

Stage IV. The Great Galilean Ministry

G . The Second Tour of Galilee

5. The Parable of the Sower, His Seed, and Four Kinds of Soil (#091)

Base Text: MT 13:1-9, 18-23 (Parallel Texts: MK 4:1-9, 13-20; LK 8:5-8, 11-15)

1 ^{MT}That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. 2 ^LPeople were coming to him from town after town, ^{MT}and such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying:

^M"Listen up! ^{MT}A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path ^Lwhere it was trampled underfoot, ^{MT}and the birds came and ate it up.

5 "Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered away because they had no root, ^Land so they had no moisture.

7 ^{MT}"Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants ^Mso they bore no fruit.

8 ^{MT}"Still other seed fell on good soil, ^Mwhere it came up and grew, and ^{MT}kept on producing fruit-- ^Mmultiplying a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

9 ^LWhen he had said this, he cried out: ^{MT}"Whoever has ears, let them continue to pay full attention to this.

18 ^MThen Jesus said to his disciples: ^M"Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?

"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ^Lthe seed is the word of God-- ^Mthe farmer sows the word. 19 ^{MT}When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one, ^MSatan ^{MT}comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart ^Lso that they may not be saved by believing it. ^{MT}This is the seed sown along the path.

20 "The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. ^LThey believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. ^{MT}When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

22 "The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, ^Lthe pleasure of this life, ^Mand strong desires for other things ^{MT}keep on choking out the word, making it unfruitful, ^Lso it does not mature..

23 "But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone ^Lwith an honest and good heart ^{MT}who hears the word and understands, ^Mfully accepts it, ^Land retains it. ^{MT}This is the one who constantly produces fruit, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *the words of Jesus are italicized in red*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

CONTEXT DIGEST	
Location	Somewhere in Galilee, Beside the Sea of Galilee

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Timeline	May (Month Sixteen)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage IV: The Great Galilean Ministry
	G. The 2 nd Tour of Galilee
Title	5. The Parable of the Sower, His Seed, and Four Kinds of Soil

COMMENT:

In today's reading Jesus introduced the use of extended stories-- "*parables*"-- into his speaking ministry in one continuous sequence of ten parables. Eight of them were recorded by Matthew in Ch. 13, and Mark included two more in Ch 4 of his gospel. The session began by the Sea of Galilee, moved inside for private explanation to the disciples of today's parable, then back outside for continued delivery of the rest of the parables in the sequence. (We will examine the reason Jesus began to use parables in the next DKN Reading.)

This parable of the sower, his seed and four kinds of soil is the most basic of all of Jesus' parables. He had already described his word as the unshakeable foundation-rock , on which the wise person builds their life (MT 7.24-29). He has quoted Duet. 8.3 against the Devil while undergoing temptation, likening God's word to the "food, or bread" that sustains life . Now Jesus uses the imagery of sowing "seed" in four different kinds of soil, with four different kinds of outcomes, to describe the way his word works in our lives.

After speaking the parable to the large crowd listening to him on the shore of the sea of Galilee, Jesus explained its meaning in private to the twelve apostles. We can therefore be sure of the meaning of this important teaching of Jesus. This, and the parable of "The Weeds" that follows it are the two parables in the sequence in which Jesus' extensive explanation is included in the narrative. The is because of their importance for understanding life in the kingdom, and also because of their unique content.

Most parables make one basic point. The message is not in the details, but in the application of the point for Jesus' audience. (We will explain more about this in the "Comments" portion of the DJN #092.) However, these first two parables functioned more as analogies, in which the details in the story relate directly to the audience in some way. This is NOT typical for Jesus' communication style with parables. We make a mistake when we try to interpret every detail of every parable as an analogy, but this is a common error. Therefore, Jesus explained the details of these two specific "analogy-type" parables to avoid confusion, because these two parables are not typical of the rest of them ("main-point" type parables). The gospel writers included Jesus' explanation in their presentation of this teaching session so that all readers of their gospels would have Jesus' own interpretation to guide us.

The ten parables began with the "sower," who is Jesus himself, and his disciples who also proclaim his message in his name. The "seed" is the good news--the message of God's love and grace in sending Jesus as the Savior-King to the world of sinful people. This parable describes the process of evangelism in an individual's life, that occurs through hearing the message of the good news that Jesus proclaimed.

The notion of the gospel as "seed" is a powerful concept. One tiny seed contains the DNA programming and enough initial energy to start a growth process that will ultimately reproduce much fruit, and a living plant or tree that can live for many years. Jesus' word is "living" and highly productive in itself. Paul will later call the gospel "*the power of God that produces salvation in all who believe.*" Each seed of the gospel is a very powerful thing indeed. This is the Divine side of salvation, made available to us in the good news about Jesus.

In spite of the innate capacity of every seed to reproduce itself many times over, the productivity of a seed is also directly influenced by the quality of the soil in which it is sown. This is the human side of salvation--our response. Jesus uses the four kinds of soil to show four different kinds of hearts and minds in response to Jesus' message. Of the four, only one issues in the sower's desired outcome of "much fruit." That is a sobering statistic. One kind of "soil" never receives the message into their mind and heart to seriously consider it. Three kinds of "soil" take the word into their soul, but only one kind ends up bearing fruit.

Jesus was using this parable to challenge people to think about their response to his message. Only one in four kinds of soil was of any use in the end. Jesus called it an "**honest and good heart.**" Honesty in facing the truth

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about our own sinfulness and need for Christ, and his saving work in our behalf as Messiah was what Jesus called "good" soil. We simply need to acknowledge the truth, and act upon it.

Being good is not about being good in ourselves...it is simply being honest that we are in fact NOT good at all, and have a deep need for Jesus to save us. That fundamental attitude—exactly what the "be-attitudes" of the Teaching on the Mount described— is the key to being saved through faith in his word. It is all about God's grace, and our humility in embracing our desperate need for this grace.

APPLICATION:

Thankfully, God can change the kind of "soil" in our hearts. He can plow up the hard ground, remove the weeds, and water the soil with his Spirit. In fact, he uses every experience in our lives to prepare the soil of our hearts if we will just yield to him in doing that.

What kind of soil do you think Jesus sees in your heart these days?

How is he working in you to make your heart more fertile for the growth of his word within you?

What do you need to yield to him today, in order to be more fruitful tomorrow?