on good ground prepared by God and takes root, it will not only yield more good fruit, but a new crop that God will reap: the harvesting of souls. Many refer to this as the “great commission,” when Jesus instructed His disciples to go “and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of

the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19). Furthermore, Jesus emphasized the seriousness of this mission when He asked and instructed Peter three times, “Do you love Me?” Peter, of course, answered, “Yes,” and Jesus replied, “Feed My sheep” (John 21:15-17). Proverbs 11:30 states, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.” So, let us be wise and continue our vital growth in the knowledge of God by feeding on His word, then perhaps we will be equipped to spread His word, help feed His sheep and continue the cycle of sowing.

CONCLUSION

When the seed of God’s word finds good ground in the understanding hearts of believers who hold fast to it and grow in its knowledge, it can produce many types of good fruit. But if our hearts don’t have depth of earth and aren’t weeded out and cleared of the thorns, we will likely yield nothing. And if our heart is hardened and won’t accept, absorb and let the word take root to grow, how will we understand any parable or teaching from God? Thus, this parable is key to understanding the rest of Jesus’ teachings of which many are parables. As He stated, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?” We must, therefore, believe, accept, understand and keep His word if we want to have ears to hear and eyes to see. For our understanding of God’s word is only truly unlocked and opened when we open our hearts and minds to Him. We must let the word dwell and endure in our hearts and minds. Otherwise, the cares of this world, riches, tribulation, temptation and even the wicked one will come and steal, choke and wither it away leaving nothing but an empty, dead and fruitless field. Jesus makes this very clear in the following explanation:

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” (John 15:5-8; cf. Matt. 15:13)

Therefore, let us abide and be rooted in union with Him and His word so that we may with a pure and repentant heart bear much fruit: love, compassion, kindness, charity, faithfulness, trustworthiness, honesty, fairness, patience, humbleness, mercy, meekness, self-control, selflessness,

contentment, peacefulness, and in all manner of righteousness planting the word of God and enduring to the end, as we look forward to the fruit of His coming:

“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life...” (Rev. 2:7)

NOTES

1. Scripture citations in English are from the *New King James Version*.
2. Katechó. (1995). In *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: King James Version Bible*.
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3. Hupomoné. (1995). In *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: King James Version Bible*.
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5. Metanoia. (1995). In *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: King James Version Bible*.
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