

Matthew 13:1-23

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[0:00] What a beautiful refrain. Our God is faithful forever. He is perfect in love.

! He is perfect in love. He is perfect in love. He is perfect in love. He is perfect in love. He is perfect in love. He is perfect in love. He is sovereign over us. And when we come into His presence, we find ourselves just bowed before Him. He is the one whose reign, whose rule, whose sovereignty over us takes absolutely first place in our lives. And He's worthy of all our worship. Worthy of it all. I want you to turn to Matthew chapter 13, that passage that Libby read for us so well. It's a familiar passage, I'm sure, to many of you who are familiar with the Scriptures, the parable of the sower. I want to suggest that the parable of the sower was probably one of the parables that you heard, if you were like me, one of the sent ones. You know what I mean by that?

Your parents didn't go to church, but they sent you. And I was one of the sent ones, not part of a Christian family that went together to worship, but sent along with them. And I remember the parable of the sower. Here's the interesting thing. I remember the parable of the sower, but I had no idea what it meant. It's exactly what Jesus said. None of us understand the parables unless a sovereign God takes His Word and applies His Word by His Spirit and removes the scales from our eyes that we might see and understand and believe. And it was going to be many, many years before an actual fact, even although I knew the parable, that I would understand the parable. And here's the incredible thing about that parable. I am constantly learning wonderful things from a very familiar parable.

And the only way I can do that is when I actually take time, not just to hear that, but to do as Jesus said, let those who have ears to hear listen. And the only way I can do that is in actual fact to spend time listening to God's Word and saying, what are you saying to me? How does this land? How deep is this going to go in my heart? And even as I say those things by means of introduction, I'm actually unpacking the reality of what Jesus was teaching in the parable of the sower.

And you know, the incredible thing about that is we turn to Matthew chapter 13. We're coming to the third large teaching section of Matthew's gospel when you work through that. And in this section, Jesus principally is going to be using parables, and he's going to be telling, for the most part, parables of the kingdom of God. Parables of the way in which the reign of God, the rule of God, the sovereignty of God is established in people's lives. And there's a real sense in which these parables separate those who are faithful followers of Jesus from those who are not.

[3:58] And it's interesting that when you follow the movement of Matthew's gospel, even there in verse 13, verse 1, chapter 13, verse 1, we see the movement. That same day, Jesus went out of the house, and he sat beside the sea, and great crowds gathered about him so that he has to get into a boat in order that he might teach. And in the movement, we're moving from the, you know, kind of the sort of quieter groupings of teaching, and we're moving to that, making known the way in which the kingdom of God is established and planted in the hearts of people. I'm going to say to you this morning, if you're a follower of Jesus, there's a very real sense in which you will know, you will understand, you will get it, that the kingdom of God take root in your life when the Word of God is planted in you. And God, the Holy Spirit, opens your eyes to see, to understand, to repent, to believe, to place all your trust in Him. This is how the kingdom of God begins. It's as the Word of

God is planted in a person. We sometimes use the little phrase, let me plant a thought in your mind. Let me sow a little seed in your head. You know, let me just share a little word with you that it might stick. And Jesus, in actual fact, so beautifully in the parable of the sower, because we learn from the whole counsel of God's Word that in actual fact, you know, the sower is God Himself, Christ Himself, the seed is the Word of God. And so what He does in this beautiful parable is He shows a way in which the Word of God liberally sown, not liberally, theologically speaking, but liberally sown in terms of, you know, plentiful distribution of the Word of God. As it's sown, the natural fact, as that

seed lands, it lands in very different soils. We call it the parable of the sower. It ought to be the parable of the soils. It ought to be the parable of the heart. But as the seed of the Word of God is sown, it lands. And the work that it does is the work that God has designed for it to do. And Jesus, in actual fact, just shows the way in which, as He sows the seed of His Word, and here He's doing it in parables, in actual fact, the responses will be very different. The responses will be very different. I'm always staggered as I just listen again to the parable of the sower that in actual fact, only one of the soils is fruitful. In actual fact, for the biggest part, as the seed is sown, you know, there are three quarters of this, you know, heart that receive the Word of God, that actually show no response whatsoever, or they show a response which, in actual fact, is not going to be a lasting response. It's going to disappear. Challenges of life, the temptations of life, everything that life can throw at us, in actual fact, is going to cause them to give up.

