

Matthew 13:1-23 | Jeffrey Smith

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[0:00] Good morning. All right, we're on. How's everyone doing? Good? I usually like to have the mic and everything set up, but I have a young IT guy apprentice back there and how to get him set up.

So, I said, son, do you want to do the PowerPoint? He said, what is PowerPoint? I said, perfect. I will teach you. All right. It is good to be with everyone.

If you want to turn in your Bibles to Matthew 13, that is where we will be. Looking at really the first, roughly the first half-ish of Matthew 13.

And before we jump into it, I want to just take us back four years. So, it's 2020. We're going to say it's April, May-ish time frame.

What was life like April, May of 2020? It was very different than this. We had lockdowns. We had quarantining. We had masking. We were attempting to flatten the curve.

[1:17] Things were being canceled left and right. And in a way, the world kind of came to a halt. And on a personal level, you know, our family schedule, which was pretty full at the time, still is, but pretty full then, completely changed.

I was traveling for work pretty frequently. I was probably traveling once every three-ish weeks or so. The kids had school. They had evening activities, sports, all of that. And then suddenly, it all changed.

Not only was I not traveling for work, but I was now working from home. So, that's completely different. The kids went from going to school to homeschooling. Sports and everything were canceled, right?

And now, if I'm going to be honest, and I'm not going to ask you guys to raise your hands if you agree with me or not, but there was a silver lining to all that. It was really nice just to see the schedule come to a halt.

Everything slowed down. Suddenly, it's just you are at home with your family more. And there was some really kind of great aspects of that.

[2:32] And then we all started to kind of get used to and accustomed to Zoom. And, you know, we're doing cheesy things like, hey, let's play a game on Zoom with your family members. Or let's have a big Zoom call. Or at work, we were doing Zoom happy hours.

I'm like, this is the lamest thing I've ever done. But we're doing weird things, right? People are watching shows together. Do you remember the documentary on Michael Jordan, The Last Dance, came out?

And everybody's watching The Last Dance. There was another one that I did not watch, but Tiger King was a real popular one. And so, it's like everybody kind of started to kind of do things together, but separately.

And then we started to get into different hobbies. And one of the most popular hobbies was gardening. Do you know how, like, people just suddenly started building, you know, garden beds and garden boxes and all these things?

And part of it was you didn't know if we could rely on the grocery store for food. And so, you thought, well, maybe I have to grow my own food. I don't know. Well, we joined that as well.

[3:42] And, Josiah, if you want to hit forward one click, this is the test of our new intern. One more, okay, perfect. Stop there. So, we joined the Gardening Hobby Club.

And we built three of these raised garden beds. We had kind of a measly garden there before. It was on the ground. If you've never been in our backyard, there's a garage that's just immediately to the right.

So, as you can see, it's not like the most ideal place for a garden because you have a privacy fence on one side. You have a garage on the other side. You're kind of limited on when you get sunlight. And if you click one more time, my lovely daughter, she didn't know I was putting this picture up there.

But this is us with actually some plants in there. We had this string. Reese's mom taught us about square foot gardening or something, a way to organize the garden.

And if you also remember at this time, things were getting really expensive. Material was expensive. Wood was expensive.

[4:52] Everything was expensive. Do you know how much it cost me to build those three garden boxes, to fill them with all the correct soil and moss and all that stuff, and then also to put all the plants in?

Any guesses? It was \$400. \$400. \$400 for that. Well, okay, so we planted all the normal things, right?

Your beans, your peppers, your lettuce, tomatoes of various kinds. And for me, the pinnacle of a garden is your tomatoes, okay?

And I'm not talking like the cherry or grape tomatoes. I'm talking about like your normal, large, whatever, beefsteak, whatever you want to call them, tomatoes, okay? I don't care if they're yellow, red, but like a juicy tomato, a BLT, even a tomato sandwich, it just doesn't get better than that. Okay, so \$400. Do you know how many tomatoes I got for \$400? I got one tomato? I got one tomato. One stinking tomato.

