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Two Parables of Seeds Growing (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg teaches on two parables of seeds growing in Mark chapter 4, which include the parable of the sower and the parable of growing seeds. Gregg explains that Jesus used parables to obscure the truth from those who were not interested in fully understanding his message. He goes on to examine the different types of soil in the parable and the significance of each, reminding listeners that while some may not understand the message, God is not one to minimize it. Throughout his teaching, Gregg emphasizes the importance of faith in receiving God's gift of salvation.

Transcript

Let's turn to Mark chapter 4. The parable of the sower is parallel to the parable of Matthew 13. Matthew follows it with several other parables. Altogether, I think eight of them in that chapter.

So sometimes Matthew 13 is called the parables discourse of Christ. All of the parables in Matthew 13 have one theme, and that is the kingdom of heaven, the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. So, mysteries of the kingdom, or parables of the kingdom, is a title that can be given to Matthew chapter 13.

Now, some of the parables in Matthew chapter 13 are found nowhere else. They're not recorded in Mark and Luke or John. They are unique to Matthew.

A few of them have parallels in Mark and Luke. That is the case, at least with the first of them, and very possibly the most important of them. I mean, judging from the airplay it gets from the three synoptics, it gets a lot of exposure and a lot of treatment.

And that is the parable of the sower. But just so you'll be aware, at some point in the next few days, we're going to be looking at Matthew 13. Because we want to take this entire parables discourse.

Even though Mark and Luke do not actually give us a parables discourse. They just give us parables at different places, and Matthew gathers them together in one. We're going to take all the parables in the parables discourse in a row.

Which means for the next several sessions we'll be going through Matthew 13. But the reason I have you turn to Mark for is because the particular parable of the sower, I think, is best covered in Mark. And there's also, it's followed in Mark by a parable that's unique to Mark.

So there's two parables in the material we want to look at in Mark chapter 4 today. There's the parable of the sower, and another parable about growing seeds that's found nowhere else except in Mark 4. Now, in Matthew 13 this parable is followed by, that is the parable of the sower is followed by the parable of the wheat and the tares. Mark doesn't have the wheat and the tares, but it has another parable about growing.

And so we can see that there's quite a few parables Jesus taught that use the idea of a field or seeds or growing. And two of them are in Mark. We will look at Mark today, Mark chapter 4 verses 1 through 29.

That'll cover two parables. After that we'll probably be looking at Matthew 13 for the remainder of the parables in the collection. They all have something in common, and that is the kingdom of heaven.

Now, we've of course had occasion to talk about the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. On many occasions so far, it's come up in the Sermon on the Mount, it's come up even prior to that. John the Baptist's preaching was that people should repent because the kingdom was at hand.

And Jesus likewise, his first recorded words in the Galilean ministry in Mark are, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand, therefore repent and believe the gospel. So there have been prior occasions that we've been exposed to the idea of the kingdom. Just to put it very quickly, the kingdom of God was understood by the Jews to be a political thing like the kingdom of David.

In fact, they thought it would be a great deal like the kingdom of David. It would be a second Davidic golden age in which a king would reign in Jerusalem, who would be the Messiah, and he would reign over not only Israel, but all the nations to bring him tribute that he'd make Israel the prominent nation in the world. And all the nations would do homage to the king of Israel and would pay tribute to him.

And therefore the Jews had this glorious Davidic kind of picture in their mind of the kingdom of God. Now Jesus, in these parables of the kingdom, actually apparently is deliberately trying to dispel these notions. Because the kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God, as we've demonstrated other times, are interchangeable terms.

In Mark chapter 4, we'll be reading about the kingdom of God. But in Matthew, it's the kingdom of heaven. Now, they're interchangeable ideas.

But the point is that what Jesus has to say about the kingdom, whether he calls it

kingdom of God or of heaven makes little difference, what he has to say about it are things that mark out his vision of the kingdom as distinct, very distinct from that of the Jews. He makes the kingdom out not to be political, but spiritual. He makes it not to be national, but global, and so forth, and international.

So there are some things he's going to say here. Also, the kingdom is not spread by military effort, but by sowing seeds. And this is what, of course, several of these parables bring out.

