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I. Seeds, Sowers and Soils

- A. For the past couple of months, I have been preaching the parables of Jesus.
- B. Up until today, most of the Parables have been a response that Jesus is making either to a specific question that is being asked or addressing a particular issue with which the religious leaders were trying to dispute and discredit Him.
- C. Starting today, we are going to look at a series of parables that Jesus shares with His audience all with the purpose of describing what the Kingdom of God looks like and how we proclaim it!
- D. In the 13th chapter of Matthew's account of Jesus' life and ministry, a series of seven parables are recorded that describes the Kingdom of God in terms of Seeds, Sowers and a variety of situations in which seeds grow and the type of fruit that is produced.
- E. On Facebook, in the Highway and in my Geemail I sent a request for those of you who subscribe to those lists to read Matthew 13 in its entirety. I won't ask for a show of hands.
- F. I would suggest you read it sometime in the coming week. It will help to see the chapter as a whole and not just as unrelated stories.
- G. *(Mat 13 NRSV) 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.*

II. Seeds

- A. The fact that Jesus uses the illustration of a Sower sowing Seed reminds us that **Faith Grows**.
- B. In the gospel that John recorded, the 15th chapter contains the message where Jesus describes our faith like that of a vine that produces fruit. Jesus likens himself to the vine and we are the branches.
- C. We live in a fast-paced society and we expect things to happen quickly.
- D. It's just like the best wines are those that are mature. There is no way to speed up the process.
- E. Flowers grow in season and then die. Though they are beautiful, their life is short.
- F. I see a lot of Faith that is like a flower. It blossoms, but when the cold comes or the hot happens, the blossom dies.
- G. This past winter had some of the longest sustained days of freezing temperatures I have experienced since living here.
- H. Quite frankly, I was pretty amazed at how much of my lawn and landscape actually survived.
- I. There are two very old and tall oak trees in our front yard. The cold didn't faze them in the least.
- J. A byproduct of their growth is that they protected my lawn from the cold.
- K. When a person first comes into a relationship with Jesus Christ, it is like a seed coming to flower. It is quick. It is beautiful. It shows signs of new life.
- L. It is, however, just the start of our growth.

M. There is, however, no growth without seed. So Jesus lets us know that the kingdom of God grows in each of us from seed that is Sown.

III. Sowers

A. If you don't mind, I am going to offer a little unorthodox view of Matthew 13.

B. In some ways, I think we need to view this parable about Seeds almost as two different parables.

C. The first is ***We Have to Sow.***

D. {3} *And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow.*

E. Maybe because I am ultra sensitive to what it means to be a Sower.

F. Maybe after over 30 years of sowing seeds I am especially sensitive to what it means to do that.

G. Let's not take this parable too literally. Jesus isn't an MBA doing a statistical analysis of what ministry impact will be for His followers.

H. He isn't setting a quota of 25% productivity with a 75% failure rate.

I. I think he is more giving the sower the freedom to sow seed willingly without worrying about productivity.

J. Jesus understands the delicate nature of ministry, of sharing the Good News, of sharing Abundant Life, of calling people to repent and join the Kingdom of God.

K. In some ways Jesus is saying, sow seeds everywhere. Don't be stingy, be generous. Don't be careful, be careless, be reckless.

L. Some will fall on hard-packed ground without a chance of growing, some will fall on rocks with just a thin layer of soil, some will fall into rich soil but will get surrounded by weeds and will be choked, and some will fall on good soil.

M. If I were going to add to this Parable, it would be that I have seen some fall on good soil and still not make it.

N. Jesus is saying Sow the Seed. There is plenty of seed. Don't be stingy, be generous. Don't take aim, just sow.

O. I think Jesus is giving us license: encouragement that it is our job to sow, and it is God's job to reap the harvest.

P. We are so results oriented that if we don't see fruit immediately, we think we have failed.

Q. Jesus is saying you sow, my Father will harvest in due time.

R. {9} *Let anyone with ears listen!"*

S. *W. H. Auden: You cannot tell people what to do, you can only tell them parables; and that is what art really is, particular stories of particular people and experiences. Leadership, Vol. 8, no. 1.*

T. {10} *Then the disciples came and asked him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" {11} 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. {12} 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.* The disciples' questions are actually reinforcing Jesus' motivation for the message.

U. He seems to recognize the reality, that there are people, quite often religious people, who do not really understand the message of the Gospel, the pronouncement of the Kingdom of God, on earth as it is in heaven.

