Matthew 13:1-23

I. Introduction

A. In Matthew 13 Jesus gives us a series of kingdom parables = stories and analogies that help us understand what it’s like when God’s kingdom (his rule, power, grace, love, etc.) breaks into this world in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ

B. The Parable of the Sower is his explanation of the various responses to his message and what lies underneath each of those responses

II. The seed

A. The seed represents the message of the kingdom/the gospel

B. The goal and purpose of a seed is to produce a fruitful crop

1. A seed looks small and insignificant, but it has miraculous potential if placed in the right conditions

2. So it is with the gospel message

C. The crop/fruitfulness envisioned is the values/character qualities of God produced in a person’s life (as an example, see the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23)

D. The key difference in these 4 soils is that only one produces lasting fruit

III. The 4 soils

A. Soil 1: the hard soil (v. 4 and 18-19)

1. This is a person with a “hard heart” who is never really open to the gospel

When Jesus says this person does not “understand” (v. 18), it’s not that they don’t understand intellectually; it’s that they don’t receive it with faith or openness

2. There’s a spiritual component to this beyond the heart of the person. Satan is also at work to prevent the message from taking root

3. Examples of this soil

a. the person on the street who hears the gospel and dismisses it

b. the person who attends church for years, but it’s simply a cultural thing, and they never really personalize the gospel message for their lives

c. we all can experience a hardness when we read the word (such as in a quick devotional time before bed) but aren’t really open to it changing us

B. Soil 2: the shallow soil (v. 5 and 20-21)

a. This is the person with a “shallow heart” for the gospel

1) There is an apparent authenticity to their coming to faith (= receive it with joy)

2) When life turns up the heat (in form of trouble or persecution) they think, “where is God, why has he failed me? This didn’t work. This isn’t worth it. I’ll move on.”

b. This person doesn’t really want a Lord; they want a Blesser to provide help and relief

“They didn’t want to enter Jesus’ kingdom. They wanted Jesus to enter their kingdom.” –Tim Keller

c. This is a person with a consumer mindset

= “My goal is personal happiness and fulfillment, and I look for products that will fulfill me. Once a product stops working, I move on to the next product.”

d. Classic example: someone who has a “camp spiritual high experience” but never bears any fruit after that experience and doesn’t continue on with the faith.

C. Soil 3: the thorny soil (v. 7 and 22)

1. The gospel message really does take root and start to grow, but other core priorities and pursuits remain intact

a. The worries of this life (v. 22)

-It’s not the problems of this life but the obsessive worries of this life that are the problem. It’s the belief that we still have to continue to control our lives and provide for ourselves and the anxiety that comes with that, rather than fully entrusting our lives into God’s loving care

b. The deceitfulness of wealth (v. 22)

-It’s not wealth but the deceitfulness of wealth that is the problem. It’s when a person buys into the false promises wealth makes to provide their lives with security, significance, and satisfaction

2. These other pursuits and priorities “choke” the gospel plant

a. These people would absolutely consider themselves authentic Christians, but when they honestly ask the question, “where is the fruit in my life?” their answer comes up short

b. There may be external fruit (going attendance, tithing, service, etc.), but there isn’t significant internal fruit (a growing love, joy, peace, trust in their lives)

3. These people live very conflicted lives

They always experiences themselves as being caught between 2 worlds; they live a life of constant compromise, a balancing act between competing priorities

D. Soil 4: the good soil (v. 8 and 23)

1. The key difference is that they hear and “understand”

= they receive it with faith. They let it sink into their heart and mind until it takes root in every area of their lives. They give it top priority, other priorities pushed aside to give full attention to it

2. And the gospel message produces an amazing crop of fruitfulness in their lives

= love, joy, peace, etc.

IV. Jesus’ main point: be careful how you listen!

A. Jesus invites us to consider how we listen to the message

1. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (v. 9)

2. There is a way of listening that is not really listening (v. 13)

3. The way you listen will have huge implications on what you receive (v. 12)

B. The difference between these soils was how well they listened

1. Every soil “heard” the word (see v. 19, v. 20, v. 22, v. 23)

2. But they heard in different ways

a. Soil 1 hears with a hard heart that is never really open to the message

b. Soil 2 hears with a shallow hear that is always asking the question: “what’s in it for me? How will this make my life better?”

c. Soil 3 hears with a divided heart that asks, “how can I pursue this without letting go of the other things I love so much”

d. Soil 4 hears with a receptive heart that asks, “how can I make space for this in my life, so that it sinks deep down and does its work in me?”

V. As we consider how we listen, we need to consider what kind of thing the gospel message is

A. It’s like a seed

1. It starts small, insignificant, defenseless, but it has a miraculous power to transform quietly, slowly, comprehensively when planted deep

2. This requires a very active and careful listening. We need to listen with a sensitivity, a depth, a patience, and an undistracted posture to allow something small to take root in us

B. It’s not like a boulder (Tim Keller analogy)

1. The kingdoms of this world work like boulders. They are big and they smash and transform externally through coercion

2. God’s kingdom message starts small and works slowly, but transforms from the inside out in a far more comprehensive way than a boulder ever could.

VI. Conclusion

A. Pay attention to how you are listening

-Every time you open the Bible, or talk about it with a friend, or hear a sermon or Bible study, take a moment to be receptive and to ask God to reveal himself and his truth to you and to open your heart to his word. Don’t just go through the motions

B. Trust in the power of the gospel message

1. Be patient with your spiritual growth. It doesn’t work like a boulder but like a seed

2. Remember that the work of life transformation is God’s work, not ours

**Discussion Questions**

1. How did Jesus’ comparison of the gospel message to a seed bring new insight or change your posture towards the gospel, if at all?

2. Consider the 4 soils in Jesus’ parable. What soil do you connect with most? Was there anything in the details of those soils either from Jesus’ words or Sunday’s sermon that was particularly insightful, convicting, or helpful for you?

3. In Sunday’s message, it was argued that the point of Jesus’ parable is to get us to consider how well we are listening to his kingdom message. As you consider the space and attention and care you are currently giving to listening to God’s gospel message, what do you see?

4. Is there anything specific you want to do differently moving forward in light of the message of this passage?