

Matthew 13:1-9 & 18-23 – “The Heart of the Matter”

(Pew Bible Page: 818)

Intro: The parable before us is “The Master Parable” – the one parable that must truly be understood by every believer. If we do not understand the principle this parable teaches, we will be confused and uncertain in our understanding of what we are trying to accomplish as Christians. Jesus began His parables of the kingdom by pointing to the essential first step for entering the Kingdom at all: The call to “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” That gospel proclamation must be received in the heart of all who would enter the kingdom. The big idea is that “The heart is the Heart of the Matter.”

Proposition: The good seed of the Word bears fruit according to the heart’s condition. Pray to the Lord of the harvest that many hearts would be prepared to receive the saving Word of the kingdom.

Billboard:	(vv.1-9)	The Parable
	(vv.10-17)	The Interruption
	(vv.18-23)	The Meaning

(vv.1-9) The Parable – A parable is a story about people, places, and things that is meant to point our attention to one main spiritual lesson. Parables are made from common, everyday events and items – things everyone can identify with and are meant to catch the attention of the listener. But the story is more than a story! A parable will contain one main lesson – some spiritual principle made available to the listener if one has “*ears to hear.*” The intent of this parable is to point us to that prerequisite. What does it mean to have “ears to hear”? And so, the parable begins: **Matthew 13:1–3 - 1** *That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. 2* *And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. 3* *And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. Jesus began His parable with a common occurrence everyone in the crowd would be familiar with – someone sowing seed in a field, hoping for a harvest. In an agricultural society almost everyone would either have done this personally, or would have a friend or relative who had done this. This common occurrence would be used by Jesus to teach an uncommon spiritual lesson, but the meaning of the story wouldn’t be revealed immediately. In keeping with the lesson we learned from verses 10-17 last week – that Jesus taught in parables to reveal truth to some, but conceal it from others – in these verses, Jesus simply told the parable without adding any explanation. **Matthew 13:4 - 4** *And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them.* The parable breaks itself into four distinct movements. This verse gives the first. A man sows seed, and as he sows, some of the seed falls “*along the path*” where the ground would be hardest, compressed by who knows how many feet treading for who knows how many years. The man sowing is a good Sower, and the seed is fine seed. The problem is neither the Sower nor the seed, but the soil. The soil is hard-packed, so the seed lies on the surface where the birds of the air quickly find it and make a meal for themselves. **Matthew 13:5–6 - 5** *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, 6* *but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away.* Here the seed falls onto a different condition of soil – shallow soil with stony subsurface beneath. The seed sprang up quickly and promised a good harvest, but eventually, when the sun grew hot, the seed withered away because it had no root. Again, the seed was fine, but the soil was insufficient. Next **Matthew 13:7 - 7** *Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.* Here is yet another hindrance for the seed: the soil on which the seed fell was filled with weeds and thorns. In the fierce competition for nutrients, the newly sown seed didn’t stand a chance and was quickly choked out by the surrounding competitors. Finally, **Matthew 13:8 - 8** *Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.* At last, the seed found good soil to grow in! And grow it did: producing a harvest for the Sower, “*some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.*” Everyone listening would have*

Matthew 13:1-9 & 18-23 – “The Heart of the Matter”

(Pew Bible Page: 818)

recognized the realism of the story Jesus told. It happened everyday all around them. Every time a sower went into his field to scatter seed, some fell on good ground and other fell on poor ground. Life just works that way. But Jesus was after something more than telling a story about seed and soil. He pointed to this by ending His story by saying, **Matthew 13:9 - 9** *He who has ears, let him hear.*” Some of His listeners would hear, and others wouldn’t.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Only those with “spiritual ears” would be able to “hear” the message Jesus was sowing.