The kingdom of David was spread by the sword, by David sending his armies out and conquering the Philistines, the Moabites, the Ammonites, and so forth. The kingdom of God that Jesus is teaching about doesn't do that. It doesn't conquer people that way.

It conquers people's hearts by the sowing of seeds. And that is certainly what the first parable is all about. We're in Mark chapter 4, beginning at the first verse.

And again, he began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to him so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea. And the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea.

Then he taught them many things by parables and said to them in his teaching, Listen, behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened as he sowed that some seed fell by the wayside, and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground where it did not have much earth, and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth.

But when the sun was up, it was scorched, and because it had no root, it withered away. And some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased, and produced.

Some thirtyfold, some sixty, some a hundred. And he said to them, He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Now, before we expound on it, we'll go as far as to let Jesus do so.

It makes little sense to do so without his comments on it. And they come up in the context of a conversation with the disciples after the crowds were gone and Jesus was alone with them in the house. Beginning at verse 10, But when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parable.

And he said to them, To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand, lest they should turn and their sins be forgiven them. And he said to them, Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word, and these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan

comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.

These likewise are those ones sown on stony ground, who when they hear the word immediately receive it with gladness, and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. Now these are the ones sown among thorns.

They are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things. Entering in, choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. But these are the ones sown on good ground.

Those who hear the word accept it and bear fruit. Some thirtyfold, some sixty, some a hundredfold. Okay? Now, in between the giving of the parable and the expounding of the parable, we have a little discussion between Jesus and his disciples.

In verse 10 it says, But when he was alone, those around him, with the twelve, asked him about the parable. Now, it doesn't say exactly what they asked him about the parable, but we are told in Matthew 13 that the question they asked him is, Why do you speak in parables? That was the question. It does not record in Matthew or Luke that they asked him to expound the parable, but just why do you do that? Why do you use this kind of storytelling method? And obviously, his answer here in verse 11 is the answer to that question, although that question is not stated plainly in Mark here.

It is in Matthew. Why do you speak to them in parables? Is the question they asked in the parallel in Matthew 13. And he said, Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

Here in Mark 4, verse 11, it says, Those who are outside, And obviously, there is a very great contrast intended between the you in verse 11 and to those. You and those. Now, who are you? Well, he is talking to the people who addressed him in verse 10, who were those who were with him with the twelve.

I think what we would understand is it was the apostles and the larger group of disciples who were following Jesus. And in view of the fact that he expounded this parable to them, I think that confirms that when he says, To you it has been given, he means to you who are, in fact, disciples. If you look at verse 34 in the same chapter, Mark 4, 34.

33 and 34. It says, And with many such parables he spoke the word to them, that is the multitude, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable he did not speak to them.

And when they were alone, he explained all things to his disciples. Here in Mark 4, 10 and following, we have an instance of him explaining privately when they were alone all things to his disciples. So we are told in verses 33 and 34 that this was not an isolated case, he did this as a rule.

He did not even speak to the multitudes without a parable. But he explained them to his disciples privately. So those to whom he says, To you it has been given, in verse 11, to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, are those who are his disciples, those that he is speaking to, the twelve and those that were around him.

But to those who are outside, it has not been given. That is the multitudes who have not made any kind of commitment to Christ in terms of discipleship. And all things come to them in parables.

Now, why? He still does not answer. Well, he does answer, but not in a clear way. Why do you speak in parables? Well, because to them it has not been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to you it has.

What has that got to do with the question? Obviously what it means is, I speak to them this way because I do not want them to know everything that I want you to know. There are things that are yours to know, which are not their privilege to know. And that is why I speak to them in parables.

What does that imply? That parables are a means of obscuring something from an audience that you do not want to fully understand what you are saying. The fact that he had to explain it privately to his disciples on a regular basis proves that it was not the kind of thing that was commonly understood without an explanation. And that was only done when the disciples knew he were alone.

He did not go out and tell the multitudes what the explanation was. He spoke stories which were meaningless without an interpretation, but he did not give that interpretation to the multitudes. He gave it only to his disciples.

