

Pt 2 Not the Soil but the Seed

by Alan Redpath

Alan Redpath's sermon emphasizes the importance of the seed in the parable of the sower, highlighting how our response to God's Word determines our spiritual fruitfulness.

Duration: 40:14

Scripture: Psalm 25:14, Matthew 13:3-9, Matthew 13:18-23, Matthew 13:31-33, Matthew 13:44-50, Matthew 13:52

Topics: "Parables"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on Matthew 13:15, which talks about how people have blinded their eyes and shut their ears to God's word. The preacher emphasizes that this is not God withdrawing His mercy, but rather the people's own attitude of shutting themselves away from God's word. To break through this resistance, Jesus spoke in parables. The preacher then explains the meaning of the parable of the sower, highlighting how different types of soil represent different responses to God's word, such as indifference, worldly distractions, and the deceitfulness of wealth. The sermon emphasizes the importance of being receptive to God's word and avoiding the distractions and temptations of the world.

Transcript

Matthew chapter 13 we'll begin with, and I'll just read a part of it again, which we covered in some way yesterday morning. Matthew 13, that same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat there.

And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying, a sower went out to sow, and as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil.

And immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell upon thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

Other seeds fell on good soil, and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear. Now over with me to verse 18.

Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart. This is what was sown

along the path.

As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is he who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is he who hears the word and understands it.

He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and another thirty. That will cover that this morning, that portion. And I just remind you that we, yesterday morning, we took a look at the whole chapter and these parables.

I don't know about, I don't know whether you were able to take notes of anything, particularly yesterday, maybe you had a notebook with you, but maybe you have. At any rate, I'd be glad to give you anything on the whole thing that you think you need to know. But let me just remind you of one or two things about it.

There are eight parables in this chapter, and four of them are told to the crowd, and four to the disciples. The crowd hear the parable of the sower, the parable of the tares, the parable of the mustard seed, and the parable of the leaven. And then at verse 36, there's a break, and the disciples hear about the treasure in the field, the merchantmen seeking poles, the fishermen and the net, the householder and his treasure.

You will come on to each one of these in turn during the rest of the series. So I'm just giving those that you may remember, but I'll be coming back to them in more detail. And we covered yesterday morning something of the change in our Lord's ministry from this point, as he was under pressure about his ministry.

And we explained the reason for that change, why he used parables. Not to hinder, but to help. Not to blind, but to open eyes.

Verse 15 was the verse which has so often been misunderstood. We're told there that the people had blinded their eyes, shut their ears, lest, lest they should be drawn to God. And the important thing about that to recognize is that the lest is not the withdrawal of God's mercy to them, but the lest of their attitude.

They'd shut themselves away from God's Word. Didn't want it. Hardened their hearts.

So in an attempt to break through, Jesus spoke in parables. I said I think how reluctant he was to give up the struggle for each one of them. And to the disciples, he told parables that deal with the inner progress of the kingdom of God, the last four.

And the first four explained what was happening outwardly, things that are happening in the world, and going on around them all the time. Apparent failure. And to the disciples, it's the inner secrets of the kingdom.

Now we'll see that more clearly as we go on. Just the verse that I gave to you, I think, the Lord confines his purpose to those that fear him, verse 25, verse 14. And we finished by saying that every arena, every life should have an arena of worship and an altar.

They that wait on the Lord. Yes. Pardon me.

25, verse 14. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. Or any be, the Lord confines his purposes to those that fear him.

And Jesus is doing that to his disciples. Now that was merely the introduction, but we turn this morning to the parable of the sower. In verse three, our Lord calls it the parable of the sower in verse 18.

But nothing is said about the sower at all. By inference from the parable of the tares, as Jesus explained it, we assume that the sower is the son of man, verse 37. And you notice, if you just go down the opening verses of the parable of the sower, a man is sowing, and he's sowing seed.

And it falls on different kinds of soil, and a certain sequence follows. What does that all mean? Well, as I listen to the story which the Lord Jesus told, I'm inclined to think that the chief lessons are to do with the nature of the soil. But when I turn to our Lord's explanation, I find the chief lessons are not concerning the soil, but the seed.

If I hadn't the interpretation that Jesus gave of this, I would say that the harvest depended on the nature of the soil. There are four kinds. You find them from verse four onwards.

Open highway, or the path, rocky places, thorny ground, or fruitful ground, four kinds of soil. But Jesus lays no emphasis on the soil at all, but all upon the kind and quality of the seed which is thrown into it. Now, the parable of the sower is one of two which he explains.

