

# The Seeds of God's Surprising Kingdom

Thomas Robinson, *Deeper with Jesus*, 1, January 26, 2014

## Matthew 13:1-23

<sup>1</sup> That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. <sup>2</sup> And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into **a boat** and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach.

### Parable of the Sower, Seeds, and Soils

<sup>3</sup> And he told them many things in parables, saying: "**A sower went out to sow.**

<sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seeds fell along **the path**, and the **birds** came and devoured them.

<sup>5</sup> 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, <sup>6</sup> but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away.

<sup>7</sup> Other seeds fell **among thorns**, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

<sup>8</sup> Other seeds fell on **good soil** and produced grain, some a **hundredfold**, some **sixty**, some **thirty**.

<sup>9</sup> **Whoever has ears, let them hear!**"

### Why Jesus Uses Parables

<sup>10</sup> Then **the disciples** came and said to him, "**Why do you speak to them in parables?**"

<sup>11</sup> And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know **the secrets of the kingdom of heaven**, but to them it has not been given. <sup>12</sup> For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

<sup>13</sup> This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. <sup>14</sup> Indeed, in their case **the prophecy of Isaiah** is fulfilled that says:

*'You will indeed hear but never understand,  
and you will indeed see but never perceive.*

<sup>15</sup> *For this people's heart has grown dull,  
and with their ears they can barely hear,  
and their eyes they have closed,*

*lest they should see with their eyes  
and hear with their ears  
and understand with their heart  
and turn, and I would heal them.'*

[Isaiah 6:9-10]

<sup>16</sup> But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. <sup>17</sup> For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

### Jesus Retells the Parable for the Disciples

<sup>18</sup> Hear then the parable of the sower: <sup>19</sup> When anyone hears **the word of the kingdom** and does not understand, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along **the path**.

<sup>20</sup> As for what was sown on **rocky ground**, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, <sup>21</sup> 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**.

<sup>22</sup> 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**.

<sup>23</sup> As for what was sown on **good soil**, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a **hundredfold**, in another **sixty**, and in another **thirty**."

### *Isaiah 6:11-13*

<sup>11</sup> Then I said, "How long, O Lord?"

And he said:

"Until cities lie waste without inhabitant,  
and houses without people,

and the land is a desolate waste,

<sup>12</sup> and the LORD removes people far away,

and the forsaken places are many  
in the midst of the land.

<sup>13</sup> And though a tenth remain in it,  
it will be burned again,

like a terebinth or an oak,

whose stump remains when it is felled."

**Its stump shall be holy seed.**

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## From Sermon Illustration to Parable

We began "Seeking the Kingdom" Mt 6. Then intense conflict, Mt 12; Now deeper with parables.

The parable of the sower is simple, easy. Why "Whoever has ears..."? (Cf. Mt 11:15, John is Elijah.)

It's simple, and not! Note: Same day as intense conflicts of chap 12. Special setting. Extended private explanation. A simple reading is not wrong, but there's so much more. What more?

We often think of parables as sermon illustrations: aid to clarification. Jesus' explanation seems really strange. Stories both to teach and hide. Mt helps us look back on people and disciples.

It's hard to get back into the dangers of Jesus' situation as he proclaims a new Kingdom. John in prison. Herod dangerous. Pharisees trying to destroy. Accusations of Beelzebul. The Romans.

Jesus is living a mission larger than any of those around him can understand. Nobody knows whether he's raising an army. Nobody can foresee his death and resurrection. Dangers abound.

## Jesus Lives the Troubled Story of Israel

When the disciples ask about parables Jesus cites the experience of Isaiah, called by God to point God's people to a time of grace and blessing but on the other side of intense judgment. Isaiah extends over 2 centuries to show both sides: judgment & renewal. Jesus as servant, Mt 12:18. Isaiah told of destruction from which "holy seed" would spring. A branch growing from a stump.

Jesus says that seed is being planted, but people are still blind, moving toward destruction.

He will take on death in order to create life and hope on a new scale. Right now those who can hear are not the wise, the powerful, the wealthy, the great teachers and priests. Rather it's the "little ones" (11:25), the ordinary disciples (12:50), who share in the in-rearing kingdom.

## Disciples on the Way to Understanding What They Have

The important thing about the disciples is that they are with Jesus with eyes and ears open. They often don't understand. But they listen; they watch. They are not fixed in place by their power, wisdom, responsibilities. They watch as the mysteries of God's kingdom unfold in Jesus. The time of fulfillment has arrived and they are following Jesus. You see. But will see far more.

Jesus retells the parable for them. Some things are filled in, not everything. It is still a parable.

The message of God's kingdom breaking in is the catalyst, the seed. The seed from the stump. Some have no place for it, at least not from Jesus. To Pharisees, he's dangerous, Beelzebul. So also high priests. Many like the idea, are willing to cheer it on, receive its benefits, but it doesn't gain root within them. God actually ruling: changing life, sharing suffering, facing crisis. Many are entangled with too much Mammon, anxiety, commitments to be open to hear, see. But some do. Good soil. Ordinary people. Among them God's kingdom breaks in and grows.

## Where Am I in the Story?

Matthew places us with the disciples. Blessed because we can see more: Cross and Resurrection. He recounts this because we and our generation face the same challenges. God's kingdom as a living reality is still as challenging, faces the same opposition, grows with the same power.