

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 28 July 2024. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **The Parable of the Sower (Part 2)**

### **Matthew 13:18-23**

On 17 September 1980, a young Baptist pastor named **Ken Spilger** was at a crossroads in his life. Ken had known the Lord Jesus as his personal Saviour since his teen years, when his older brother led him to Christ; and since that time, God had been working in his life, step by step. God brought a godly young woman named Beth into his life during his years at Bible college; and a few months before their graduation, they were married. After Ken finished his seminary training, he pastored a couple churches in Georgia and Nebraska; and then, in December of 1977, he became pastor of Grace Baptist Church of St. Louis. Ken's dream was to build one of the largest and fastest-growing churches in the Midwest.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, after two years at Grace Baptist Church, that goal of having a big church simply wasn't materialising. To be sure, souls had been saved, and baptised; and these precious new believers were growing in the Lord. God truly was doing great things. Yet, at the time, Ken couldn't see it. Although in his *new nature* he had a sincere zeal to serve the Lord, there was, at the same time, in his flesh, a prideful desire to achieve "bigness." He couldn't rejoice in what God was doing, because he had his *own* idea of what should be happening; and *his* idea was that there should not be handfuls, but *hundreds*, of people saved by now. As he knocked on doors, and tried to present the Gospel to people, he met with rejection after rejection; and he almost became bitter about it. Furthermore, his own family was suffering. He was spending so much time in the work of the ministry, that he wasn't spending much time with his own wife and children. His little girls often had to stay with babysitters, who were no replacement for mommy and daddy. Even his relationship with Beth was a struggle. Ken and Beth did *not* have the joy of the Lord in their hearts, as that they had once had. They read their Bibles and prayed every day, of course; but they rushed through it quickly, so that they could get to their "ministry work." They weren't drawing much spiritual nourishment from their personal time with God; and they were extremely discouraged.<sup>2</sup>

Well, it was around this time that Ken was invited to go to an all-day pastors' seminar in Kansas City, Missouri; and he decided to sign up for it. Shortly after he had registered, a local pastor, who happened to be a licenced pilot, rang Ken and told him that he had leased a small plane, and that he and a couple other local pastors would be flying to Kansas City for that same conference. He asked Ken if he would like to ride with them, and he took him up on the offer; and soon, he and the three other pastors were at the conference. However, at the conference, Ken was so discouraged, that he avoided fellowshiping even with his closest friends. He simply sat alone in the back, and took in the preaching. The preaching that day was very encouraging and uplifting; yet, it was also challenging, because Ken knew that something wasn't right in his life. As one of the pastors ended the conference with a prayer of dedication, Ken inwardly prayed, "Lord, I have prayed that hundreds of times; but there is something in my life that is not right; and I don't know what it is. So, Lord, I give myself to you. You can do whatever you need to do in my life to fix whatever's wrong." Little did Ken know that God would answer that prayer speedily. The

“soil” of Ken’s heart was soft, and ready to receive instruction from God’s Word; and God was preparing to bring forth much fruit from his life.<sup>3</sup>

Before this message is over, I will tell you *how* God answered Ken’s prayer; but in the meantime, I want to show you what the Lord had to say about the soil of our hearts. My friends, God is looking for soft, receptive, and tender hearts, that will yield fruit for Him; but in order to get a good harvest, God must *prepare* our hearts to receive His Word. The title of this message is ***The Parable of the Sower (Part 2)***.

**Read Matthew 13:18-23.**

### **I. The thorny heart (v. 22)**

Over the past several weeks, we’ve been studying the “Kingdom mystery parables,” which are recorded for us right here in **Matthew 13**. Now, as you may remember, Jesus, on this particular day, preached a total of seven parables: and all seven of these “Kingdom Mystery” parables reveal some truth about what it will be like during the period of time *before* Jesus returns to earth to set up His Kingdom. In other words, these parables reveal what it will be like during this *church age* in which we are still living, *as well as* during the terrible seven-year Tribulation period of judgment, which will unfold *just before* Jesus returns to earth.

Now, remember: the Kingdom of Israel has been set aside *for now*. Because the people of Israel, for the most part, rejected Jesus as their Messiah, Israel has been set aside temporarily, and the Kingdom has been postponed; but one day, at the time of Jesus’ return to earth, Israel *will*, as a nation, finally believe on Him, and receive Him as their King. But what is to happen in the meantime? Well, until that future day, we can expect that the Gospel will continue to be preached throughout the world, and that many people will be saved; but we can *also* expect that there will be a tremendous, ever-increasing growth of apostasy, and that many people will *appear* to be believers in Jesus Christ, when, in fact, they do not know Him at all. *This* is what the seven Kingdom mystery parables reveal. They show us what it will be like between the time of Christ’s *first* coming to earth, and His *second* coming to earth—this period of time when the Gospel is being preached far and wide, yet *apostasy* is growing up right alongside it.