Now to say that the stories were meaningless, of course that is not quite true. The stories did have meaning. But the meaning would be totally obscure.

The real meaning would be obscure, if not for the explanation. You read of a sower out scattering seed indiscriminately on his field. The seed falls on different kinds of ground.

Some of it is amenable to growth, some of it is not. Some is choked by thorns, some has no roots and dies, some is eaten by birds, others produces what it is supposed to produce, crops. Now, you know, that is the end of the story.

And it is quite obvious that if you heard nothing more than that, you would have not the faintest idea why he told the story. Virtually everybody there either was a farmer or knew about farms. Certainly it was a very agrarian society.

If a person even was a businessman, he would certainly be acquainted with the work of the farmer, you know, who is his neighbor. And Jesus could not be thought to be telling them anything about farming they did not already know. Everybody had observed

people sowing seeds on their farms before.

Everyone knew that birds ate some of them and some died because of the poor soil and so forth, and choked out by thorns. So why is he telling them this? That is the great question most of us must have had. Why tell us this? Everybody knows this already.

And he just tells this and that is the end of the story. And that is the end of the discussion. And the people were then left with a dilemma, the multitude.

Or I should not say dilemma, but a choice. They could say, well, this man obviously is not all he cracked up to be. Everybody talks about how wise this teacher is and so forth, but he does not say anything profound that we did not already know and that every child knows.

So why follow this guy around? He obviously has not got anything that I need. On the other hand, they could say, now this guy, if he is talking about these simple things that everybody knows, he must have something else he is intending to say. There is more there than this simple, obvious, common knowledge that he has given.

There must be some link there. There must be some parable here. There must be an analogy.

He is talking about something else that is hidden. And I will not rest until I know what it is. Now, in Matthew chapter 11 we read, when we covered it not too long ago, that Jesus gave out an open invitation.

He said, come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. And he said, you will find rest to your souls.

Quite obviously, Jesus was not exclusive. He would allow anybody who was heavy laden, anybody who was laboring, anyone who wanted rest of souls, to take on them his yoke and to learn from him. Now, those who did so are what we call disciples.

Those who decided to learn from him, to sit under him, to be taught by him, were his disciples. And they did learn what his parables meant. And anyone could become one.

He said, anyone who wants to, all you who labor and are heavy laden, come on, learn from me. But the problem is, to learn from him requires that you take his yoke upon you. And a yoke is a surrender of freedom.

If you have somebody's yoke on your neck, an animal that was under the yoke was inservitive. In fact, the expression under the yoke became an expression for a slave. Of course, slaves didn't really wear a yoke like oxen did or like a workmule would.

But that was the idea. If something is under a yoke, it is the slave. It's totally lost its freedom.

It is now, all its energies are harnessed to the service of whoever has yoked it. And if a person in the Old Testament was a slavery, sometimes they were called servants under the yoke. Although it wasn't literal, that was metaphorical.

But the yoke was itself an emblem of slavery, of the sacrifice of one's freedom, of being pressed into servitude. So when Jesus said, take my yoke upon you, of course what he was saying is, you've got to surrender your own life. You've got to surrender your own pursuits, your own goals, everything.

You've got to forsake all that you have. He said elsewhere in Luke chapter 14, I think it's verse 34 or something like that, it says, if man doesn't forsake all that he has, he cannot be my disciple. So it was a costly thing.

The parables were the bait. The parables were a way of separating between sheep and pigs. Jesus wouldn't cast his pearls before a swine.

His sheep, however, would know his voice and would follow him. That's what he said in John chapter 10. My sheep know my voice.

He said to the Pharisees, you don't understand what I'm saying because you're not my sheep. You don't know my voice. But there were those that were inclined to follow Jesus.

Those that had been spiritually touched. Those that the Father was drawing. Those that were hungry and thirsty for righteousness' sake.

There were those who were in fact his sheep, although they had not yet been all claimed yet. They were the lost sheep of the house of Israel and he had come as the good shepherd to take them. And those who were sheep would come and be fed and be taught and learn the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

And only they were entitled to them. Unto you, he said to those who had come to him, unto you it has been given. Why? Well, he can trust them to a certain degree because their commitment level is such that they've surrendered their freedom.