Therefore, there's no room for speculation. Let's examine his explanation with this in mind. Verse 19.

This is he which was sown by the wayside. Verse 20. He that was sown in rocky places, or in some versions, as for what was sown, this is he.

Verse 22. He that was sown among thorns. And verse 23.

He that was sown upon good ground. Notice, emphasis not upon that which receives the seed, that's the soil, but he that was sown, that's the seed. Get that? Emphasis not on the soil, but on the seed.

As we go through these parables, it'll be very interesting to see your faces. I'm sure a lot of you won't agree with me. Try and love me just the same, but you won't agree.

I'm so thankful to know that's true, and you're really thinking it through, because you'll have to think. And I hope that you'll not be afraid to come and tell me. But it's a controversial subject, this we're handling, because for this parable, for instance, we usually thought of this parable of the sower and the seed, thought of it as a picture of our Lord, and then of all who preach the word, and the seed as the word of God, which is sown in hearts of people who respond in different ways, you know? But Jesus gives another slant on that, here in Matthew.

He's saying, now I'm in for it now, not that the sowing of the seed is the word of God thrown into the hearts of people, but it's the throwing of people into a generation. He that was sown. The sowing, therefore, is not that of truth, but of people, of men and women.

In the next parable of the tares, we read in the tares, he takes up the picture of sowing and says in verse 38, the good seed are the children of the kingdom, emphasizing that truth. In every case, it is he who was sown. Not it, but he.

And remembering what these parables are designed to teach, the progress of God's kingdom on earth, here we have at once his way of going about it. Sowing people, men and women, you and me, into a generation. This is he who was sown.

Some fruitless, non-productive. Others fruitful. There is, of course, also the sowing of the word of God in the heart.

And Luke's account of this parable emphasizes that. But there's no contradiction. Because the sowing of the word into your heart is the beginning of the principle which makes us fruitful seed.

I repeat so slowly. That's not what I said to myself. Ready? Get it down.

Ready to go? The sowing of the word of God in the heart is the beginning of the principle which makes us fruitful seed in our day. Now, are you quite sure you wrote that down in your notes and clearly that you understand? Do I need to go over a bit of it again? Perhaps I should. Right? Let me just go over it because it's important.

Jesus is saying, not that the sowing of the seed is the word of God thrown into a generation, thrown into the hearts of people, but it's the throwing of men and women, fellows and girls, into a generation. Note, I hope, particularly verse thirty-eight, where in the parable of the wheat and tares, the Lord takes up the picture of sowing and says in verse thirty-eight, the good seed are the children of the kingdom. All right? Emphasizing that truth.

It's always he who was sown. Verse twenty to twenty-three emphasizes that. Parables are designed to show the progress of God's kingdom on earth.

And here's his plan of working. Sowing people into a generation. Some are fruitless, some are non-productive, others bring forth fruit.

Well, that should be on your notes, at any rate, clear. Now, let's look for a second at the Lord's description of these various seeds. Verse nineteen, he that was sown by the path, or by the wayside, who is he? Anyone who hears the word of God and doesn't understand it.

Somebody who listens to a message, but it's meaningless, and he doesn't trouble to think. Seeds by the wayside. And the evil one, the enemy, comes and snatches away what was sown.

No fruit. No influence in that life, in the extension of the kingdom. You know, in church, how many things press on our mind, and we're insensible to the truth of God's word.

And immediately Satan comes and snatches away the seed. And two minutes after the sermon is over, and the service is over, the conversation is. Dinner, weather, business.

Whirl of traffic begins again and again. And they become harder than ever. If you want to know what blessing has come through your preaching, just watch the crowd go out.

I've done that, and that keeps you humble. It's amazing how when you've poured your heart out for the Lord, and really given everything you've got, two minutes afterwards, 90% of the people couldn't care less. I don't say that to discourage, but to warn you.

Again, here's another person. Verse 20. Got that? Verse 20.

He that was sown upon rocky places. Who's he? Oh, he's somebody. I just keep on saying he, you know, I mean she as well.

It's using a generic term. Well, they've got no root in themselves, you see. They consent to the claims of the word, and rejoice in it.

Their emotions are easily stirred. Listen to a gospel address and say, why, that's the finest sermon I've ever heard. They come and tell the preacher that, and the preacher is very foolish if he pays any attention to him.

It never takes root, and in the face of trouble, he fails. Just let me speak slowly and get this down. Ready for it? Okay.