Now, last week, we began to study the first of these Kingdom Mystery parables; and that was **the parable of the sower**. In this parable, there was, first of all, a **sower**, who went out to cast seed into a field. This sower represents not only the Lord Jesus Christ, but also all *believers* in Jesus Christ. And what is the “*seed*” that these sowers are sowing? This “**seed**,” Jesus said, represents the “***the word of the kingdom***” (in other words, the Word of God, or the Scriptures, which tell us how we can *get into* the Kingdom). As believers, we who are saved have a commission from our King to spread the “good news” of salvation, by giving out His Word to everyone we meet. As sinners respond to the Gospel in faith and repentance, and are saved,

they become part of the spiritual, invisible Kingdom of God; and one day, they will also enter into the *visible* Kingdom that Christ will establish here on earth after He returns.

Yet, how did Jesus say that people would *respond* to the Gospel message until the time of His return? *That* is what the parable of the sower reveals. Jesus says that there are four different kinds of “soil” (or “hearts”); and these four kinds of hearts receive the Gospel in four different ways. The first of these four kinds of hearts is **the wayside ground**. As we saw last week, the wayside ground—that hard soil by the side of the field—represents those whose hearts are so hardened in sin, that when the Gospel is presented to them, it doesn’t even begin to sink into their hearts; and the “fowls” (Satan and his demons) quickly snatch away whatever truth they might have heard. The second kind of ground is the **stony ground**. As we saw last week, this ground represents those who have *shallow* hearts. At first, they seem to receive the Word with joy. They like what they hear; and for a while, they are into the Bible, Bible studies, and church; but as soon as the sun comes up, and it gets hot (in other words, when they begin to suffer persecution from family and friends for hanging around with those “born agains”), the sapling “plant” that had begun to spring up from the soil of their hearts dies, and they never bear any spiritual fruit. In other words, they were never truly saved; and the fact that *no spiritual fruit* ever came forth from their lives is the *evidence* that they were never saved.

With all this in mind, we now come to the third kind of heart: **the thorny ground**. Let’s read **verses 7 and 22** again, and see what Jesus said about this heart. **(Read Matthew 13:7, 22.)** What does the “thorny ground” represent? It represents the heart of someone who was never truly saved, because he was “choked” by the pleasures of this world. Now, just like the “stony ground” person, the “thorny ground” person gets all excited about God’s Word--*at first*. When the Gospel is first presented to him, the Scriptures begin to take root in his heart; and a little “plant” begins to spring up. However, it isn’t long until the “thorns” of worldly pleasures and carnal pursuits choke whatever interest he may have had in being a follower of Jesus; and no spiritual fruit ever comes forth from his life. Just like the “stony ground” person, the “thorny ground” person comes to a point at which he has a decision to make. He has heard the Gospel, and even *likes* what he’s heard; yet, as the Holy Spirit reveals truth to his heart, he begins to realise that if he would receive God’s gift of salvation, then he must be willing to turn from sinful pleasures, the love of money, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, and let *Jesus* come into his life, so that He might give him a *new* heart, and *new* desires. Tragically, this is the point where many people stop short of going through the Door of salvation. Let’s look at the example of the rich young ruler.

**Read Mark 10:17-27.**

The rich young ruler is a perfect example of the “thorny ground” that Jesus warned us about. This young man *seemed* sincere in his desire to have eternal life. However, he had several problems, which were causing him to *stop short* of receiving eternal life.

First, this young man failed to acknowledge who Jesus is. He failed to see that Jesus is not just a “good teacher,” but that He is *God*. You’ll notice that the *very first question* that Jesus put to this young man had to do with *His identity—who He is*. Jesus challenged him with the question, “***Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.***” In other words, Jesus was saying, “What do you *mean* when you call me ‘good’? If (as you yourself

acknowledge), I am ‘good,’ then you must also acknowledge that I am *God*—because only God is good. Do *you* believe that I am God? Or do you see me as just a ‘teacher’?” Jesus was *affirming* to this young man that He is God; and He was telling him that in order to have eternal life, *he must* personally believe in Him, and accept Him, as God in human flesh!