They've become his followers. They've taken his yoke upon them. Now they can learn from him.

Everything has its cost. There isn't a free lunch. And you know, if Jesus has something of value to give, there's something of value you surrender.

Although the thing that you surrender is of much less value than the thing you receive. God doesn't rip anybody off. It always is a benefit to make this transaction with God.

But you surrender all yourself in order to obtain all of him. You get a good deal out of that. A very good exchange.

You're trading up in that deal. But it is a trade and you don't come into it without a cost. Someone says, but I thought it was a free gift.

I thought salvation was a free gift. What can a man give in exchange for his soul? What will a man give in exchange for his soul? The idea is if he sells his soul, how will he buy it back? What can he give back for it? But the... I was at a funeral actually yesterday. And the preacher was an evangelical preacher preaching there.

And he took it as any evangelical would, as an opportunity to preach the gospel to the lost who were gathered there. And he is presenting the gospel in terms of the four spiritual laws. Which is okay.

I mean the four spiritual laws are reasonably good when you present the gospel in some respects. There are a few things I'd like to add to them. But I don't think any part of them is heretical.

But as such, he represents salvation as nothing but a gift. All you have to do is accept the gift. All you have to do is accept the gift.

He kept saying, this is a free gift. Everyone just has to accept it. He didn't make any suggestion that it cost you anything to accept it.

And of course there are many people who object to the suggestion that it cost anything because that takes away from the freeness of the gift. It's a free gift. But that is a metaphor that is used when speaking of the fact that you don't earn it by good works.

You obtain it without earning it. That's why it's called a gift. But that doesn't mean that you obtain it without making any sacrifices.

If somebody said, Steve, I'll give you this XKE Jaguar as long as you promise to polish it and wash it every weekend and keep the wheels shiny and don't let it gather any dust and you don't leave your junk around in the back seat. If anyone's seen the back seat of my car you know what I'm talking about. And that you treat this thing as the valuable piece of equipment that it is.

Well then I have a decision to make. Do I want to accept it on those terms? Now, let me ask you this. Would I be able to object and say, wait, I thought you said this is a gift.

If I wash and wax the car every weekend then it's not a gift. I'm earning the car. Wouldn't that be an absurd thing for me to say? Of course I'm not earning the car by doing so.

Those are conditions upon which I could receive the gift but the meeting of those conditions in no sense earns the car. Doesn't even make a payment. Doesn't even begin to make a payment.

It's not even intended to be related to making a payment on the car. The car is free but it won't be squandered on a person who will abuse it or who will not keep it in its condition. If I had something of great value but maybe delicate or something and wanted to give it to some poor family but I knew that one poor family had squandered everything they'd been given and another family would value it and would treat it with the proper care and so forth it would probably influence my decision who to give it to.

It would not make it any less a gift that the parties who receive it must, you know, they bear some obligation to receive it worthily as it were. It is still free. Now the Bible does talk about salvation as a gift but that's not the only way it talks about salvation.

That's just one of the metaphors that the Bible uses and it's not even one of the most frequent. It's far more common to talk about the commitment that is required to take a yoke upon Christ is one of those places. I mean take Christ's yoke upon you.

Now it is a free gift but people need to realize that it's a gift that is worth something and it's not something that God gives to those who do not appreciate it and will not make the sacrifices to obtain it. I mean this is something that you can't avoid. As much as we like the free gift motif of the gospel, you cannot read the gospels in the Bible and get the impression that it costs nothing to be a Christian.

It costs everything to be a Christian. You have to forsake all that you have. You have to forsake your own life and your lands and your wife and children and everything it says.

It's obvious that this is a side of the gospel message that sometimes is neglected in preaching but every bit is biblical if not more so because it's more common than the idea of the gift aspect. But what I would say is Jesus was willing to give these treasures of the kingdom, these mysteries of the kingdom to those who had shown themselves willing to make the sacrifice to qualify for them, to take his yoke upon them and then he could direct them. Learn from me requires that you come under his direction but he can't direct you if his yoke isn't on you.

