

Kingdom of God Week 1 - Matthew 13

April 15, 2020

Dear Church Family,

Welcome to this first Sunday after Easter! I trust that you are continuing to live every day in the Resurrection Power of Jesus Christ! As we celebrated the events of Holy Week and Easter Sunday, we **celebrated and proclaimed** the message that **Jesus is our King, Jesus is alive, and Jesus is with us!** Since Jesus is alive and since He is our King, then that means **the Kingdom of Heaven is real**, and we can participate in the reality of the Kingdom, as well!

Did you know that **after** Jesus was raised from the dead and **before** He ascended to Heaven, He spent His time revealing Himself to His followers, and He spoke to them about something very important? **Acts chapter 1 verse 3** records for us what Jesus was talking about.

Acts 1:3

*³ During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about **the Kingdom of God**.* (NLT)

If it was important for Jesus to talk to His followers about **the Kingdom of God before** He returned to heaven, then I think we should spend some time giving our attention to understanding the **Kingdom of God** too.

As we begin to see what Jesus would say to us, let's pause for Prayer and ask for the LORD's guidance and understanding.

*"**Heavenly Father**, thank You for raising Jesus from the grave and for displaying Your **great love and power** to us. We are beginning to realize that **Your Kingdom and Rule** is more real than we might have originally thought. Help us today to begin to understand at a greater level the reality of Your Kingdom and how we can live in it. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen."*

Let's turn our attention today to what Jesus taught us about **the Kingdom of God**. While we don't have the specific teachings that Jesus gave during the 40 days **after** the Resurrection, we do have all of His teachings on **the Kingdom of God** during His time of ministry **before** the Crucifixion.

I believe that Jesus would have probably went back over these same teachings to show His followers how to apply these teachings now that they were beginning to understand what **the Kingdom of God** was really going to look like in their life and time.

Turn with me in your Bible to the **Gospel of Matthew**, and we will take up one of Jesus' teachings on **the Kingdom of God**. In **Matthew Chapter 13**, we will find several parables that Jesus told concerning the **Kingdom of God**. Matthew uses the term **Kingdom of Heaven**, but these two titles refer to the same thing.

Though you may have heard this parable before, **I want you to listen with AFTER EASTER ears** and listen for what Jesus is telling YOU about the **Kingdom of Heaven**.

Listen and imagine that the Risen Jesus is teaching YOU about the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew 13:1-9

Later that same day Jesus left the house and sat beside the lake. ² A large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat there and taught as the people stood on the shore. ³ He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:

“Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. ⁴ As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. ⁵ Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn’t have deep roots, they died. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. ⁸ Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! ⁹ Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.” (NLT)

This is a timely parable for us to take up today, because it is the start of gardening and planting season here. Maybe some of you are experiencing the results of the planting you had done earlier in the year if you have flowers coming up or bushes starting to bloom. Maybe some of you have already started planting your gardens for the summer.

As you think about the process that you went through in planting and the results that you are experiencing, let’s listen to Jesus as He explains this parable to us today. He is going to highlight for us the different responses and results people have to the message of **the Kingdom of God**.

Matthew 13:18-23

¹⁸ *“Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: ¹⁹ The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don’t understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. ²⁰ The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. ²¹ But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word. ²² The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God’s word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. ²³ The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!” (NLT)*

Let’s look closely at what Jesus is explaining to us about **the Kingdom of Heaven** and more specifically the response of people to the reality of the message.

First, let’s begin by establishing that **Jesus is the farmer** who is planting the seed.

Jesus doesn’t specifically identify Himself as the farmer in this explanation, but in another parable explanation in **Matthew 13:37**, Jesus does identify Himself as the Farmer. Either way, Jesus is the one teaching the story on the day this parable is originally given, and He is the one teaching His followers after the Resurrection, thus I feel it is safe to say that Jesus is the one getting the message out about the Kingdom of God.