And what it is that's been sown in them. And so Jesus tells the parable of the sower. We know it, we're familiar with it. It was so well read, I'm not going to go over that part of it.

Interestingly enough, as He speaks in parables, the disciples say, why? Why do you always talk to the people in parables? And they must have been staggered by the answer that Jesus gave, because what He effectively said was this, that I deliberately show in parables in order that only those that God is doing a work in and opening blind eyes and removing scales from their eyes that they might see, might respond and know and believe and live as God is calling them to.

[8:32] And He said, it's been prophesied in Isaiah. Turn over the page in verse 35, you'll find it's also there in the Psalms. That in actual fact, Jesus is just fulfilling Scripture when He teaches the crowds in parables. Look what He says to those who are His disciples, those who are followers.

Verse 11, There's something indescribable about our salvation. The grace that causes us not just to hear the Word of God, but to hear in a saving way is absolutely marvelous.

The grace that enables us to hear God's Word and to realize this is a life-giving Word, that if I receive it and believe it and put it into practice in my life will utterly transform me, and I'll begin to live eternal life right now.

It's incredible. And Jesus is very honest with us. He says, actually, this should inform our praying. How do we pray for people? Do we really pray that as we sow the seed of God's Word in their lives, that God would open their eyes to see, that God would convict their hard hearts and break them that they might believe. We need to pray for those that we love in a very real way. We need to stop pushy-footing about with, bless them with this, Lord, bless them with that. We need to say, Lord, break them. Open their eyes. Enable them to see the truth of Your Word, that they might be saved. And Jesus is very honest with us. He says, people's hearts have grown dull, their ears can barely hear, their eyes have been closed. And I speak in parables, lest they should see with their eyes, see with their ears, understand with their heart and tongue, and I would heal them. And the amazing grace of God is this, that in actual fact, He delights when people read His Word earnestly and seek His face and long for the transformation that His Word can bring. He delights to open their eyes and to change their hearts and to transform their lives. Staggering as you go through this little section, you know, the different parables, parable of the weeds and the seed and the leaven and the hidden treasure and the parable of great value. Incredible little section of God's Word that you're in right now.

[11:52] But when it comes to the parable of the sower, we actually get an explanation from Jesus about what it means. I'm always very thankful for that. The natural fact Jesus takes time to unpack it and to explain it for His disciples. And He says to them, He says, you know, you who know Me, who have heard My Word, who as the Word of God has been planted in you, and you have repented and believed and put your trust in me. You are living in me. You are living in a way and in a day that the prophets and righteous people long to see. What amazing grace that you and I live in if we're followers of Christ. But I want to think about this business of the Word of God landing in our hearts. And I want to ask you how that's going at the present moment in time. As you engage with the Word of God, and I'm thrilled to bits we do that in the body of Christ Sunday by Sunday. We do that as the house groups start up again this week. It's great to do those things together. In actual fact, we are saved, not as individuals. We're saved to be part of the family of God. And so it's so important that we receive the Word of God in this way, that we receive the Word of God in these life groups. But we know as followers of Christ that in actual fact, we should be regularly engaging with the Word of God. And I wonder what our response looks like to the Word of God. If we were to just take a few moments to think about the way in which Jesus describes the Word of God is landing in the hearts

of those that He's talking about in this parable, where would we be? It's interesting that, you know, Jesus, He describes for us each of the outcomes.

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 is sown along the path.

Seed sown. No response. Caught in the grip of the devil himself. The reality is we either serve God or we serve the devil.

We don't have any other choices. But the reality is Jesus says that the Word of God is often sown in such a way that even before it is any opportunity, the disposition of that life is so set against God that it's snatched away.

I've heard beautiful brothers debate in apologetics with those who are atheists.

[15:08] And even as they've shared the Word of God, it's almost just like a visual representation of that parable. The Word of God just bounces off them. Snatched away before it ever takes any root.

Because the heart and the mind are already set against God. They've adopted an unbelieving, atheistic position that just does not want to hear, even if what has been heard is credible.

And Jesus just describes it like seed sown along a hard path. Now it should never stop us praying. It should never stop us engaging in apologetics. It should never stop us sowing the seed of God's Word into the life because we never know what God is going to do. And our God is able even to break the hardest of hearts and the most stubborn of minds.

But it does help you understand that as we sow the seed of God's Word into people's lives, the reality is it's not always received.