[5:59] So the question is, how does tomatoes tie with Matthew chapter 13? Let's pray, and then we'll talk about it. All right. Heavenly Father, thank you again for this morning.

Thank you for your word. As we always say, Lord, it is your direct communication to us. It is truth. There is so much to glean from that, and I just pray that we would walk away with something this morning, again, coming from your word and your scripture here, Lord.

So we just thank you for that. In your son's name, amen. All right. So Matthew 13, verses 1 through 23. There's three parts to this.

There is the parable of the sower. You'll kind of see where I'm going here with some seeds, some planting, all of that. And then there's a little break in the middle of this passage where Jesus explains why he uses parables.

And then at the end of this, and this is really where we're going to spend most of our time, he explains that first parable, the parable of the sower. So let's read.

[7:04] We're just going to kind of read each section and talk about it. And again, we'll kind of spend most of our time on that last piece. Josiah, if you want to click forward one. So Matthew 13, if you want to read with me, it says in verse 1, 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 down.

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 on the path, and the birds came and devoured them.

Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have 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 among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

And other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.

[8:15] So the parable is very straightforward. It's a parable of a farmer or a planter or a gardener planting seeds in four different scenarios. The first scenario is seed that falls on the path.

No growth. Birds come, eat the seeds. Second scenario is seeds fall on rocky ground, not much soil. But there is enough soil for germination.

I'm going to come back to this. For germination, which is this situation that happens when you have a plant or a seed that is in the ground. So you have soil, you have water, you have sunlight.

There's a reaction that happens. A root is developed, and then a sprout comes up. And so that's what happens. It's rocky soil. There's not much soil there.

But it does spring up. When you think about the life cycle of a plant, again, I have no plant expert here. As you can tell, my tomatoes yielded one tomato.

[9:17] My tomato plants. But you have a seed, you have germination, you have growth, and then you have fruit. Has anyone ever seen a plant grow but never bear any fruit?

Okay, we're going to see some of that here. So there was enough soil in seed two for there to be some germination, and the plant grows, but then it dies quickly because the sun bakes it, there's not much root, and it withers.

And then you have this third group of seeds who are cast into an area where it grows, it germinates, it grows. It seems like it maybe grows more than seed two.

But ultimately, the weeds grow up with it and choke it, and the plant dies, and it doesn't reach full maturity and fruitfulness. And then you have this fourth group of seeds, which is the most ideal situation, where the seed is planted, the soil is good, there isn't the presence of weeds, and it germinates, it grows, it goes to maturity, and it bears fruit.

And it bears fruit at many different levels, 30-fold, 60-fold, 100-fold. The point is in a variety of different outcomes. And so here's the parable.

[10:30] It's pretty straightforward. Scenarios one and four are the most straightforward. And we're going to have some interesting discussion around scenarios two and three. Where are seeds two and three?

We'll come back to that. So why parables? Why does Jesus use parables? He could have easily explained whatever his point was in plain language, and the disciples and all the audience would have said, yep, got it.

It's been said that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. So it's an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. In the Greek, the word parable means to cast alongside.

A parable is a story or a saying that draws comparison between some earthly reality and a spiritual truth it intends to illuminate.

Not to sound overly spiritual here, but I love parables. I love to give parables. I don't call them parables. I call them analogies. Okay?

[11:39] Stories. Teresa knows that I love analogies. I love analogies because, you know, if I'm trying to explain something, say at work, and I come home and Teresa's like, how was your day at work?

I could say, yeah, it was fine. It was good. Or it wasn't good. Or maybe there was like some issue that came up, but it's so nuanced and so specific to my job that explaining it to Teresa, who doesn't live in that world day to day, it's just not going to connect.

It's not going to make sense. But if I say, you know, what happened was, the situation with the client, it's very much like, you know, if one of our kids were to come home and say this, and you respond with that, but then they do this in return.

Like, you would be so surprised. And that's what happened with this client. Those kind of comparisons, those analogies, can help communicate something to someone that, you know, may not initially get it.

And so Jesus is using these parables to cast this spiritual truth amongst the disciples. Just like, if you want to click forward one.