I have some long words here. Watch it. The superficial, S-U-P-E-R-F-I-C-I-A-L, the superficial excitement with which these people receive the word of God is equaled by the haste in which they beat and retreat when trouble comes.

The hard rock is right beneath the skin. The most heartless people are the most gushing. The most immovable people are those who are most easily moved on the surface, but the heart is never touched.

You've probably met them. People will say, oh, I think this is now old hat. That isn't the word you use now in the States, is it? How many people come up to me and say, gee, that was a swell sermon.

And they're even in tears. But the heart has never been broken. It needs to get 18 inches lower down from the mind to the heart.

He that was sown in rocky places. Got it? Next kind is verse three. I'm sorry.

He that was sown among thorns, verse 22. Who is he? The man who hears the word. But the cares of life and the deceitfulness of money choke what is heard.

He becomes in love with the world around him. Not the world, but the love of it. Not riches and money, but the deceitfulness of it.

Chokes him. And under the influence of all that, the seed dies. Smothered, kept from fresh air and nourishment, smothers.

Unfruitful. Sundays are now spent on the golf course, or in the garden, or taking the dog for a walk. How well do I recall, 40 years ago now, when I was at Moody in Chicago, a man came up to me after morning service.

He was very well dressed. And very smart. I suppose a man about looked to me in his 40s or perhaps coming into his 50s.

And he said to me, 20 years ago, everything you said this morning rang a bell in my heart. But not now. It was real to me then, but not now.

Oh, I said, why? And he smiled. Well, he said, you see, I've made a lot of money. I've got a big business.

I'm in charge of 300 men. I get out every day to my office by seven in the morning, and I never get home at night till about 10. I've neglected the family.

It's been a huge success. I'm a multimillionaire. And then suddenly he broke down.

I found it a bit embarrassing. He just wept his heart out. And when he'd recovered himself, he just looked at me and said, my God, what a price I've paid.

That's it. Falls on thorny ground. Lay not up treasure on earth, but lay up treasure in heaven.

Matthew 6, 19 through 21. And all that sounds a bit depressing. But he that was sown upon good ground, verse 23, he hears, understands, and brings forth fruit a hundredfold.

He's heard the word, and he's obeyed it. And his life is making a tremendous impact. He's preparing for the return of the king.

Now, you notice from these four pictures that the harvest to which God is looking depends not on the soil, but on the seed. The soil responds or refuses to respond according to what kind of seed. It's put in it.

And in your Christian service for God, situations will be hard or rocky or thorny or fruitful according to the nature of the seed. What matters most in the Christian life is not what I do, but what I am. What I am.

And your influence and mine upon the bit of field which God sends you to depends entirely upon your response to Scripture. If you don't understand it, the way is hard. There's no harvest.

If you become absorbed with something else, the age destroys you, chokes you. But if I understand and respond and obey, then there's a breakthrough. That's the method of God's working.

And it's very thrilling to me, exciting to think. Oh boy, I wish I was fifty years younger. You know, it's tremendously exciting to think.

And that's God's method of working today, planting you and planting me in the way that you are influencing others to the kingdom. Just jot down this verse of Scripture to note it and look at it. Romans 8, 19.

The whole creation waits with eager longing for the manifestation of the sons of God. What do you think that means? Well, conceivably, I suppose, I'm sure indeed, it may mean the anticipation of the day when Jesus comes, comes with his people in glory. But the principle is at work right now, today, here at Cape and Ray.

Whenever the creation groans, the only answer is the planting in it of people of God. You all know, as I do, that the world everywhere is in such a mess. There's no answer to it by any other means than planting in every situation men and women of God, fruitful seed.

In the midst of people who are against the king, and such a harvest is the result of living seed flung from the hands of Christ to bring fruit for his glory. He has sown you and me into this age for that purpose. The question is, what kind of seed are you? The answer to that question depends on the extent to which God's Word has gripped your life, and his grace has been received and appropriated by faith in your heart.

And your attitude to the Word of God depends upon your attitude to the Holy Spirit. Just remember the different attitudes you can have. You can resist the Spirit.

Acts 7.50, you can resist him. You can hear the Word of God week by week, and be at the receiving end of all the lectures here, and sing the hymns. But no harvest in your life.

Nothing in us to attract anyone to Jesus. You can grieve the Spirit, Ephesians 4.30, grieve him. Somebody takes first place before Jesus.

Something else matters more to you, never takes root. You can quench the Spirit, 1 Thessalonians 5.18. You know, all's going well, but you're getting on. The success of material things come first.