(vv.10-17) The Interruption – In our study last week we noted that Jesus and His disciples seem at this point to have gone back into the house (cf. 13:1) where He answered the disciples’ question, “*Why do you speak to them in parables?*” As we saw last week, Jesus spoke in parables to reveal truth to those willing to receive it and to obscure truth from those unwilling to accept it. We need not cover that ground again, but it will be helpful for us at this point to remind ourselves about the Bible’s teaching that “The heart is the place of decision.”¹ In order to unpack this, let’s take a few moments to refresh our minds concerning the Doctrine of Man. The Bible tells us that Man is made in the image of God, and that the innermost part of man is most like his Creator in the area personality. God is personal and so are we. That means that like our Creator we share certain inner aspects that working together both define our personalities and express them to others. Like our Creator, we have intellectual ability. We have something the animals don’t have: the ability to grasp the reality of things unseen. We can handle ideas; moral values; mathematics – unseen things that are nevertheless real things. We have intellect or intelligence. Like our Creator we also have feelings. Feelings are non-verbal inclinations of the heart. We can feel sad or happy; brave or cowardly; confident or uncertain. We feel things. A special kind of feelings are most important to Jesus’ teaching in the parable: the feelings we call our “heart.” The heart is best described as our “intuition.” We feel inclined toward some things, or we feel led to reject other things. There are certain people we are attracted to, but others we earnestly wish to avoid. These inclinations don’t work at an intellectual level but are completely instinctual, and mostly out of our control. That is because the heart is a function of man’s spirit and **Proverbs 20:27 - 27** *The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all his innermost parts.* It is through the heart that God searches out the innermost secrets of man, revealing who man really is. The heart is spiritual in nature. A. W. Tozer tells us that “The heart is like a musical instrument and may be played upon by the Spirit of God, an evil spirit, or the spirit of the man himself.” Our hearts are at work all the time, interacting with the mind to direct the third aspect of man that reflects the Creator: the will. The will is the ultimate control center in man. The mind and the heart sometimes strive against each other and at other times work together to produce the choices of the will. The choices we make, reveal our inner man – who we really are, as Jesus reminded us in **Matthew 15:19–20 - 19** *For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20* *These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.*” Because our hearts are fallen, they express our fallenness in visible ways for all to see. So, the heart is the place of decision. Unbelief is natural to a fallen heart, just as belief is natural to a redeemed heart. The interruption in the parable at this point is not an accident. The principle taught in these verses is predicated on the fallen nature of the crowd’s heart, and Jesus’ explanation of the parable in verses 18-23 unpacks this truth to His disciples.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] The interruption of the parable at this point is not an accident.

¹ Expositor’s Bible Commentary.

Matthew 13:1-9 & 18-23 – “The Heart of the Matter”

(Pew Bible Page: 818)

(vv.18-23) The Meaning – Notice that verse 18 picks up the thought interrupted at the end of verse 9: **Matthew 13:18 - 18** *“Hear then the parable of the sower”* is a response to *“He who has ears, let him hear.”* The disciples had ears to hear – they had responded to His message, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* Their minds may have been foggy, but their hearts were open to receive Jesus’ message, so now He made plain to them the lesson of the parable: There are four kinds of soil, four conditions of the human heart that determine whether Jesus’ message will be received. The first of these is detailed for us in verse **Matthew 13:19 - 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 what was sown along the path.* This is “The Hard Heart.” When the message, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,”* is sown in the hard hearted; the fallen heart immediately rejects that message. It rejects the message by failing to respond or by actively pushing back against the message sending intuitions to the man saying, *“That doesn’t feel right! You can’t possibly fall for that one!”* Because the man is not inclined to accept – not even by curiosity itself – the truth sown is immediately overwhelmed by *“the birds”* – Satan’s lies already planted in the man’s mind. *“This is all rubbish,”* he thinks. *“Modern people know better than to fall for this. It’s only the weak who need the crutch of religion.”* Being not inclined to listen, he quickly puts the whole matter out of mind and goes about his day. The Hard Heart. The second kind of soil is described in verses **Matthew 13:20–21 - 20** *As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, 21 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.* This is “The Shallow Heart.” When the good seed is sown in a shallow heart, the heart first receives it with joy. A man’s heart says to him, *“This is wonderful! This can make a real difference in my life. I’ll join these happy people who are telling me these things. If I become one of them all my troubles will be finished!”* And for a while the man goes out with what John Calvin aptly called, *“temporary faith.”* For a while, he is committed to the message. But this doesn’t last. Why not? Because he still has a fallen, unredeemed heart. When persecutions arise – when he finds that his former friends are beginning to avoid him, are laughing at him behind his back, or are outright opposing him as foolish, or when the society around him begins threatening or taking action against Christians, his fallen heart does a flip-flop. No longer urging him to believe, it now tells him to throw over the whole matter. And so, he follows his fallen heart out into the darkness again; a dog returning to his vomit; a sow returning to her mud puddle. The apostle John spoke of this kind of person in **1 John 2:19 - 19** *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.* The shallow heart has no root and is inconstant – it changes its mind and falls away. The third kind of soil explained here is “The Distracted Heart.” **Matthew 13:22 - 22** *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.* This heart responds to the good seed, but only mentally. The mind believes the gospel message is true, but the heart refuses to permit Christ to take control of his life. *“This person... never permits the message about the kingdom to control him: life has too many other commitments that slowly choke the struggling plant, which never matures and bears fruit.”*² J. C. Ryle notes that these kinds of people *“Never make up their minds to seek first the kingdom and so die in their sins.”*³ This kind of man is *“religious but lost”* and the proof is that for all his profession of belief, his life bears no fruit for the harvest. *“Only fruitfulness indicates spiritual life”* (cf. John 15:8).⁴ The Distracted Heart. The fourth and final kind of heart Jesus described is “The Good Heart.” **Matthew 13:23 - 23** *As for what*