[12:49] So the disciples, they ask a great question in verse 10. They come to him and say, why do you speak to them in parables? And he answered them, to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

But to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case, the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says, you will indeed hear, but never understand, and you will indeed see, but never perceive.

For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and with their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears for they hear. For truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous people long to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

[14:01] So the disciples asked the obvious question, why do you speak to these people in parables? For being honest with ourselves, we probably wanted that sometimes too. Jesus, why couldn't you have just communicated in a way that was just a little bit more straightforward?

I think you can do it. Why didn't you do it? And so the Gospels are full of examples of Jesus communicating something, and the disciples misunderstanding.

There's a great example, I think it's in John 10, where Jesus says something, and the next verse is, the disciples just didn't understand. They just didn't get it.

But he does it for two reasons. One is he's fulfilling prophecy. What that quote is, is from Isaiah 6, 9 through 12. But it's also a method of communication. And it's interesting, because again, we're at this point in Jesus' ministry where there's starting to be this rejection of him.

And so from this point on, when Jesus speaks in parables, he explains them only to his disciples. Jesus had a specific audience that was to receive the meaning of these parables.

[15:14] It says, He who has ears, let him hear. These people all had ears. It wasn't physical ears. But for those who were intended to hear this, let them hear this message.

It's almost like, as parents, if you've ever done this, when you're trying to communicate, but you have a child maybe next to you, and that message isn't meant for them. Maybe you're driving in the car, and you're trying to say something to your spouse here.

Maybe you're in the house. Whatever it may be, you may communicate a little bit differently. Maybe you use some code words. Maybe you're mumbling a little bit.

Maybe you're kind of speaking in a lower tone. You're trying to say something. Don't, don't, don't. Are they paying attention? And it's just a way of communicating to someone when there's the presence of others, but that message is for one person.

Okay, so let's get to the good stuff. This is all good, but let's get to the extra good stuff. The explanation of this parable. Just so I, if you want to click forward. So verse 18, it says, Hear then the parable of the sower.

[16:24] When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

As for what was sown on the rocky ground, this is the one 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 the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, and another sixty, and another thirty.

So remember, we have these four groups of seeds, and Jesus explains that the seed represents the message of the kingdom of heaven. And in light of this recent rejection, there were certain truths about the spiritual aspect of the kingdom that needed to be communicated.

[17:38] And the ground represents the four types of individuals receiving this message. In each of the four groups, the seed is cast, but the response varies widely.

Okay, so hang with me here. The first example represents someone who hears the gospel, hears the message of this future kingdom, and does not understand or come to faith.

Pretty straightforward. Okay, let's jump to the last one. The fourth example is good soil. This is the one who hears the gospel, understands it, puts their faith in it, but the really cool thing is that person is not only, not only do they believe, and they are saved, but their life begins to change, and they begin to bear fruit, and that fruit comes from the indwelling of what?

The Holy Spirit. Ephesians 1 says that when you believed, you are marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.

This is the guarantee of our future inheritance, of salvation. So the moment you believe, you are given the Holy Spirit. That fruit can come in many ways.

[18:59] The fruit of the Spirit is not a coconut. We know that. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

When people get saved, there is a wide response to that. Even as it says in that fourth situation, some yielded 30, some yielded 60, 100.

Some you see believe, and they run at full force with that. And you see fruit. And you see fruit the rest of their life.

And it is a beautiful thing. Some people get saved. And as we'll kind of see in a couple situations here, you don't see that as much. Okay?

There's a lot of different variables that go into that. So that last example is good soil where someone believes and immediately or shortly thereafter shows substantial fruit.

[20:02] So what about the two middle groups? Were they saved? What happened to those people? The second group in verse 20 hears the word and receives it immediately with joy.

This account is in the other two synoptic gospels. So you can find this almost exact account in Mark and Luke as well. There is one difference though.

In Luke 8, it says that that second seed believed. That's interesting. They believed for a while.

But because they had no root in time of testing, they fell away. That's interesting. They believed for a while and then they fell away because they had no root. If we would all agree that one cannot lose their salvation, then when this person believed, they received the Holy Spirit and they were sealed, as Ephesians 1 says, guaranteed this inheritance of salvation.