V. {13} *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.'*

W. Every form of soil about which Jesus had just spoken seems to be represented. Jesus is telling this story for the people that had gathered around.

1. Jesus' description changes a little.
2. They could see, but couldn't perceive.
3. They could hear, but they didn't listen and even if they listened they couldn't understand

X. Last week I spoke about the Surrendered Heart. This is really the problem here.

1. Jesus sums it up: *{14} 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. {15} 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.'*

Y. Oswald Chambers: It is easy to say we believe in God as long as we remain in the little world we choose to live in; but get out into the great world of facts, the noisy world where people are absolutely indifferent to you, where your message is nothing more than a crazy tale belonging to a bygone age, can you believe God there? -- God's Workmanship. Christianity Today, Vol. 39, no. 11.

Z. Jesus offers this word of encouragement *{16} But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. {17} 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.*

IV. Soils

A. *{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."*

B. How much explanation do you need for this one.

C. It is pretty simple. Sandy and I toured the Holy Land about 25 years ago and our guide stopped us on the road and just began to talk about the parable.

D. We were walking on hard packed road that bordered a small field where there were some crops growing.

E. We paused and she commented about the soils that were close by.

F. Standing on the hard packed, just a few yards from the fertile soil, you could see soil that had been tilled but it was filled with weeds as sort of a buffer, the closer you got to the road you could see soil that hadn't been tilled with rocks and there was very little growth, and then the road.

G. As she talked you could almost picture Jesus standing there with seed in His hands demonstrating.

H. This illustration, this visual concept was nothing new to His hearers. The perspective on the Kingdom of God was new, but the Old Testament talked about the condition of person's heart as Soil.

I. The Old Testament prophet Hosea and Jeremiah both used the expression, "Break up your fallow ground."

J. *(Hosea 10:12 NRSV) Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.*

K. *(Jer 4:3 NRSV) For thus says the LORD to the people of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns.*

L. To lie fallow describes cultivated land that is allowed to be idle during the growing season in order to restore the soil.

Land was allowed to lie fallow so it might become more fruitful.

- M. Now we are more sophisticated and have found that rotating crops in some cases is actually a better way to restore the soil.
- N. When left in this fallow condition, the soil could become overgrown with thorns and weeds so before you sowed a new crop the soil, the fallow ground, needed to be broken up, to be cleared of weeds, before sowing seed in it.
- O. Quite often, the interpretation of this scripture has expressed sort of a one shot meaning.
- P. Seed gets sown, if it grows you're in, if it dies you are out.
- Q. It is like you get one chance!
- R. I don't think that is necessarily the case.
- S. If we were going to have a show of hands, (we won't) where do you think the majority of us would say we are.
1. On the hard pack.
 2. In the shallow soil
 3. In the weeds
 4. Or growing exponentially, up and to the right.
- T. I would guess that most of us would place ourselves somewhere slightly left, right or smack dab in the middle of the weeds.
- U. Just the fact that you are here means you are looking for fertile soil, but all around you are the cares of the world, the problems, the pain, the struggles that divert you from having a really fruitful faith.
- V. I don't know anyone who says, place me on the hard pack... We just end up there.
- W. I don't know anyone who asks for the shallow soil, we just find ourselves dealing with shallow things.
- X. Nobody wants to be in the weeds, but somehow without knowing it all this clutter has surrounded us and we are being choked!
- Y. Given the choice, I think all of us would like to be in the deep rich soil.
- Z. Remember, parables don't even attempt to answer all the questions, they largely challenge us to think about our condition.
- AA. Here is the reality: for the most part we choose the soil we are in.
- BB. We aren't quite like the seed, we didn't just end up in one these four soils, we chose to get in one of them.
- CC. Possibly, we even jump from one soil to the next.
- DD. This is where we are challenged.
- EE. The Prophets figured it out. ***We need a Hoe!***
- FF. *Faith Grows!*
1. It is a process we all go through.
 2. You can't rush it!
- GG. *We have to Sow.*
1. Don't be conservative.
 2. Don't worry about the results.
 3. Leave the results to God.
- HH. *We need a Hoe!*

1. Don't settle for the state of your soil.
2. Be proactive.
3. If you aren't growing, Plow the Fallow Ground around you.
4. Change the path you are on. Remove the rocks that impede your growth, Get out of the Weeds.
5. You have some work choice in the type of Soil your life is. It may take some work.

II. This is the invitation that is offered us today.

V. Prayer

VI. Reminder to read Matthew 13 a few times this week.