

SM022 – The Farmer, The Seed, and the Soil

You're listening to Stories of the Master.

The stories of Jesus have reached into the hearts of millions. They have changed people, families, and nations. Not all have loved the stories Jesus told. Not all have honored the life He lived. Some were angry with Him, the things He did and the things He said. Others were deeply moved and found hope. What will your response be?

Today on Stories of the Master, The Farmer, The Seed, and The Soil and it is taken from Matthew 13. I hope you will follow along in your own Bible.

My name is Jonathan, and I will be your Storyteller and Teacher.

I'm so glad you're here. Gather your friends. Come close and listen. It's time for the world to hear again the stories of the Master.

And now, The Farmer, The Seed, and The Soil.

Part 1

One morning, Jesus went out of the house and went to sit by the sea. How beautiful and calm the sea was. How refreshing it was to his soul. It seems that he had endured so much conflict in recent days and weeks. Every time he helped someone, whether it was in healing, in forgiveness, or delivering people from bondage to an evil spirit, the religious leaders challenged him. Sometimes they were upset that he healed on the Sabbath. Sometimes they were upset that he forgave sinners on the spot. When he showed his great power and cast out evil spirits, they said he was using the power of Satan.

The smooth surface of the waters was a welcome sight and its waves splashing gently on the shore were a pleasant contrast to the contention of the previous days. As Jesus sat by the sea and enjoyed his beautiful creation, the entire village began waking up and it was not long until people saw him sitting there. In ones and twos they came to him and he welcomed them. Finally, a large crowd had assembled and Jesus knew that it was his Father's will to teach them.

But as Jesus thought about teaching, he knew that the time had come for a new approach. For months he had spoken to them about the kingdom of God. He had explained clearly that the kingdom had come to set the captives free and he showed it by releasing people from evil spirits. He had explained that the kingdom had come to give sight to the blind and he showed it by healing the blind, but more importantly helping some to see their need for God. He had explained that the kingdom had come to set free the oppressed, to preach good news to the poor, and to proclaim God's favor.

The people were favorable to Jesus, but did they really understand the kingdom of God? Did they really know what Jesus was trying to do? Who really understood? Who was really in touch with the work of the Spirit of God? There was only one way to find out. Jesus decided to teach the people in parables. Parables were short stories drawn from every day life. The people would be familiar with the

illustrations and should easily make the connections between every day life situations and what Jesus was doing – if they had ears to hear.

Jesus got into a boat and had the owner anchor out a few feet from shore. He sat down in the boat and the crowd stood nearby on the beach and Jesus said,

A farmer went out to sow seed into his field. ⁴ and as he sowed, some *seeds* fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. ⁶ But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. ⁸ And others fell on the good soil and *yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear.”

Jesus then grew silent and waited. He wanted to see what kind of response the people would give him. He looked at his disciples and their furrowed brow showed that they did not understand why he was speaking to everyone this way. He looked at the crowds and searched their faces and their hearts and what he saw brought great sadness to his heart. So few understood.

Jesus began again.

“ The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the weeds became evident also. ²⁷ The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ ²⁸ And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this!’ The slaves *said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ ²⁹ But he *said, ‘No; for while you are gathering up the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather up the weeds and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.””

Then Jesus presented another parable to them.

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; ³² and this is smaller than all *other* seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR COME AND NEST IN ITS BRANCHES.”

Finally, Jesus said:

The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.”

All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable.

³⁵ *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES; I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.” ³⁶ Then He left the crowds and went into the house.

Jesus' disciples came to him and said, "Lord, why do you speak to them in parables?" And what they were really saying was, "Jesus, I don't think this was one of your more successful teaching times. Parables are good and fine but you didn't explain the meaning of the parable. I don't think anyone is any closer to understanding your true intent?"

And Jesus said, "Here is why I did that. The kingdom of God is a mystery. It is not something that people will understand naturally because of the blindness and hardness of heart that sin has brought into the world. That which should be easily known and understood is now a riddle to people, a mystery and the meaning of this riddle is known only to whom God reveals it. All of the people, the common people as well as the religious leaders think that they understand the kingdom of God. But they don't. And to them, the meaning of the parable will remain a mystery and the meaning of the kingdom of God will remain a mystery. Understanding is not granted to them.

But I will give you understanding in the mystery of the kingdom of God because you have something they don't have. You have a heart for the things of God. You have a heart for me. You have a heart for what I am doing in Israel. And I say to you that whoever has this kind of heart, to him more shall be given and he will have an abundance.

But whoever does not have this kind of heart, even what he has will be taken away. I have given them so much. I have healed the sick. I have given sight to the blind. I have taken away pain and disease. I have released them from evil spirits. I have offered them love and forgiveness, but if they never walk forward in obedience and faith and with a heart for the kind of kingdom God wants to bring, even these blessings will be taken away from them and they will have nothing."

Isaiah the prophet talked about them. He said:

YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; ¹⁵ FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.'