What about this young man, then? Did *he* ever embrace the truth that Jesus is God? It seems that he didn’t. It appears that Jesus’ claim to be God went right over his head, because he didn’t even ask Jesus any questions about it. This was a serious error, which was preventing him from entering the Kingdom. However, this wasn’t his only problem. He also had the problem of **self-righteousness**. He actually thought that he was a good person, and that he had kept the Law. He didn’t understand that his sin had separated him from God, and that he couldn’t possibly be good enough to earn eternal life. **(Read Mark 10:18-20 again.)**

Now, what other problem did this young man have? His third problem was the **sin of covetousness**. He loved the things of this world; and his covetousness was “choking” whatever feeble desire he may have had to become a follower of Jesus. Jesus wanted to point out to this young man that he *had not* kept the Law: and to that end, He cut right to the chase, and put His finger on the big, overwhelming sin in his life. **(Read Mark 10:21-22.)**

In Jesus’ reply to this young man, He laid bare the sins that were keeping him from eternal life. First, Jesus pointed out that in order to receive eternal life, this young man must receive *Him* not just as a “good teacher,” but as *God*. Jesus also addressed this young man’s problem of self-righteousness, and covetousness. By commanding him to sell his goods and give to the poor (something that he clearly was *not* willing to do), Jesus was exposing his covetous heart. For the first time, this young man was being confronted with the fact that he had broken not only the *tenth* commandment (“***Thou shalt not covet***”), but also the *first* commandment (“***Thou shalt have no other gods before me***”). Money was this young man’s *god*; and his love of money and possessions was preventing him from receiving the gift of salvation, which Jesus wanted to give him. His love of money had such a stranglehold on him, that he was not willing to *turn* from his love and trust in money, and follow Jesus.

Now, please don’t misunderstand: Jesus was *not* telling this young man that he must liquidate every last possession and asset that he had, and become a pauper, living on the streets. He was simply telling him that those who would be *His* followers must be willing to receive a *new* heart, and a *new* outlook on wealth and possessions. Giving to the poor is not a *good work* that *earns* you salvation; it is simply the fruit that springs up in your new heart *after* you have received the gift of salvation. Jesus didn’t tell this man that he must “earn Heaven” by giving away his things; rather, He said that he would have “***treasure in heaven.***” “***Treasure in heaven***” is something that God gives as a *reward* to His servants, *after* they are saved; but to *be saved in the first place*, you must believe on Jesus, and surrender your life to Him.

Many wealthy people, such as Joanna, Susanna, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathaea, and Philemon, continued to have wealth *after* they were saved; but they did not continue to *love* and *cling* to their possessions. They now looked at their wealth as a *tool* to serve God. They joyfully gave of their possessions to honour Jesus, and to help those in need; and they didn’t do these things in order to be admired by others. Why not? Because Jesus had given them a *new* heart, and a new desire to serve *Him*, instead of self.

**Read Luke 8:1-3.**

**Read John 12:1-8.**

**Read Philemon 1-7.**

My friends, all the people that we've just read about were wealthy people: yet, they experienced that miracle of salvation. They experienced the *impossible!* They actually *went through* that "needle's eye" of salvation, by simply repenting of their sin and believing on Jesus; and after they were saved, God gave them a new heart. **Joanna** and **Susanna** gave of their wealth to support Jesus and His disciples as they travelled about Israel to preach the Gospel. **Mary of Bethany** spent a year's wages to pour out an expensive perfume on Jesus' feet, just to show her love and thankfulness to Him for saving her soul. In **Philemon's** case, he opened his own house as the meeting place for the church in Colossi. He also was known for his gracious giving to those in need. Folks, this is what salvation does to a person! In **1 Timothy 6:17-18**, Paul instructed Timothy to "***Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate*** [in other words, to share their substance with others]."

You see, the issue is not that these believers *had* wealth; the issue is that they should not *trust* in their wealth. Even for us who are truly saved, it is easy to start trusting in our possessions instead of in God. As for the unsaved, wealth is often a major obstacle that keeps them from coming to Jesus at all. It doesn't take a massive amount of material prosperity to "choke" a person's desire for eternal life; it takes only enough to make a person *think* that he doesn't really need Jesus. That is why, after the rich young ruler had gone away sorrowful, Jesus said, "***Children, how hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!***" The issue is *what we are trusting in*. Jesus "loved" this young man, and wanted to save him; yet, tragically, this young man never placed his trust in Jesus for salvation. His wealth was his "***strong city,***" in which he trusted; and he was not willing to transfer his trust to Jesus.