² Expositor’s Bible Commentary.

³ J. C. Ryle, *“Expository Thoughts on Matthew.”*

⁴ Expositor’s Bible Commentary.

Matthew 13:1-9 & 18-23 – “The Heart of the Matter”

(Pew Bible Page: 818)

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, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” This is a heart that hears the message of the kingdom and welcomes its coming, receiving the King as Savior and Lord. There are two important points to note about the good heart. First, it is distinguished from the other three kinds of hearts through bearing fruit for the Master. Warren Wiersbe helps us understand what this involves. Wiersbe lists various kinds of fruit that the good-hearted believer will produce: Holiness (Rom. 6:22); Christian Character (Gal. 5:22-23); Witness (Rom. 1:13); Sharing our goods (Rom. 15:25-28); Praising God (Heb. 13:15). As Jesus pointed out in this verse, different believers will produce different yields of these fruits - *He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”* The second important point to take note of is related to this reality: Every good-hearted believer is called “Good” by the Master, no matter the size of the yield his fruitful heart produces: **Matthew 25:20–23 - 20** *And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’* **21** *His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’* **22** *And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’* **23** *His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’* The Good Heart ALWAYS produces good fruit for the harvest because it not only leads us to receive the King, but it also continues to lead us to worship the King all the way to harvest home.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] *“Take care then how you hear”* (Luke 8:18).

[ILLUSTRATION] What if someone told you that fabulous wealth was reserved for you, and that all you need to do to receive it was to swim the English Channel and it would be yours? Or grow an additional foot in height and the wealth would be given to you. Or regress in age ten years – roll back the clock and it’s yours! How would you feel about that offer? The kingdom of heaven is only for those who have good hearts to receive it. But what if you don’t have a good heart? Or what if your loved one doesn’t have a good heart? What then? It takes supernatural power to change a heart from hard, or shallow, or distracted to good, and there is only one way that change can come.

[APPLICATION] **Romans 10:13 - 13** *For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* But how does one get a heart that *“calls on the name of the Lord”*? How are hearts changed so that they want to *“call on the name of the Lord”*? How does the miracle of grace begin? It begins because someone, somewhere has been praying. The point of the parable is that *“the heart is the heart of man’s problem”* and the only way to get a new heart is for God to change the old for the new. And God does do this; sometimes without asking anyone’s permission, but most often He does it in answer to believing prayer. When you and I pray for hearts to be changed it is just possible that we are doing the most significant thing to help others that can be done on planet earth, with one possible exception: Prayer must always be followed with Witness if hearts are to be changed. You may be praying for someone on the other side of the world whose name you do not even know, or you may be praying for your brother-in-law who lives next door. Your prayers will be answered through someone, somehow, sometime making the announcement: *“Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.”* How will we as Christians accomplish the commission Jesus gave us before He ascended? There is just one way: through proclamation empowered by the prayers of God’s saints. There are many ways we can entice people to *listen* to us, but there is only one hope of getting them to *hear*: *“Ask, and it will be given to you.”*

Matthew 13:1-9 & 18-23 – “The Heart of the Matter”

(Pew Bible Page: 818)

Conclusion: The “The Master Parable” is before us – the one parable that must truly be understood by every believer. If we do not understand the principle this parable teaches, we will be confused and uncertain in our understanding of what we are trying to accomplish as Christians. Hear the Lord’s teaching: The heart is the heart of the problem. Let us call on the Lord of the harvest to soften, deepen, and focus unbelieving hearts, making them willing to hear and receive the message of the kingdom.