

## Bible Study Guide: Week of 7-6-2020

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

### **Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. 2 Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. 3 And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, 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 brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 Let anyone with ears listen!"

18 "Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. 20 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. 22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. 23 But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

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Jesus begins this parable with a command (a 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular imperative, implying that each person present should pay attention to Jesus' words). It is translated here as "Listen!" but most of the time when this Greek word occurs it is translated as "Behold!" or "Look!" or "See!" or "Lo!" This word (*idou* in Greek) is a command used to call attention to what is about to come, for instance, "Behold! The young woman shall conceive" or "Lo! The angel of the Lord appeared to them." The translation, "Listen!" in this context is appropriate, given that Jesus ends the parable with another command, "Let anyone with ears listen!" The Greek word here is "*akoueto*," the same root from which we derive our word "acoustic."

In other words, this parable is surrounded on both sides by commands from Jesus that his listeners pay attention to what he is saying, stressing the importance of this parable. Interestingly, the sower is quite generous with the seed, not really caring where the seed seems to fall. The sowers job is to sow, not to cultivate or improve the soil, nor to plot or plan where or how to sow. In his explanation of the parable as an allegory in vs. 18 and following, Jesus never explicitly identifies the sower, but is rather more concerned with the seed and the soil. We might ponder, then, who is the sower? Is it God? Is it Jesus? Is it the apostles? Is it all followers of Jesus? Is it several or all of these?

Jesus' reference to a crop yielding a hundredfold may be a reference to Isaac in Genesis 26:12, where he planted crops that yielded a hundred fold. Many sources indicate that a yield of fifteenfold would be considered exceptional in Palestine during biblical times, so a yield of a hundredfold would be miraculously great, emphasizing the sort of "harvest" that followers of Jesus can hope to reap when the Word of God is sown on "good soil."

After this part of the passage, we skip over vss. 10-17. Here are those verses, for the sake of understanding the passage better:

*<sup>10</sup>Then the disciples came and asked him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" <sup>11</sup>He answered, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. <sup>12</sup>For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. <sup>13</sup>The reason I speak to them in parables is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.' <sup>14</sup>With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: 'You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. <sup>15</sup>For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn— and I would heal them.' <sup>16</sup>But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. <sup>17</sup>Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.*

Jesus' reasons for teaching parables seem to be:

1. The ability to understand matters of the kingdom is a gift of God, not a human accomplishment.
2. Jesus' teaching style rewards those who do the hard work of seeking to understand and confounds those who refuse to try.
3. Jesus' parables are a fulfillment of the words of Isaiah 6:9-10.

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We now continue with Jesus' explanation of the parable of the sower. Many of the troubles Jesus mentions the would-be hearers and doers of the Word experience are familiar to us. The one perhaps most familiar and most challenging is the passage about the "Lure of wealth." This phrase is literally, "the deceit of riches/possessions/abundance." That is, the very things we look to for life and comfort and support can be the very things that cause us to be deceived and turn away from God.

The emphasis in this parable is on the sure and certain success of the Word of God. Even though the Word of God faces challenges and hardships, it will surely spread and yield a miraculous harvest. For Matthew's community, made up of mostly Jewish believers in Jesus, this parable provided some reassurances that the seeming rejection of Jesus by the larger Jewish community would not hinder or delay the fulfillment of God's purposes and God's kingdom. But Jesus' concern here is not just for the eventual coming of the kingdom, but also for the ultimate fate of

the different types of soil. Implicit throughout this parable is this question: “What type(s) of soil am I?” Or perhaps better said, “Will I/Do I hear and respond to the Word, or am I instead weighed down by cares and wealth and trouble and persecution?” We are invited to participate in the fruitful growth of God’s kingdom in the world and this parable helps us make sense of what it means to do this.

**Discussion/Reflection Questions:**

- 1. (How) do you think it changes the way we read this passage if we include vss. 10-17 instead of omitting them as our lectionary does?**
- 2. Who do you think the sower is in the parable? Are we called to be merely receivers of the Word, or are we also called to be a partner in the process of sowing?**
- 3. In what ways are you all the different types of soil at different times in your life?**