And as long as you still have the out saying well I'll follow you as long as it's comfortable to me, that's like the seed that falls on the stony ground. It has no root. It dies quickly.

Now Jesus had taught him the sermon on the mount. You don't cast your pearls before a swine. You don't give that which is holy to dogs.

And what Jesus had here were the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Nothing could be more holier or more sacred or more like a pearl of great price. And therefore he would not simply expose these mysteries to the curious but the uncommitted.

And many of the people in the multitudes that followed Jesus were just that. They were curious. They'd heard about Jesus.

He was a phenomenon. They hoped to see some miracles no doubt. They were curious about what he might be saying.

Many of them were wondering whether he was the Messiah. But they were strictly speaking just curiosity seekers and they were not committed to him at any level. Those who became committed to him in any significant sense were the ones that are called his disciples.

And they are the ones that he would entrust with the mysteries, the secrets of his strategy. You know the kingdom of God is an invading force in a world that's been controlled for a very long time by the kingdom of darkness. And if you're seeking to invade enemy territory, you don't give away your strategy and your secret plans to people who can't be trusted.

The generals only entrust their secret strategies to those that have been tested and have been cleared, you know, have had security clearance. And that's essentially what Jesus is doing here. He's launching an invasion into the kingdom of darkness with his own kingdom.

And it's a mystery. It's not something everybody can know. It's a secret.

It's the strategies of the kingdom of God. And he's not going to tell everybody about it. He's only going to tell those that have passed security clearance.

And those are the ones who have become at some level committed to him, who have taken his yoke and become disciples. So he says, the reason I talk to these people in parables is I know they won't understand them without an explanation. They won't get what I'm saying.

At the same time, it's sort of throwing bait out to them. It's not giving them nothing. It's giving them enough to make them curious, enough to spark their spiritual, you know, curiosity and perhaps draw them to him on the basis of that for more insight about the kingdom.

Now, he says in verse 12, he does that, so that seeing they may see and not perceive, hearing they may hear and not understand, lest they should turn and their sins be forgiven them. Now, this is set in my Bible in sort of a poetic form. It is because it is a poetic form and it is based upon Isaiah 6-9.

It is not exactly a quote of Isaiah 6-9 and 10, but it is based upon it. Isaiah was told when he saw the Lord high and lifted up in his train filling the temple in Isaiah chapter 6, he was sent to go to his generation and preach them. And God said to him, make these people blind and make them deaf so that seeing they may see and not perceive and hearing they may hear and not understand, lest they be converted.

And I, you know, pardon them. Let me give you the exact quote. I'm kind of paraphrasing there.

He says, Go and tell these people, keep on hearing but do not understand. Keep on seeing but do not perceive. Make the heart of these people dull and their ears heavy and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and return and be healed.

Now, this suggests that in Isaiah's day, God was saying, I don't want these people to be. Some of them I'm giving up on. That was certainly the case in Jeremiah's day.

He said, don't even pray for these people. Don't pray for these people, Jeremiah. Just tell them what I tell you to tell them, but don't even pray for them because they are beyond redemption.

It sounds like he's saying that about these people in Isaiah's day, but then you say, well, if they're beyond redemption, why preach to them? What's the point? Because, he says, I want them to be without excuse. I want them on the day of judgment to not be able to plead that they didn't hear. Even though they've hardened their hearts, if I never speak to them, then they might plead ignorance.

I want them to know everything I have to say to them. And I know for a fact that many of them are going to turn away from the word. They're going to shut their eyes when the blinding light is given to them.

They're going to hold their ears so they won't understand what they're hearing. They don't want it. And he says, but you've got to go out and preach it anyway.

Now, Jesus said that his generation was like that of Isaiah's. In fact, a lot of things in Jesus' generation were like that of Isaiah's generation. When we study Isaiah, that will be obvious.

And just suffice it to say that Isaiah is one of the most quoted prophets in the Gospels. And when Jesus quotes the prophecy of Isaiah, sometimes he says, well, did Isaiah, did Isaiah, did the prophets speak of this generation when he said? Now, actually, Isaiah was speaking of his own generation. But essentially, Jesus is saying the same thing that is true of Isaiah's generation is true of this generation.