Remember too, **Matthew 4:17** records the message Jesus came to preach during His earthly ministry, *“From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” (NLT)*

This leads us to **the seed** that was planted. **The Seed is the message about the Kingdom of Heaven**. This is mentioned specifically in **vs. 19a of Matthew chapter 13**, ¹⁹ **The seed** that fell on the footpath represents those who hear **the message about the Kingdom** and don’t understand it.

Next, we also learn there is **opposition to the message of the Kingdom of Heaven**.

The Evil one, **Satan**, tries to snatch away the seed that is planted.

vs.19b of Matthew chapter 13 says, Then **the evil one** comes and **snatches away** the seed that was planted in their hearts.

Satan doesn't want anyone to understand the truth of **the Kingdom of Heaven**, and he certainly will do everything he can to **keep us** from growing in our understanding of God's Kingdom and from producing a harvest of Kingdom fruit with our lives.

So, we have Jesus planting the message about the Kingdom of God **in the hearts** of people, and we have Satan opposing both Jesus and His message.

Let's look at **the human response** to the message of the Kingdom of Heaven, because that's where we will find ourselves in this story.

In this parable, Jesus says there are **4 responses and results** to the message of the **Kingdom of God** that He plants in a human heart.

Note that it is the **same seed** that is planted in the **same place...the heart** of each hearer.

The **heart condition** of each person is represented by a different type of soil.

The Footpath – is the **first** heart condition we find.

¹⁹ *The seed that fell **on the footpath** represents those who hear **the message about the Kingdom** and don't understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. (NLT)*

The **Footpath** represents a **hard heart**, one that is resistant to having the message of the Kingdom of God planted within.

When we have a heart hardened toward God or His Message of the Kingdom, it is very easy for Satan to come in and steal the message from our heart.

The hard-hearted person doesn't understand the Message about the Kingdom and doesn't want to.

The Rocky Soil – is the **second** heart condition we find.

²⁰ *The seed on **the rocky soil** represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy.*

²¹ *But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word. (NLT)*

The **Rocky Soil** is a person with a **divided heart**. This person's heart is divided between what they know to be true about God and the pressures that they feel from living in this world.

They have joyfully received the message about the **Kingdom of Heaven**, but then life gets difficult and problems and persecution come because of their belief in the **Kingdom of God**. When these troubled times come, the problems or "Rocks" seem so large that **they stop believing** in the God who is the "Rock" of our Salvation and the God who had the "stone" rolled away at the Resurrection.

The person with a divided heart turns away from God and back towards the world when times start to get a little rocky in their world.

The Thorny Soil – is the **third** heart condition we find.

²² *The seed that fell **among the thorns** represents those who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced.* ^(NLT)

The **Thorny Soil** is a person with a **heart set on the wrong things**.

These people are growing things in their lives...but they are growing thorn bushes. That's the wrong thing to be growing. It's the things like **worry** and **the lure of wealth** that take hold of our lives quickly and grip us deeply. They grow until they take over our whole lives even if we didn't intend them too.

I would equate them to blackberry bushes or vines. When we lived in Oregon the blackberry bushes would grow so fast that they could quickly take over an entire yard within a very short time. They would also grow back just as soon as you cut them back. It was amazing, frustrating, and scary all at the same time.

How many people do you know that have given their lives over to keeping their worries at bay or making the next dollar?

At times, these people's lives look productive, but a closer inspection shows a fruitless life full of things that cause pain to themselves and others.

The person with their heart set on the wrong thing quickly finds that they no longer have room for the message of **the Kingdom of Heaven** in their lives which ultimately results in **a fruitless life**, no matter how hard they worked.

Jesus told us that we can live differently.

Matthew 6:33, Jesus says,

³³ *Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need.* ^(NLT)

The Good Soil – is the **fourth** heart condition we find.

²³ *The seed that fell **on good soil** represents those who truly hear and understand God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"* ^(NLT)

The Good Soil is a person with **a heart totally fixed on God** and His Kingdom!

All throughout Scripture we read of God's desire that our hearts would be **completely** fixed on Him. **Completely** His!