The interesting thing is, and I hate the term problem passage. Has anyone ever heard this? What's a problem passage? None of Scripture should be a problem passage.

[21:30] But what people typically mean by this is, you know, it can cause some disagreement. It can be, you know, it's hard to explain maybe for one side or the other. I was shocked when I'm reading the commentaries that this Matthew 13 wasn't more of a problem passage.

95% of the commentaries I read would say that those in seed 2 and seed 3 categories were not believers. believers. And they would say that because ultimately they withered away and they didn't show much fruit.

They didn't show any fruit. There were some that would say, hey, seed 2 and seed 3 may have been believers.

And quite frankly, that is the direction that I really feel like the Scripture is leaning towards here. again, remember the difference between a seed that falls on the path that is immediately eaten by a bird and the seed that is planted and germinates.

Okay? That seed that plants that germinates has those three things, right? Soil, water, sunlight. A root comes down, a sprout comes up. There is some life that is there.

[22:51] Do you remember my \$400 tomato? The other nine plants that I had were all still tomato plants. Unfortunately, they didn't yield much.

They didn't yield anything. Okay? But they were still tomato plants. Since then, since 2020, I've had years where we've had tons of tomatoes and years where we've had no tomatoes.

Oh, there's a lot of factors there. A lot of factors. My point is they were all still tomato plants. Okay? Now, would I count a little tomato seed a tomato plant?

No, I wouldn't because that isn't, that hasn't germinated, that hasn't grown. Seed number three, here's the word. So, we're moving on from two to three.

A plant grows, but eventually it's choked out by the deceitfulness of riches. So, similarly to the rocky soil, the seed germinates, it grows, but it doesn't grow to the point of full, fruitful maturity.

[23:56] We love to focus, and I don't think it's rightfully so, but we love as believers to focus on seeds two and three because it's interesting. Are they saved?

Are they not saved? We love to play that game. And in certain cases, it's really important to be discerning about is someone a believer or not? In this situation of church discipline, that is a situation where you need to understand is someone a believer or not?

If they're not a believer, it doesn't necessarily apply. If they are a believer, there are steps to take to address sin that is observed. But we love asking the question, is someone a believer?

And we typically ask that question when we see no fruit, right? If I go to someone, and this is, again, a conversation that we have often, if I go to someone and I say, hey, what do you think about someone that gets saved maybe for five or so years they are involved in a church, maybe they are part of a Bible study, maybe they do a short-term mission trip, but surely thereafter they fall away and don't attend church for the next 30 years, don't open their Bible for the next 30 years.

Do you think that person is saved? When I give that scenario to most people, do you know what they say? Eh, I don't think they're saved. Okay, and then I say, wait, that's actually my dad. My dad's in that exact same situation.

[25:32] Supposedly gets saved, heavily involved in church, was on a mission field for two years with the Manilas, comes back, shortly thereafter has an affair and hasn't been to church in 30 years.

So when I make it personal, I say, hey, that's my dad, what do you think? No one wants to tell me for sure that he's not a believer. Maybe because it's just awkward, but the reality is we don't know. Okay? I don't know. But in that uncertainty, it tells you that he could be. Okay? He could be. And he could be like that soil that is cast into the rocky soil or amongst the thorns. Most likely kind of the thorn situation in my opinion.

Ephesians 4.30 says, do not grieve the Holy Spirit by whom you are sealed for the day of redemption. We are given the Holy Spirit the moment we believe.

[26:36] Well, if it wasn't possible to not bear fruit, why would this verse be there? Why would Paul be telling this church, don't grieve the Holy Spirit? It's because we can.

That happens. I believe the plant who doesn't bear fruit, so C2 and C3, is kind of like the person in 1 Corinthians 3 that has the foundation of Christ.

They have believed, as Luke 8 says, they have germinated, they have been fully persuaded that Christ is their Savior, but they build on that foundation with the wood, hay, and stubble.