When Isaiah said this about his own generation, he was as well talking about this one. And so he's saying that just as Isaiah was sent out to a people who were not going to receive it, they were going to hear what he had to say, but they wouldn't perceive it. They wouldn't receive it.

So also, Jesus' generation was that way, very largely. There'd be some, like those who became disciples, who were exceptional. He was gathering the remnant out of the larger

group.

But the larger group was apathetic or worse, either apathetic or hostile toward the truth. And therefore, he wasn't going to cast his pearls before such people as that. He was going to preach to them so they'd be without excuse, but he preached in parables so that he wouldn't give away his program to those that were simply not worthy of it, not capable of being trusted with the information.

And then he says in verse 13, Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? I must confess that I've often wondered what Jesus means by this rhetorical question. He doesn't wait for an answer, so it must be rhetorical. He's trying to make a point, but what is the point? On the one hand, he may be saying, If you don't understand this parable without me explaining it, then you're not going to understand any of the parables without me explaining it.

And that might be what he's saying. He might be saying, Listen, don't get it through your head that you're going to understand what I have to say without my explanation. Don't try to come up with your own ideas and theories.

You ask me like you're asking me now. Notice you didn't understand this parable? Well, let that be a lesson to you. You're not going to understand any of the parables without understanding them the same way you're going to understand this one, that is by my explaining it.

That could be what he's saying. The other sense that one would get from reading is that he's chiding them for not understanding the parables, saying, Well, gosh, if you're that dull, how are you going to understand anything? But I have a hard time believing that's what he's saying because how could they be expected to understand the parable? They hardly deserve to be scolded at this point. He just told them a story about farming and one would not be expected to immediately make the transfer.

Oh, the seed is the word of God and the soils are different hearts and so forth. So I'm kind of at a loss to say for sure what Jesus' import was when he made this challenge to them in verse 13 and gave this rhetorical question. But I suspect he was saying something like this, you know.

Well, here's the first of my parables. You don't understand it. You need me to explain it.

Take note of that. You're going to need me to explain all the parables. If you don't understand this one, how are you going to understand any of them? You're going to understand them the same way you'll understand this one as a result of my explaining it to you.

Don't think that you can understand these mysteries without my help. That's sort of what I think he means there. I could be wrong about that.

Now, apart from that little interim there, we have the parable itself and the explanation of the parable. There's not too much needed to be said about the parable itself except the explanation. The meaning of the first nine verses they like quite readily on the surface.

The sower is scattering seeds. The land that he's scattering on has a variety of soils. Now, it was not expedient to just go out and plant individual seeds only on soil that was known to be good.

The seed was cheap enough and there were so many that had to be implanted that it was more time efficient and more economical just to go ahead and scatter the seed knowing that a certain amount of seed would be lost. Some of it would be essentially wasted. It would just become food for the birds although that's not wasted because your father feeds them and that's one of the ways he does it.

Jesus said that your father feeds the birds so they get fed by the sower sowing seeds where they can get at them. On the wayside is the first place the seed is said to fall and that's just the pathways through the fields that have been run upon. When you've got soft soil with tender plants you don't just go running on top of them.

You have to run around you have to access the field through certain established pathways and you don't go off into the soft soil but these pathways do get tread down pretty hard so that although a seed might eventually penetrate them it's not very easy to do so. The soil is hardened by the weight of runners on it continuously and so obviously the seed sits on top initially and in all likelihood the birds will get it before it has any chance to germinate or penetrate. So some seeds, that's their fate.

