

The parable of the sower is one of Jesus' more well known parables and as we study the truths it contains we will see clues as to why some people respond in faith to the word of God while others reject it in unbelief. The disciples did not understand why Jesus used parables when teaching and His answer to their inquiry may also help us understand why some people reject the gospel.

¹ The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. ² And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

Jesus leaves the unspecified house where He was to go sit by the sea. He may have been in Capernaum, which was a city on the shores of Galilee and the house may have been Peter's. When great multitudes gather around Him, Jesus boards a ship and uses it as a pulpit from which to teach the people. He sits in typical rabbinic fashion while the people stand on shore and listen to Him.

³ And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

“And he spake many things unto them in parables” – The Greek word for “parable” means “to place one thing alongside another,” which is how Jesus would use parables. He would place a familiar concept alongside a spiritual one for comparison or to express spiritual truths using earthly illustrations. The disciples didn't understand why Jesus constantly used this technique when teaching the multitudes because He would typically speak a parable without explanation. They will ask Jesus why He does this in vs. 10-17.

“saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow” – Jesus begins this parable by using the familiar concept of a man sowing seed to illustrate a spiritual truth.

⁴ And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: ⁵ Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: ⁶ And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: ⁸ But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

In the parable, the sower is sowing the seed, tossing it in all directions. As he does so, seed falls on four different types of ground: the wayside, stony ground, thorny ground, and good ground. The seed was the same that fell on each type of ground, so the only factor that determined the growth of the seed was the type of ground.

- **The wayside** – The fields were bordered by paths hardened by foot traffic and baking sun. Seed falling on this surface had no chance to grow before it was eaten by birds.
- **Stony places** – These were areas where the number of stones and rocks limited the amount of soil available for the seed to take root in. Any plants that sprung up here could not survive the hot sun because they did not have enough of a root system to draw sufficient moisture from the soil.
- **Thorny ground** – Seed that fell among the thorns would have to compete with the thorns for moisture and sun, so any plants that sprung up there would not last long.
- **Good ground** – This is ground where there were no hindrances to the seed taking root, springing up, and producing abundant fruit.

⁹ Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Here we have the first clue as to why Jesus used parables. This statement could be seen as an invitation to all (since all have ears) to listen to and understand what Jesus has just said in this parable. However, as Jesus reveals when the disciples ask why He uses parables in His teaching, not everyone has the ability to understand the spiritual truths being expressed by His parables. Thus, this statement is most likely an invitation to those who have spiritual ears to “let him hear” by seeking to understand these truths.

Verses 10-17: The disciples ask Jesus why He uses parables in His teaching since the meaning is not always clear. He replies that people like the disciples who listen in faith have been given the ability to understand spiritual things but the rest have not. He explains that parables have a dual purpose: (1) to open the eyes of those with faith and (2) to blind the eyes of those without faith (v. 12). The apostle Paul describes how that men do not naturally understand the things of God in **1 Cor. 2:14**: *“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”* It takes the presence of the Holy Spirit in one's life to comprehend spiritual things (John 16:13).

¹⁸ Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

Jesus now explains the parable to the disciples. The explanation of the purpose of parables that Jesus gave does not mean that we are left on our own to figure out the meanings of parables as best we can. Jesus is willing to explain them to those with the faith to believe because they will have the desire to learn. Those without faith will dismiss parables as foolishness and will not seek to understand, or if they do seek to understand, will misunderstand the meaning or give up because the parables seem like foolishness.

¹⁹ When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

The seed in the parable represents the word of God, or specifically in this case, “the word of the kingdom.” The wayside represents people whose heart and understanding has been hardened and Satan (represented by the birds) takes away the word from their heart before it can penetrate and take root. Satan will cause them to quickly reject the word of God so that it has no time to touch their heart.

²⁰ But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; ²¹ Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

The “stony places” represent people who hear the word of God and “anon” (immediately) receive the word with joy. They have an emotional response to the word because they like the idea of the blessings of God but their faith is not genuine. These were the type of people that had a superficial belief on Jesus because of the miracles He performed but Jesus knew that their faith wasn’t genuine:

John 2:23-25 ²³ Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. ²⁴ But Jesus did not commit [believe; have confidence in; entrust] himself unto them, because he knew all men, ²⁵ And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.” Such people lack the genuine commitment to Christ and will abandon Him when it comes time to suffer persecution for Him, which is why Jesus did not trust them. The Greek word translated as “by and by” is the same word translated “anon” meaning “immediately.” When the people represented by the seed in stony ground have to suffer for Jesus Christ, they will quickly abandon Him and reveal their true lack of commitment.

²² He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

Then there are those who are like the thorny ground, where the soil is apparently fertile but the seed cannot grow and bear fruit because of the hindrances of the thorns. These people follow Christ only when it’s convenient because they have other priorities that are more important to them than serving Christ. Churches today are full of people who will come to church as long as they have nothing better to do and still have the energy. Their commitment to Christ takes second place to the things they like and they give God the “leftovers” of their life if there are any. They only consult the Bible for answers when worldly advice fails. The word of God will never bring forth any fruit in their lives because their commitment to it has been crowded out by their desire for the things of this world.

²³ But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

None of the three previous soils produced fruit because the seed never took root substantially enough to produce fruit. The fruit is apparently the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25), indicating genuine salvation (Rom. 8:9). The seed produces fruit in someone who is “good ground” for two reasons:

- **“he that heareth the word”** – In order to have faith and be saved, a person must hear the word of God:
Romans 10:17 “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”
Gal. 3:2 “This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”
- **“and understandeth it”** – In Mark’s account, Jesus uses the phrase “receiveth it” (Mark 4:20) and in Luke’s account Jesus uses the phrase “keep it” (Luke 8:15). Putting the three accounts together, it seems that Jesus is speaking of those who have heard the word of God and then understand what it is saying (with the help of the Holy Spirit), accept it (“receiveth it”) as true and relevant to their lives, and then obey it (“keep it”). This obedience is not the cause of their salvation but the result as well as the evidence of it.

The result of hearing the word and then incorporating it into one’s life is that fruit will be produced by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-24) – the evidence of salvation. The seed of the word of God will produce “some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” showing that, although not all believers are equally fruitful, the Spirit will produce at least some fruit in all believers. This parable also shows us that in order to properly evangelize the world and see souls saved it will require a two-pronged approach: (1) preach the word so that people can hear it; (2) teach the word so that people will understand that they need to accept and obey the word of God and incorporate it into their lives so that they can properly follow Jesus Christ.

Verses 24-30: Jesus speaks a parable that illustrates the truth that in the church there will be genuine believers and those who only look like genuine believers, and that God will not separate them until judgment day (vs. 24-30, explained in vs. 36-43).