Deuteronomy 6:4-6

⁴ *"Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. ⁵ And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. ⁶ And you must commit yourselves **wholeheartedly** to these commands that I am giving you today.* ^(NLT)

Jeremiah 29:13

¹³ *If you look for me **wholeheartedly**, you will find me.* ^(NLT)

Matthew 22:37-38

³⁷ *Jesus replied, " 'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.* ^(NLT)

The person whose heart is fixed on God and receives the message of the Kingdom of Heaven lives a **fulfilling and fruitful life**.

Jesus wants this kind of life for all of us!

In **John 10:10**, Jesus says, “*My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.*”^(NLT)

Jesus wants us to personally receive the message about the **Kingdom of Heaven** into our hearts. He wants the truth of the message to begin to grow there and to bring us the understanding of how this **Kingdom of Heaven** functions in our lives, both now and into eternity. He wants our lives to be so Kingdom hearted that we naturally begin bearing Kingdom fruit.

Think about how seeds work.

Seeds grow the type of plant that they are a seed for.

Apple seeds grow Apple Trees.

Apple Trees grow to maturity and produce Apples.

Each Apple a tree produces, contains within it more Apple seeds to produce even more Apple Trees. Each of these Apple Trees will Produce more Apples which naturally contain more Apple seeds which will produce even more Apple Trees...and the cycle goes on and on.

This is exactly what Jesus wants to happen with the message about **the Kingdom of Heaven** once it takes root in our hearts and we begin to grow and produce Kingdom fruit. As our lives proclaim the reality of the **Kingdom of God**, we spread **the Kingdom message** to others and then they go and tell others and then they go and tell others and **the Kingdom of God** continues expanding and growing on and on.

But it all starts with the way **we** respond to the message about **the Kingdom of God** from Jesus.

How have you responded to His message of **the Kingdom of Heaven**?

What kind of soil best represents **your heart condition** today?

Is your heart **hard** to Jesus’ message about the Kingdom of Heaven?

Is your heart **divided** between what you hear from Jesus and the pressure you feel from the world?

Is your heart **focused on the wrong things** that are squeezing out the message of the Kingdom of Heaven and leaving no room for Jesus?

Is your heart **fixed on Jesus** and His message about the Kingdom of God?

Do you desire to live in the reality and blessing of the Kingdom of God?

My friends, we have all received the same message about **the Kingdom of Heaven**, but we must decide for ourselves whether we will receive the message into our hearts and make it the focus of our lives.

Let me share some encouraging words from the writer of Hebrews as you decide how you will respond today.

Hebrews 3:12-15

¹² Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. ¹³ You must warn each other every day, while it is still “today,” so

that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. ¹⁴ For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ.
¹⁵ Remember what it says:

*“Today when you hear his voice,
don’t harden your hearts
as Israel did when they rebelled.”^(NLT)*

Let me encourage you today to allow the message of **the Kingdom of God** into your heart.

Allow it to grow into maturity and trust the LORD to bring about **Kingdom fruit** in your life.

Imagine how much **Kingdom fruit** your life could produce as you live in the reality of the **Kingdom of God** every day!

Let me close with a word of Prayer for each of us as we choose to respond to Jesus’ message today.

“Heavenly Father, thank You for the truth of the message about Your Kingdom that has been delivered to us and demonstrated to us by Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help each of us to keep our hearts fixed on You, no matter what circumstances or problems we may be facing. Grow our understanding of Your Kingdom and help us to bear Kingdom fruit in our lives for Your glory. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

May the Love of the Father, the Grace of the Lord Jesus, and the Power of the Holy Spirit continue to keep you and bless you both now and forever!

Please don’t forget the other ways that we are reaching out as a Church Family in these days of separation.

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NEW Church YouTube channel: Search for Central Fellowship Church or
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJ5mrAnoy6Bhe4UwtyICQ8g/featured>

Thank you to everyone who has continued to faithfully send in their tithes and offerings! Please know that the work of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ continues in many ways through our Church even in these days of suspended physical services.

Love and Prayers for you all!

Following Christ,
Pastor Mike Martin