Not the precious stones, not the good works that will last. And when it comes to the final judgment seed of Christ, the Bema seed, all that wood, hay, and stubble is burned up.

And what does it say? That person will make it through the fire. They will make it to heaven. They are saved. They won't have much to show for it. They will just barely make it through the fire.

[27:47] Is every seed that falls on the rocky soil or amongst the thorns a believer? I'm not here, honestly, to give you a definite yes. I mean, you can only go so far with parables.

Some people say, grab one spiritual truth out of that, don't build doctrine out of that. Does every person that shows any amount of fruit in my mind a believer?

No. If they believe, yes. But just because they're showing some fruit, fruit, I should say, not true fruit, but they're showing some good work, I'm not going to say they're a believer.

If they have put their faith in Christ and they are fully persuaded of that, then yes. I had many roommates in college who got saved, I believe, went home for summer break, were out of the Christian bubble, the discipleship that was given to them at school, and they came back and they said, hey, this is not for me.

I'm not involved. Part of that was they went back to a very thin, rocky soil. There wasn't a church family, there wasn't a believer in their family, like, there was very little support, and unfortunately that was choked out, in my opinion.

[29:05] There's a great quote from Dr. Constable at Plano Bible Chapel, and he says, interestingly, the enemy of fruitfulness is in the first instance, so the seed on the path, is the devil.

Pretty straightforward. In the second instance, which is the rocky soil, it is the flesh. In the third instance, which is the thorns, is the world. And I just think it's interesting to kind of see that breakdown of how unfruitful seeds fall.

The devil is the enemy of the seed on the path. The flesh is the enemy of the seed that sprouts up quickly but falls due to lack of root. And the world is the enemy to the seed choked by the thorns. You can see how in that second seed, you know, there's some excitement, there's some belief. It quickly fades, though, because personally that flesh wants to do other things.

In that third situation, you can see, you know, there's a bit more involvement, there's a bit more commitment, that person believes, there's a bit more growth, but ultimately just the weight of the world falls on that person.

[30:14] And whether it's temptation or whether it's pressure, whatever it may be, it chokes them out. If the musicians want to come up, obviously our goal should be that fourth seed.

I know we spent a lot of time talking about seeds two and three, but our goal should be that fourth seed. The gospel is the good news that Jesus paid for our sins and provides a way for salvation by belief or trust or full persuasion, whatever synonymous word you want to put in there.

Whatever belief in that gospel, with belief in that gospel, you can be saved. You can know that you are saved. You don't have to worry about it. You don't have to think, oh man, I hope I am yielding much fruit the rest of my life.

Otherwise, am I even a believer? It doesn't matter. Once you believe, you are given that Holy Spirit. You are sealed. John 5, 24 says, whoever hears my word and believes him who has sent me has eternal life.

Present tense has eternal life. Not will have eternal life, not hopes to have eternal life, has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Walk in the Spirit.

[31:33] Aspire to be the one that yielded a hundredfold. That's not a bad thing. That is a goal to have. Whatever that looks like, aspire to that. Walk with the Lord.

Be committed in your local church. Don't ask what can be done for you. Ask what you can do for the church, for others. We live in a very self-centered world where the focus is what can we gain from a situation.

The believer who is in God's word, praying, bringing love and truth to fellow believers, sharing the gospel with others, those are the ones yielding 30-fold, 60-fold, 100-fold.

May we be a church that is full of believers that are deeply rooted and mature and bearing fruit.

Let's pray. Lord, again, we thank you again for your message, for your word, for this parable of the seeds.

And I think it just brings to light that at the very foundation, salvation is had in belief in you for eternal salvation, Lord, for that eternal gift.

[32:44] And so we say thank you for that. Lord, thank you for just the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. You don't just give us the gospel and say, good luck. Lord, you indwell in us the Holy Spirit that has an impact.

I pray that all of us would have a desire to obey and follow that, to yield fruit, not for our own glory, but for the glory of you, Lord, for the building up of the church and other believers, for our own walk, for the sharing of your good news with others as well.

We have a lot to be thankful for. In your son's name, amen.