Other seeds are on stony ground and the stony ground there is not from the explanation it's clear it's not just soil that has a lot of rocks in it but soil that has stone below the surface a thin layer of topsoil is held on top of a sheet of bedrock as it were so that while the seed does penetrate where the birds can't get to it it's got another problem it can't go deeply enough to put roots down to where moisture is and in a hot climate in the summer time of course tender plants are very dependent on the moisture under the ground of course plants are always dependent on moisture under the ground and if they can't put their roots very deep then in the heat of the day the soil above the rock is going to be dry and while they may initially spring up above the ground and look like they're going to do well the hidden fact the hidden tragedy is they have no root the rock underneath the soil just won't admit the roots to go down and therefore there's no moisture and they simply can't endure the heat of the day and then of course there's those that fall on soil that has not the problems of the previous two but after the plants begin to grow in what seems to be good soil there come up also additional plants thorns and weeds and thistles that choke the plant up now I don't know to what degree ancient farmers or even modern farmers go through and try to weed their wheat fields if you

have a garden plot at your house you try to keep the weeds out they come up and you pull them out at least up to a certain point while your crops are young but I've never been a farmer on fields I'm quite sure that farmers just don't go through pulling out all the weeds in a hundred acres it'd be a little bit of a large job I think you just kind of hope that you've factored into your accounting that some of them are going to be killed by weeds and some are not if I'm wrong you can correct me about that because I don't know from first hand but I'm sure that they just don't go weeding every little weed that pops up in a hundred acres or so and therefore some of the plants just die of the weeds if it was in your garden plot you'd probably pull the weeds out and save the plants but it's just too much work probably in a huge field of grains to do that so you just count on some of them getting choked they die but there's a certain number that do produce what you're hoping for the crop you want and he says some produce 30 some 60 and some 100 fold now a 30 fold crop from what I understand is a pretty good crop kind of average I guess you plant one bag of seeds and you get back 30 bags of wheat that's 30 fold that is I think from what I've read a good crop 60 fold is obviously twice as good 100 fold is exceptional extraordinary very rare now one thing interesting is back in the book of Genesis the only chapter that we read about Isaac alone without reference to his father or his sons it tells us that he became a farmer now his father had been a herdsman of sheep but Isaac began to plant some crops and it was during a famine in the land and the first year he harvested 100 fold which is rather amazing I mean that's evidence of God's astonishing sovereignty over the situation because here it was a famine when most farms were not producing well at all or anything and here he gets a whole 100 fold crop now what Jesus is saying here is there are some seeds and crops that produce average to superior there are even some that produce extraordinarily now all of those those that produce 30 some 60 some 100 fold are ok they're all fine they're all on good soil this is the good guys these are the ones that he has nothing to say negative about which points out of course that not every person is going to produce the same amount of fruit in their life even if they're doing anything right even if there aren't any of the negative conditions he's describing here there are just some persons who by the grace of God the special grace upon them produce more than others and there should be no jealousy there of course it's God who gives the increase remember how Paul talked about that in 1 Corinthians 3 I've planted, I've polished water and God gives the increase and the man who plants is nothing the one who waters is nothing it's God who gives the increase that matters and we just got to live with what he gives as if you're a person who doesn't seem to be producing an enormous amount of fruit in terms of converts or even in terms of the perfection of your life although you may desire it God will give you the fruit that he wants you to have and you needn't be jealous if you see someone else doing better or something it's just a matter of doing the best you can making sure that the soil that the seed falls on in your case is good enough to produce as good a soil as the seed can produce in you as good a crop that is now let's look at the explanation this parable is so familiar to Christians that there's probably no secret being divulged here to us when he says he that sows is sowing the word the seed in the

