

"Fishers of Men" Series

Learn from Me – Knowing What to Share

"The Parable of the Sower"

Matthew 13:1-23

So far in this series we have seen, as an introduction, **"They Were Fishers,"** and we saw that:

- Fishing was a way of life
- Fishing was hard work
- Fishing requires patience, skill, and adaptability
- Fishing was a team effort
- Fishing meant letting go of what was caught

We then looked at the text, **"Come Ye After Me"** – Mark 1:17, and we saw there:

- The call is personal – "come ye after me"
- The change is progressive – "I will make you to become"
- Commission is purposeful – "Fishers of Men"

Last week, we considered the text in John 4:1-15, **"Sir, Give Me This Water,"** and found that we need to:

- See the need – vs. 1-6
- Start a conversation – vs. 7-10
- Stir the thirst – vs. 11-15

This week we will begin a study of **"The Parable of the Sower"** as found in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, concentrating mostly on Matthew's account of this parable.

NOTE: As you may have already perceived, I will use the term “evangelism” interchangeably (and more often) than the term “soul winning.” I know some might think that’s a more progressive term today (considering the use of it by evangelical churches) but I obviously don’t hold to that argument. It’s literally what we do by definition of the word “evangelize” and “evangelist” – to announce the good news (in this case, of Jesus Christ). Our responsibility is to give out the gospel, it is entirely God’s to do the saving.

When it comes to evangelism (or soul winning), many of us want to know *what to say* and *how to say it*. We wonder what part of the message will reach someone’s heart, or how we can tell if they’re ready to hear the truth. But long before Jesus sent His disciples to preach, He taught them something deeper: **not every heart receives the Word the same way**. In Matthew 13, through the familiar image of a farmer sowing seed, Jesus teaches us how the message of the Kingdom works – how it’s shared, how it’s received, and how it produces fruit. This parable is not just a lesson – it’s a lens through which we learn how to faithfully share God’s truth and trust Him with the results.

➤ **A Word on Doctrine – Mark 4:2**

When Mark records this parable, he adds a phrase the other Gospel writers do not: **“and said unto them in his doctrine”** (Mark 4:2). That word “doctrine” comes from a word (διδάχή) that means **teaching or instruction**. This isn’t referring to systematic theology as we might think of doctrine today, but rather to Jesus’ method and content of teaching. (The word does take on that meaning in the Apostle Paul’s writings, however.)

It shows us that what follows isn’t just an illustration – it’s foundational truth. Jesus is laying down **core doctrine** about how the Kingdom of God works. In fact, He later says in verse 13: *“Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?”* – underscoring its importance

as a key to understanding the others (referenced in Matt. 13:3 in the phrase, “many things”).

This parable wasn't separate from Jesus' doctrine – it **was part of** His doctrine, part of His **official body of teaching**. He taught truth through story, and this one held particular weight. If we want to learn how to reach people with the Word, we have to understand what this parable reveals: how people hear, how they respond, and why the message bears different results.

When we share the Gospel, we're not sharing human wisdom or personal opinions – we're sharing the **authoritative doctrine** of Christ himself. This should give us confidence as we endeavor to bring people to Christ.

Matthew 7:28-29

²⁸ And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: ²⁹ For he taught them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes.

This passage provides direct commentary on what Mark means by "his doctrine." The crowds recognized something fundamentally different about Jesus' teaching – it carried inherent authority rather than simply being tradition taught like the scribes' teaching, which always referenced other rabbis rather than God Himself.

John 7:16-17

¹⁶ Jesus answered them, and said, *My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.* ¹⁷ *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*

Here Jesus explicitly identifies his teaching as divine doctrine directly from the Father. This passage helps us understand that Gospel presentation involves delivering God's own authoritative word, not human opinion.

➤ Why Did Jesus Speak in Parables?

A **parable** (παραβολή) is a short, illustrative story that uses familiar, earthly images to convey deeper, spiritual truths. Jesus often used parables to **reveal truth to the humble** and **conceal it from the proud**. This is exactly what He explains when His disciples ask, “*Why speakest thou unto them in parables?*” (Matt. 13:10).

“Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.” (Matt. 13:11)

Parables served a **dual purpose**:

- They **revealed** truth to those with hearts ready to receive it.
- They **veiled** truth from those who were hard-hearted or willfully blind.

Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa. 6:9-10) by using parables as a filter: those who hungered for God’s Word would lean in and seek understanding, while others would dismiss His message altogether.

Isaiah 6:9-10

⁹ And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

Key Thought:

Parables are not meant to entertain the curious but to enlighten the committed.

So in the Parable of the Sower, Jesus wasn’t just teaching farming – He was testing hearts.

➤ Connecting Parables to Evangelism

While the immediate context of Matthew 13 involves Jesus' interaction with the spiritually hardened generation of Jews, the principle behind His use of parables applies to **all faithful sowing of the Word**.

Just as Jesus used parables to:

- Present truth to the receptive,
- And obscure truth from the resistant,

We also find that when we share the Word today:

- Some hearts **receive it joyfully** and seek more.
- Others **dismiss or resist** the message.

Parables remind us that **the condition of the heart** determines how truth is received – not the method, skill, or charisma of the speaker.

So while we do not speak in parables in the same way Jesus did, our efforts to **communicate spiritual truth – especially in relatable, heartfelt ways – carry forward His example**. Like Him, we speak to be understood by those with ears to hear.

Key connection:

As Jesus spoke in parables to reveal truth to the humble, we share the Word today knowing that God opens hearts – and fruit comes where the soil is ready.

Supporting Thought:

- Paul reminds us that the gospel is “hid to them that are lost” (2 Cor. 4:3), yet we are still called to shine the light (vv. 5-6).

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

³ But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: ⁴ In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. ⁵ For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the

Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

- Our role is not to manipulate results, but to **sow truth and trust God** with the harvest – just as Jesus modeled.

➤ Harmonized Overview of the Parable

This parable is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels – **Matthew 13**, **Mark 4**, and **Luke 8** – each offering a distinct emphasis that enriches our understanding of evangelism (we will look more closely at these texts later):

- **Matthew** stresses the importance of spiritual **understanding** – those who hear the Word and comprehend it are the ones who bear fruit (13:23).

Matthew 13:23

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.

- **Mark** highlights the necessity of **receiving** the Word genuinely and wholeheartedly (4:20).

Mark 4:20

²⁰ And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and **receive it**, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

- **Luke** draws attention to the **condition of the heart** – those who “keep” the Word do so with “an honest and good heart” (8:15), and bear fruit with patience.

Luke 8:15

¹⁵ But that on the good ground are they, which in an

honest and good heart, having heard the word, **keep it**, and bring forth fruit with patience.

Together, these accounts remind us that:

- The **seed** is the unchanging Word of God,
- The **sower's job** is to spread it faithfully,
- The **fruit** is dependent on the hearer's heart,
- And the **growth** is God's doing – not ours.

Matthew tells us the Word must be understood.

Mark says it must be welcomed.

Luke reminds us it must be held fast in a good and honest heart.

This parable, then, becomes more than a lesson in how people respond – it's a **class in evangelism** from Jesus Himself. As we follow Him, we learn not only *what* to share, but *why* and *how* to keep sowing faithfully, even when the results differ.

Key Insight: Evangelism is not as much a skill as it is **supernatural work**. The Holy Spirit must open ears and hearts.

I. THE SOWER – VS. 3

“Behold, a sower went forth to sow...”

A. His primary duty – to sow

The sower's task is not to analyze the soil or manufacture the growth – it is simply to cast the seed.

- He doesn't skip hard ground.
- He doesn't avoid the thorny patches.
- He doesn't wait for ideal conditions.

He **goes forth to sow** – faithfully, consistently,

generously.

"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing..." (Psalm 126:6)

➤ **A Biblical Connection – Psalm 126 and the Sower**

There's a strong connection here of **Psalm 126:5-6**, which says:

Psalm 126:5-6

⁵ They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. ⁶ He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves *with him*.