Now, as I have said, the "thorny ground" represents someone who is not a true believer at all. We know that this ground represents an unbeliever, because no *fruit* ever came forth from this soil. However, the thorny ground can certainly have a *secondary application* to the life of a true believer, as well. A true believer *will* bring forth genuine fruit for God, to one extent or another; however, the "weeds" and thorns of love of money, and love of pleasure, can quickly spring up even in *our* hearts; and we must continually allow the Lord to "uproot" those desires. Otherwise, we will not be very fruitful for God.

My friend, is love for the things of this world choking your desire to come to Christ for salvation? If so, don't be like the rich young ruler, and end up in hell! Put your complete trust in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for you; cry out to Him for forgiveness of sins and eternal life; and let Him come into your life, and start uprooting those "thorns" from the soil of your heart. If you are saved, yet the thorns of love of this world are creeping up in your heart, ask the Lord to uproot those thorns from your life, so that you may produce much fruit for Him!

## II. The soft heart (v. 23)

**(Read Matthew 13:23 again.)** What does the "***good ground***" represent? It represents the heart of a saved person. The "***good ground***" cannot, in any way, picture a lost person. The "***good ground***" represents *only* a genuine believer; and the thing that *marks* him as a believer

is that he *bears fruit for God*. The “good ground” hearer has a soft and teachable heart, which not only receives the Gospel message at the moment of salvation, but continues to produce the fruit of righteousness *after* salvation, through the power of Jesus Christ. This person is *not* sinless, or flawless: he is simply a sinner who has been saved by God’s grace, and who is continually being *transformed* into Christ’s image, by God’s grace. The “**good ground**” hearer is willing to let God remove from his heart anything that might prevent him from loving and obeying God. Let’s look at some examples of people with “good ground” hearts.

**Read John 1:35-41.** (Andrew and John wanted to hear Jesus’ words, and to tell others about Him!)

**Read Luke 10:38-42.**

A person with a “**good ground**” heart is receptive to God’s Word; and because he is receptive to God’s Word, God is able to produce a harvest of spiritual “**fruit**.” Now, not all believers produce the same amount of fruit. As Jesus said, some bring forth “**one hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty.**” What does this mean, though? Is Christ talking about the *number of souls* that you lead to Christ? No. If that were the case, then Noah would have been a spiritual failure! The Bible says that Noah was a “**preacher of righteousness**”; yet, in the 120 years that he preached to the people before the Flood came, he didn’t have *one single convert* apart from his own three sons, and their wives! No, my friends: “fruitfulness” is not measured by the number of souls that you lead to Christ: fruitfulness is measured by *submission to Christ, and obedience to His Word, out of a heart of love.*

Christian, what kind of “crop” of spiritual fruit are you producing for Christ? That is the *only* thing that matters in this life, or in eternity! Jesus saved you so that you might bring forth “much fruit” for Him. **Romans 6:22** says, “**But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness.**” In **Hebrews 13:15**, Paul says that we should offer the “**fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.**”

**Read Hebrews 13:15.**

In this verse, the Apostle Paul is hearkening back to a particular kind of offering that the Jews offered in Old Testament times. He’s talking about the **Peace Offering**. The **Peace Offering** was a prophetic picture of the peace that would one day be obtained between God and sinners, through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. In the Peace offering, a bull, a lamb, or a goat was offered as a sacrifice. The *person who brought the sacrifice* would eat a portion of the sacrifice; the *priest* who offered the sacrifice would eat a portion of the sacrifice; and **the LORD Himself** would “eat” a portion of the sacrifice. (The kidney, liver, and fat of the animal were placed upon the altar of sacrifice; and this was called Jehovah’s “food.”) What, then, does this “dinner” between God, the priest, and the worshipper represent? It is a picture of the *fellowship* that God the Father and God the Son have with the believer. You see, our sin has separated us from God the Father; but Jesus Christ (who is pictured by the priest) is our “Peace”—the one who has reconciled us to the Father. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, the Father, the Son, and the believer can “eat” and fellowship together.

Now, there were actually three different types of peace offerings. There was the “**Thanksgiving**” Peace Offering; the “**Voluntary**” Peace Offering; and the “**Vow**” Peace Offering. Of these three, it is the “**Thanksgiving**” Peace Offering that Paul is specifically

talking about here in **Hebrews 13:15**. The Thanksgiving Peace Offering consisted not only of an *animal* sacrifice, but also of the offering of **leavened and unleavened cakes of bread**. The unleavened bread represented the Lord, who has no sin; and the leavened bread represents the sinner, who *does* have sin. The fact that *both* the unleavened bread and the leavened bread were offered together is a picture of how God the Father *accepts us*, just as He accepts His sinless Son: and it is all because of the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross, so that we might be made at peace with God. The thanksgiving peace offering could be offered up at any time, whenever the believer wanted to praise the Lord for His goodness!

