

The Parable of the Soils

Matthew 13.1-23; Mark 4.1-20; Luke 8.4-15

The ministry of Jesus is at a turning point: Opposition to Him as King has reached a point of no return. Jesus now speaks parables to conceal truth from those who don't believe, but reveal it to those who do. The first is often called the parable of the sower, but it's really about soils.

Keeping Our Historical Context: Why Jesus Speaks Parables

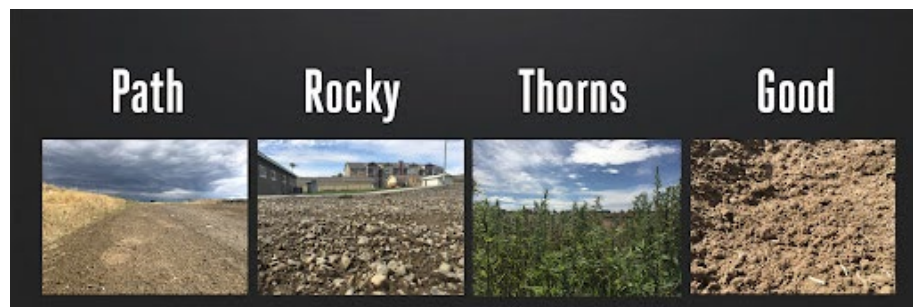
- Jews are rejecting the Kingdom
- Jesus' teachings are for those who want to follow Him.
- Those who don't believe, won't understand.

The Parable in Its Historical Setting

- Different responses to the gospel of the kingdom
- Pharisees and scribes reject Jesus and His teachings out-of-hand
- Others believe, but in time they fall away and wither
- Others believe, take it to heart, stay strong, and bear fruit

Applying the Parable Today: Every Person is a 'Soil'

- Some hear of Jesus, but don't believe in Him
- Some believe in Jesus, but do not bear fruit
- Some believe in Jesus, and bear fruit



1. The parable of the sower – or more correctly, the soils – is the first parable told in which Jesus is seeking to obscure His meaning from some of His audience. His disciples recognize this – that unlike His earlier parables, the meaning of this one is unclear. In response to their query, Jesus explains why He is doing this. Read Matt. 13.10-17, Mark 4.10-12, and Luke 8.9-10. What is Jesus' reason for this kind of teaching? What does this tell us about those who will not understand? About those who will understand?
2. The account of the parable of the soils is in all three of the synoptic gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This gives a kind of 'stereo' effect – we have three parallel accounts of Jesus explaining what the parable means. Compare Jesus' describing the first soil in each gospel (Matt. 13.19; Mark 4.15; Luke 8.12). Who does Jesus say the birds symbolize? What synonymous designations does Jesus use for him? In Luke's account, what does Jesus say he keeps the hearers from doing?
3. The second and third soils have similar results. How would you characterize the person who is like the rocky soil (Matt. 13.20-21; Mark 4.16-17; Luke 8.13)? How did he receive Jesus' teachings? Do they believe Jesus' words? What kinds of situations cause them to fall away? Do you know believers who this has happened to?
4. How would you characterize the thorny soil person (Matt. 13.22; Mark 4.18-19; Luke 8.14)? Have you experienced some "thorny" times in your Christian life? What "thorns" in our modern world effectively "choke the word" in our lives?
5. The goal of every sower is that his seed falls on good soil, and in the end bears fruit. That's what Jesus wants for His words. We can easily see how different people in Jesus' day represent each of the four soils. Can you see how they represent different people today? As Jesus sent out His followers to 'sow seed' in His day, so too we can 'sow seed' today. As you do, what kinds of responses can we expect?