But even though the people are this way, I am convinced of better things about you. "Blessed are your eyes, because they so see; and your ears, because they do hear. ¹⁷ For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, (these days of the kingdom of God) and did not see *it*, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*.

¹⁸ " Hear then the parable of the farmer. ¹⁹ 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 the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. ²⁰ The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²³ And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word

and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”

My friends, I want to ask you a question today. “ Did you understand what Jesus was saying? Did you understand the parable? Do you have seeing eyes and hearing ears? Do you understand the kingdom of God? Or, is your heart dull, are your ears stopped up, and are your eyes closed to Jesus?”

When we come back, we will examine Jesus’ explanation of the parable of the farmer.

Interlude

Hello everyone – this is Jonathan Williams, the creator and storyteller of Stories of the Master. Jesus really wanted to know what was in the hearts of people and where their allegiance stood. Did they follow him because they wanted what he wanted, or because they only wanted what he could give? Did they want the true of kingdom of God or the counterfeit kingdom of man? The parables were given as a test to see who understood and who did not, to see who really saw what Jesus was doing and who was blind to it.

What about you? Do you understand what Jesus was about? Do you understand who he really is? And have you embraced Jesus as your Lord? I hope you have and I hope you will write to us at Stories of the Master that we might help you grow in faith. Write to us at PO Box 90047 in SA TX 78209 in the U.S.

Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God Speak where we teach the truth of God’s word for life change, a biblical worldview and to connect your story with the story of Christ’s love for you. Our desire to is help people all over the world connect their personal stories to the story of Christ’s love for them. Please pray for us and help us with your financial gifts to take these stories to a world that needs to hear about the Savior of mankind. You can reach us at PO Box 90047 – SA TX 78209.

Please check out our website – storiesofthemaster.com and you can listen to today’s story again, download it or purchase a CD to share with a friend. You will also find books and studies that will help you grow in your discovery of Jesus and your relationship with him.

In our story today, Jesus has started telling parables to the people. He wants to see who has spiritual ears. Let’s get back to our story and discover the meaning of the parables he taught.

Part 2

The kingdom of God is like a farmer sowing seed. Such an image would not be difficult for the peasantry to understand. This, after all, was a culture built around farming. But to say that the kingdom of God was this way? Now, that was a new one. The kingdom of God was supposed to be powerful, but farmers were not powerful. They often barely scraped a living off the land or barely made a living as a tenant on a farm owned by a wealthy landowner. The kingdom of God was supposed to like a warrior with a mighty sword, not a farmer with a bag of seed.

But what we need to realize is that seed is powerful. Within every seed is the potential to produce a plant that will in turn produce much fruit which will produce more seed. And what Jesus is telling us in this story is that the kingdom of God comes like a farmer casting seed on the different kinds of soil. The kingdom of God comes with a message, not with military might. The kingdom of God comes to penetrate the hearts of people for only in penetrating hearts and changing people from the inside out could lasting change come into the world.

And so the mystery of the kingdom is this – the kingdom of God comes with a powerful life changing message, but what kind of heart do you have?

Jesus identified four hearts. First, he talked about seed that was sown beside the road. A road is hard. The dirt has been pressed down and packed together by the constant walking of people and animals and by the vehicles that pass its way. When seed falls on a road it sits there and does nothing. It is food only for birds who see the seed and swoop down and take it away.

Some people have hearts that are like hardened roads. And when God's word comes to them, it remains on the surface and does nothing. People hear about God and they are completely indifferent to God. The message of God's kingdom has no interest to them because their hearts have become hard by the sinful choices they have made and often because of the sinful, difficult things people have done to them and when the message of Christ comes to them, there is no response and Satan comes and snatches the words away from them so that there is no chance of any response to God.

Second, Jesus talked about seed that was sown in rocky soil. This is soil that has not yet been adequately prepared by the farmer. The rocks have not been dug out of the ground, or, the ground is so rocky that no one would think of trying to plant a crop there. But sometimes, in such soil, seed will take root and a plant will begin. But because there are so many rocks and because the soil has so little depth before it hits the rocks, the roots cannot go down deep where there is moisture to give life to the plant. Then, the hot sun comes up, and the life-giving rain stops and the plant soon withers and dies.

Some people have hearts like this. There is some good soil but there are many rocks in their hearts. The rocks represent the superficial things in life that keep people from going in depth and that keep people from having a deep hunger and a deep thirst for God. They are excited at first to hear about the things of God. Jesus is interesting to them. But when they find out the full story, when they hear that following Jesus may exact a price and that persecution or hard times could come from following Jesus, they lose interest and the small plant that has started in them quickly withers away and dies.

Third, Jesus talked about seed that was sown in good soil, but good soil that had thorny weeds in it. This kind of soil isn't good for producing crops either for the crops will begin to come up but the thorny weeds will attack the plants, wrap their tendrils around them and squeeze the life right out of them so that they don't bear any fruit.