So, are you seeing the spiritual picture in all this? Just as the Thanksgiving Peace offering could be offered up to God at any time, so Christians can offer the “fruit” of heart-felt thanks and praise to God *at any time*. A Christian’s lips should produce words of praise and thanksgiving to God day and night—whether through singing; through prayer; through teaching your family the ways of God; or by testifying to lost people about what Christ has done for you. A Christian’s life should be filled with the “**fruit of the Spirit,**” which is “**love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness,**” and “**temperance.**” Yet, in order to produce this fruit, God sometimes must bring painful things into our lives, in order to remove the “rocks” and “weeds” of sin which are impeding our fruitfulness.

This brings me back to the story of Pastor Ken. On Wednesday, 17 September 1980, as that pastor’s conference in Kansas City was drawing to a close, Pastor Ken prayed, “Lord...you can do whatever you need to do in my life to fix whatever’s wrong”; and he meant that prayer with all his heart. Well, later that day, the little plane took off from Kansas City, back toward St. Louis. However, the weather was very bad; and as those four pastors were approaching the runway in Saint Louis, and were descending over a ridge, the rough winds blew them into the top of a tree. The fuselage was ripped open; and all four men were sprayed with fuel. They then hit some power lines; and the sparks made the plane burst up in flames. They crashed into a gully in a nearby field; and all the men in that plane slipped into eternity—all, that is, except Pastor Ken. He was the only survivor: however, his life hung by a thread for three days. He was severely burned all over his body; and they did not anticipate that he would ever walk again. Yet, in time, God healed him. However, he had to go through a long season of very painful skin graft surgeries and therapy. To this day, he has one lasting reminder of the crash: the four fingers in his left hand were lost; and only stubs remain.<sup>4</sup>

The biggest pain, though, was not the physical pain: it was the *inner* pain. As he pondered the fact that he was the only survivor of that wreck, he felt the guilt of realising that this tragedy was God’s answer to *his* prayer. As he thought on these things, he quickly descended into a state of near depression; and in desperation, he prayed, “Lord, have you even called me to preach? Am I supposed to be pastor of Grace Baptist Church?” Well, God silently and lovingly answered his question, by bringing to Ken’s mind the words of **Ephesians 3:7**, where Paul said that he had been made a “**minister**” of the Gospel, “**according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.**” God was telling Ken, “By *my* grace I have called you; and by *my* grace I give you what you need to be that pastor, or that husband, or that father.”<sup>5</sup> **When God brought that Scripture to Ken’s mind, he received it with joy; and it was the turning point in his life.** His whole life changed dramatically. His personal walk with the Lord, and his *wife’s* personal walk with the Lord,

blossomed. They began to take *real* time with the Lord, and *real* time with their family, so that they might teach them the ways of the Lord. They realised that if they lost their kids to the world, then they would have accomplished very little in God’s sight. They realised that their own walk with the Lord had to be first; their marital relationship second; their children next; and *then* the ministry. (In fact, they realised that their children *were* their “ministry.”) As for the *church* ministry, they stopped being discouraged that they didn’t have “big numbers”; and they began to rejoice in the spiritual growth and discipleship of God’s people. They also began to have genuine empathy for people’s problems. Because of their own personal trial, they were able to care for others in a way they couldn’t before. To this day, they still don’t have a huge church; but over the years, God has used them to reach many souls for Christ. However, first and foremost were their own children. Ken and Beth’s seven children watched their parents’ loving devotion to Christ, and their joyfulness even through times of deep trial; and they decided to make their parents’ God *their* God. One by one, they all placed their faith in Jesus; and today, they are all joyfully serving Him.<sup>6</sup>

**Conclusion:** In closing, I would ask a couple important questions. First, “Are you saved?” Perhaps you have considered Christ; but your lust for the things of this world is choking your desire to be a Christian. If so, I urge you to believe on Jesus today! The things of this world will all pass away; but those who place their faith in Christ will inherit an *eternal* home in Heaven, with their Saviour. If you *are* saved, I would ask, “Are *you* willing to let God do whatever He needs to do to fix what is wrong in your life? Will you *let* Him pull out the stones and weeds of sin, so that you can bear much fruit for Him?”

<sup>1</sup> Randy Melchert (producer), Enoch Rasmussen (director), *Pulled from the Burning*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7OhTj5i50c>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*