parable represents the word Mark has it quite simply just like that the sower sows the word the seed is the word then in Luke chapter 8 the parallel statement is the seed is the word of God that doesn't modify this much of course we would have assumed that the word was the word of God but just so you'll know where Mark just has it being the word Luke specifies in Luke chapter 8 that it's the word of God and Matthew's gospel has it as the word of the kingdom okay so we got three different renderings here but obviously there's no contradiction among them just different ways of saying the same thing it's Luke 8, 11 now the parable is this the seed is the word of God Luke 8, 11 and then over in Matthew chapter 13 he says the word of the kingdom and he puts it this way in verse 18 and 19 Matthew 13, verses 18 and 19 therefore hear the parable of the sower when anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it then the wicked one comes and snatches away and says this is he who received the seed by the wayside so obviously the word of the kingdom is the seed so you got the word we can see therefore that the kingdom which is in this parable described as a crop a crop of grain a field of grain it is expanded its fruit is produced by the activity of planting seeds of course now this shouldn't be too surprising because in the old testament the bible often referred to what God was looking for from Israel as fruit most frequently it was in terms of grapes the grape vine Israel was God's vine or God's vineyard he was looking for fruit from them and there are other metaphors too of fruit that come up in the old testament the kingdom of God has its fruit that it seeks but of course in the old testament it was not understood to be a spiritual thing and it was a political thing and therefore the kingdom was understood to be spread by conquering one's enemies with the sword and that's exactly the way David and others conquered their enemies in the old testament kingdom but in the new testament kingdom it is by the sowing of seed which is here identified as the word of God now the word of God is cast it's cast out in a sense indiscriminately not entirely but I think that I think that what Jesus was doing to the multitudes is the sowing the indiscriminate casting now of course the soils themselves do the discriminating the sower cast the seed out in the form of parables he cast out the seed but not everyone understood it or even cared to understand it the ones who did are the good soil who came and received the explanation and followed Jesus and so forth others in the multitudes did not become disciples for various reasons and the various reasons why some did not respond as the disciples did to the parables and the teaching of Jesus was characterized by these three different conditions of the soil now the soil condition is in this parable representative of a heart condition a hard soil in the parable is like a hard heart nothing penetrates it soft soil is a soft heart the soil that has thorns and thistles in it is a heart that is corrupted with you know extraneous concerns the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of the earth is not pure of heart now we see then that the parable in its foundation or its fundamental meaning is that the sower of seeds upon soils is sowing the word of God to hearts to people who have hearts the word goes in the ears it falls upon the heart and then what happens is not in the sower's control once the sower has cast the seed he doesn't go back and make sure that the birds don't eat any on the wayside or that there's no stone under some of it he counted on that happening with

some of it he'd throw out the good seed knowing there's some good soil out there and from that good soil he expected to get his crop so Jesus also comes to the multitudes he knows the majority of them are going to reject him and they did but he sows seeds he throws out parables out there and some of them are like the first people the seed that fell on the wayside the birds came and ate it what's that mean? he says well he explains it he says in verse 15 these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown and when they hear Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts now Matthew adds a little detail there which Mark does not it says in Matthew 13, 19 when anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in the heart this is he who received the seed by the wayside now obviously Satan is what the birds represent here stealing the seed away so that it cannot produce any fruit it will not get any results but what is it that makes a person's heart like this? what is it that makes the heart susceptible to having the word stolen from it? well Jesus specifies there in Matthew 13, 19 they hear the word but they don't understand it that certainly must have been the case with the majority of the multitude hearing the parables they heard the parable but they didn't understand it and the devil comes along and says it must have been nothing and takes it away and their curiosity is no longer around well they've gone out they've seen this guy that everyone is talking about they can claim to have seen him they can talk to people about him but they know now that there is not much to him they didn't understand what he was really saying but because they didn't the devil just snatched away and all their interest in it was gone the kingdom of God is lost to them because they don't pursue understanding of it now I want to say something about this because the word understanding calls something very important to our attention and that is that there is a use of the mind in the Christian life it is not unspiritual to seek to understand things there are many people who think that if you give much effort to study, to exposition to exegesis or whatever to understand a passage in its context that you're kind of resorting to the letter which kills it's the deadness of the letter and what you really need is just to have the word quickened by the spirit of God and what you really need is just to have a living word given to you and that doesn't require understanding that just requires hearing God and responding and there are people who greatly minimize the need for understanding the word of God however, God is not one of those who minimizes it nor is Jesus in fact, in Jeremiah chapter 9 God indicates that it's one of the most important things understanding in Jeremiah chapter 9 verses 23 and 24 Jeremiah 9.23 says let not the wise man glory in his wisdom let not the mighty man glory in his might let not the rich man glory in his riches but him who glories, let him glory in this that he understands and knows me that I am the Lord exercising loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth for in these things I delight, says the Lord now this is something to glory in if you understand and know the Lord not just knowing not just some kind of subjective vibe and goose bumps that you get from the spirit but to understand God to understand his will in fact, Paul since we went to the Old Testament we'll now go forward in the New Testament I hope I can find this because I haven't

looked at it