But you can be filled with the Spirit, Galatians 5.22, and bring forth his fruit. Get this, just before we finish. The fruitful seed of life is the result of the sowing of the Word of God, in your heart.

It isn't a question of intellectual understanding only, but intellect, emotion, will, conscience, heart. The whole man receives the truth. Hosea 10.12 says this, verse 10, chapter 10, verse 12.

Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord. To the Lord come and reign righteousness upon you. And I've just made a personal prayer here.

I'll share it with you. Maybe you'd like to put in your notebook. Lord, please disentangle me from the smothering absorption of civilian living, and make me a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

I'll go with that again. Lord, please disentangle me from the smothering absorption of civilian living, and make me a good soldier of Jesus Christ. When we lived at Caponray, I think that'll conclude your notes, as far as I know.

When we lived at Caponray, we lived in that wee house down there, that little house down there, Willow Bay Cottage. We had 14 years there. It was built for us, Major Thomas built the house for us, at the same time as this conference hall was going up.

And it's a lovely little home. It was in a field, as you see. It hadn't any hedge around it, nothing.

It was absolutely open. And boy, the wind was terrific. And of course, the whole place needed, what do you call it, you know, putting flowers in it and roses in it.

And I didn't know a thing about gardening. So we got a man who was an expert to do this whole garden. And a friend of mine from London, who happened to be heading a big place, selling flowers and all that, he sent me a hundred roses for a present.

So I gave them to this man who was going to do the garden. And he planted a huge bed of rose bushes. And it was interesting to watch him because he dug so deep.

And having dug deep, he brought a whole pile of manure and buried those poor roses in that manure. You couldn't see anything. They smelt a lot, but you couldn't see them.

There they disappeared. That was the spring of about 1969. And in the autumn of 69, one or two of them had just ventured to bring up the heads above the manure.

And he came along again, raked it around, and then he took his clippers and cut off all the heads, and they disappeared. And again, piles of manure. So I thought, well, that's interesting.

I didn't know what he was doing, didn't like to ask him. And then at springtime in May, he came along again. And this time, there's quite a lot of them beginning to show their heads.

Really looking very prosperous. And would you believe it? Again. He took his clippers, cut them right down, disappeared.

Then put more and more manure on them. I found it hard not to say something, but I thought, well, I'd better not, but show my ignorance. He went away.

And it was a year later before there was any sign of them all suddenly sprouting up, early in the spring. Great big, fat stems they had, and little buds of roses. Lovely.

And I thought, well, now that's wonderful. I've got to have some. But would you believe it? He came along in May, and they all disappeared.

Three years, that was. Three years. Cutting them right back.

I didn't say anything. I would have done, but my wife stopped me. And so I said nothing.

Covered them again. And the next spring, they came up there. More wonderful than ever.

I thought, well, now we've got it now. And he didn't come then. And in June, one day, I came up here to lecture.

And I smelt something. And I said to myself, I want to see where that smell's coming from. So I followed my nose.

That wasn't hard. I went round to the garden there, the front. And in this rosebed, there was one rose that had come up.

It was several inches above the ground. And it was in full bloom. Beautiful.

And a wonderful fragrance. And I looked at it. You'd think it'd been crying.

Because the morning dew was on its leaves. And the fragrance of it was absolutely marvellous. I stood there for a few moments, and suddenly found I was going to be late for the lecture, and came up here.

And when I came back, I thought, I must tell my wife about that. I came back down to the garden there. Would you believe it? The rose had gone.

Right. Disappeared. And I was cross.

Who's done that? Has that fellow been here again? And I went into the house. And I smelt a smell. A wonderful smell.

And I went into the living room. And there was a vase full of water. And all the petals of this rose had been cut off and were sitting on the water.

And the fragrance of that rose was all through the home. It was marvellous. My wife had done it.

See? Oh, bless your heart. That's what the Lord wants to do with your life. Make it fragrant.

When I tell you in order that, um, if he might make it fragrant, it's got to be cut. It looked as if it had cried many times. And it'll bear many marks.

As that rosebush was cut and cut, you'd think it had been bleeding and crying. And sometimes, if the Lord's going to produce in you and me the kind of person he wants, he'll cut us back. And it hurts to grow, but the outcome of it will be fragrant.

So prepare to be a good seed. Let's pray. May each of us be able to say, I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

May we learn to grow by learning to die and to live at the cross day by day, so the Holy Spirit may break through in power, shattering in power, and make us the kind of people you want to fling into this generation, to be examples of your glory and of your fragrance. Answer prayer for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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