Though Jesus doesn't quote this psalm directly, the imagery would have been familiar to His listeners. Both the psalm and the parable emphasize **faithful sowing in the face of uncertainty** and the **assurance of joy in God's appointed harvest**. Just as the sower in Psalm 126 weeps but still casts seed, so too the sower in Jesus' parable scatters truth broadly – even on ground that may not receive it.

Also, Psalm 126 is part of a group known as the **Songs of Degrees** (or **Songs of Ascents**, Psalms 120-134) – a collection likely sung by Israelites as they **made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem** for the annual feasts. These were psalms of preparation, ascent, and worship—meant to fix the hearts of God's people on His promises as they journeyed toward His presence.

Jesus, His disciples, and His broader audience would have been familiar with these songs – singing them from childhood, chanting them during pilgrimage, and remembering them during worship.

It is not hard to imagine that when Jesus spoke of a sower going out to sow, the hearts of His hearers recalled the **long-cherished song of Psalm 126** – a reminder that faithful sowing, even through tears, is never wasted in God’s economy.

Encouragement: You may sow in sorrow and tears today – tired, discouraged, or unsure of the results – but the promise remains: *God brings the harvest in due season, and those who labor for Him will one day rejoice.*

We are called not to success, but to **faithfulness**. Evangelism is not about results – it’s about obedience.

B. He Does Not Control the Soil

In our flesh, we often want to **control outcomes**. But Jesus is clear: **the same seed** is sown in **every soil** – and the results vary.

This frees us from the burden of trying to save people ourselves.

“So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.” (1 Cor. 3:7)

Our duty is to share. God does the saving.

C. He must be willing to go

Notice the wording: “*went forth to sow.*” The sower **leaves the house**, goes **into the field**, and labors where the seed must be spread.

Evangelism doesn’t happen when we sit still. The sower must go out.

Jesus modeled this. He left heaven. He entered our world. He walked the streets, talked with sinners, and met people where they were. And He calls us

to follow His example.

Matthew 28:19-20 – *“Go ye therefore...”*

Acts 1:8 – *“...ye shall be witnesses unto me...”*

D. He must sow in all seasons

In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul urges Timothy to *“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season.”* That is, preach when it’s easy and popular and when it’s not.

Ecclesiastes 11:4 reminds us: *“He that observeth the wind shall not sow.”* In other words, if you wait for perfect conditions, you’ll never plant. And if you never plant, you’ll never reap.

Application: Don’t wait for a perfect opening or ideal response. Sow the Word now. Share what you know. Trust God to do what only He can do.

Conclusion: Before Jesus ever explained the seed or the soil, He started with the sower. That wasn’t by accident, it was by design, because the Word doesn’t go anywhere until someone is willing to go and share it. And while the results may vary, the responsibility remains the same: **sow faithfully.**

Today we’ve seen that Jesus taught many things – but this parable comes first. It’s foundational. It’s doctrinal. And it reminds us that our part in God’s plan for the gospel doesn’t start with knowing everything – it starts with **obedience**, with **faithfulness**, and with **trust**.

So the question is not: *Will it work?*

The question is: *Will we sow?*

Let’s be like the Sower – going out faithfully, prayerfully, and persistently. Let’s trust that the same God who sends the rain and the sun can also bring the harvest – in His time, in His way, and for His glory.

Next time, we'll look closely at the seed itself and how the Word of God brings life, conviction, and fruit when it finds the right soil.

A Chinese bamboo tree, when planted, is watered and nurtured for an entire year — and nothing seems to happen. This goes on for **five years**. For five long years, the farmer must water, weed, and wait — without any visible result. But in the fifth year, the bamboo suddenly breaks through the ground — and grows up to **90 feet tall in just five weeks**.

Did it grow 90 feet in five weeks? Or in five years? The answer is obvious: it took five years of faithful sowing and tending before any visible growth.

You may not see fruit yet — but your sowing is not wasted. God is doing something underground.