Some people have hearts like this ground with the thorny weeds. Jesus said the thorny weeds represent the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things. Are any of these in your heart? You hear the word of Jesus and you like what he says, but then you remember all of the

worries of life and you don't know if following Jesus is such a good idea after all. You hear the word of Jesus and you like what he says but then you hear Jesus say you cannot serve God and wealth and that only one can be your master. You decide that you want riches more than you want God. You hear the word of Jesus and you like what he says, but there are so many other interesting things in life! Can't Jesus just come in and be part of it all. But Jesus says there can be only one master. Worries, riches, the desires for other things, or Jesus? And many people choose their worries, or their riches, or any number of things and try to hold onto Jesus but they will discover that those other things will eventually choke out the plant and it will die.

But some people have good hearts. They are ready for the message of the kingdom. They hear the word with a glad heart. They push the other things out of their lives, the rocks and the weeds and they cultivate their relationship with Jesus and the plant grows up and bears an abundance of fruit for God, a supernatural harvest of 30 times, 60 times, or even a hundred times as much as the seed.

How can we turn our hearts into good hearts? That is the question we must face today. If you do not have a heart ready to receive the word of the Lord you must ask God to give you such a heart. You must ask God to take away the rocks and thorns from your life that are distracting you and keeping you from hearing the word of the kingdom, responding, and entering in.

Jesus told another farming parable that day. He told the parable of the wheat and the weeds. Remember this one? A farmer planted wheat but an enemy planted a type of weed that looks like wheat when it first comes up but after the weeding is over, a farmer will see that he has weeds among the wheat. The servants of the farmer wanted to pull up the weeds but the farmer said, "No, if you do, you may uproot the wheat. Wait until the wheat harvest is ready. Then, you will be able to distinguish clearly between the wheat and the weeds and Jesus' message to those people at that time and to us listening today is that in God's kingdom, in God's field, some belong to him and some belong to the devil. One day, judgment is coming and the wheat and the weeds will be separated. You better be sure which side you are on. You better make sure that you are wheat and not a weed in God's field for the weeds will be gathered up and thrown into the furnace but the wheat will enter into the presence of God forever.

Jesus told a parable of a mustard seed. A mustard seed is so tiny. When people wanted to talk about smallness they would use a mustard seed as an example. And Jesus said the kingdom was like a mustard seed! A mustard seed. God's kingdom should be compared to a great forest of trees or to a mighty mountain that is stronger than all. Why would Jesus say that the kingdom of God was like a mustard seed? Jesus was saying that people should not be deceived by small beginnings. When the kingdom of God first came in the ministry of Jesus it seemed so small. He came as a little baby. And when he began his ministry he started by being baptized and then he disappeared into the wilderness for 40 days. Not much seemed to be happening. Then he started with a handful of men and talked to people in villages and by the seashore. The Romans were still in charge in the land and even John the Baptist began wondering and sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if he were the Messiah, after all.

But Jesus was telling us not to let small beginnings fool us. He said that the the mustard seed would grow into a great plant, so great that even birds would be able to build nests in its branches. In this story the birds represent the nations of the world and Jesus was saying that the nations would come and find shade from the heat and peace within the shadow of the kingdom of God. What started small would become great.

A similar message was given about the kingdom being like a woman who hid yeast in a batch of dough. When a woman or a baker does this, you cannot see the yeast, but the yeast is working in the dough. In the same way, the kingdom of God is working, often in hidden ways in the world and in the hearts of people, and just as the dough is eventually saturated with the yeast, so one day the whole world would be saturated with the glory of the kingdom of Jesus.

What about you? Have you become discouraged because it seems nothing is happening in the world or in your life? Does it seem like forces of evil are winning? Don't be deceived. The kingdom of God is present and at work. One day the small seed of the kingdom will become the largest plant in the world. One day, the yeast of the kingdom will spread to every part of the dough.

Jesus told many other parables on this day and other days. I will close our story with these.

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid *again*; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, ⁴⁶ and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

What is Jesus saying? He is saying that the kingdom of God is the most valuable treasure and possession any person could have. It is like a treasure in a field that is worth more than all you have. It is like a fine pearl hidden in the back of a store that a merchant discovers and no one else recognizes its value but the merchant does and he sells everything to buy that pearl.

My friends, the kingdom of God is the most valuable possession in the world. Will you give up everything and submit your heart to the king and to his kingdom?

Do you have seeing eyes and hearing ears today? Or do you have a hard heart? He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

Ending

Hello everyone, this is Jonathan Williams again, and as we bring our story to a close today I want to ask you again, do you have hearing ears and seeing eyes? Can you really hear the word of Jesus and understand what he wants for you and can you really see who he is? If not, I pray that you will call upon him and ask him for those hearing ears and seeing eyes. I pray that you will come to know him as your Lord and Savior and to find life in him.

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My name is Jonathan Williams and I hope you have been blessed today and I look forward to you joining us next week for another Story of the Master. Until then, may the Master himself richly bless you.