[16:20] I've preached the Gospel in many different places. I've called people to repentance and faith. I've never yet preached it in a context where I've seen every unbeliever in the room stand up and come forward and put their trust in Christ.

For Jesus is honest with me. He's honest with me. Honest with me about the disposition of man's heart. Honest with me that every inclination of their heart is evil.

And unless a sovereign God is moving in power to open their eyes to the mystery of the revelation of who God is and the salvation that he makes known.

He says, As for what is sown in the rocky ground, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. Yet he has no root in himself.

But he endures for a while. And when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the Word, immediately he falls away.

[17:34] How's the Word of God landing with you? Jesus says there are people who, when they hear the good news of the salvation that God offers in Christ, they respond.

And there's a lot of joy. I'm thrilled to bet you've got a baptism coming up shortly, and it's always a wonderful occasion when you celebrate just that step of commitment and that public witness to the Lordship, to the sovereignty of Christ in a person's life.

But there are those who receive it with joy. And I've known those even who were baptized. And it looks as if the Word of God is doing everything in their life that it was set out to do.

But the minute the heat comes on about being obedient to what God's Word says, over against doing that which satisfies themselves, the minute the heat comes on about taking a stand for Jesus Christ, the minute the heat comes on about saying, I follow Jesus when the world in which we live is set against Jesus, then they start to compromise.

They start to turn their back. They start to reject even who Jesus is. They fall away.

[19:08] How many of us, even today, know folks who started well, but today they're nowhere.

Nowhere. We like to satisfy ourselves that, you know, surely all will be well with them at the end of the day. It's amazing the number of people I meet in my evangelism ministry who say this to me.

They say, John, I don't go to church, but I'm a believer. And I love that. That's an open door for me, right? I'm sitting there saying, what kind of believer are you?

Well, you're not a believer. I believe in God. I say, you believe in the God who made the heavens and the earth. You believe in the God. And then you take an opportunity to share the gospel, don't you?

You sent Jesus Christ to die sacrificially on Christ's cross for your sin. You believe in that God. And yet you never want to be amongst His people and worship and praise Him and thank Him for all that you're worth.

[20:20] I've never thought about it that way. What kind of believer are they? You see, many of us are drawn to Jesus because we would love the benefits.

We would love the blessings. But He does talk about those who are going to be His disciples, who are going to take up His cross and follow after Him. He does call us to a sacrificial lifestyle that's radically different from the world in which we live.

He does call us to uncomfortable when many of us want a comfortable Jesus. And there are many that the Word of God has shown in the life and it's all joy and enthusiasm and they're often the little poster boy or poster girl for a while and then there's nothing.

It's all gone. It's gone. Jesus has just been honest with us. You know, the Word of God, you know, it does take root in shallow hearts but shallow hearts won't last.

In actual fact, He goes on to build on that, He says, because not just a shallow heart but a cluttered heart, a crowded heart.

[21:34] There's no room for Jesus in a cluttered and a crowded heart. That's where He's going in the third response. He says, as for what was shown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the Word but the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, they choke the Word and it proves unfruitful.

You ever sing the hymn, All to Jesus, I surrender, I surrender all. I tell you, whenever they pick that, you know, one of the worship leaders thinks it's a great idea, let's sing that.

I sit, you know, wherever I'm sitting that day and I think, oh my goodness, really? Because the reality is the Word of God can land in very cluttered lives.

I actually think this is one of the biggest dangers for those of us who've been following Jesus for quite some time because it seems that in the abundance of good gifts that God gives us, that in actual fact our hearts can become very cluttered and we can become very attracted and very drawn and very comfortable to the abundance of good gifts, that in actual fact we don't really want God to take any of them away.

You know, we kind of like having Jesus and everything else and we kind of find ways to justify it to ourselves. You know, but if Jesus really said, today, I'm taking it all away and the only thing you've got is me, would we be saying, oh, you are more than enough, Lord?

[23:21] Or would we find that in actual fact it's just too much? It's sown amongst thorns It's sown amongst thorns to hear the Word, but there's a care for this world and all that it brings.

There's a deceitfulness about what earthly riches, material gain, can give.

Actually, that's just good logic. I find that material wealth is very, very deceitful. In actual fact, what happens is that Jesus just gets crowded out.

We try to accommodate Him, but we accommodate Him in a cluttered heart. The terrible thing is, Jesus is talking here to the disciples about the parable, the way in which the kingdom gets started, and there's a sense in which He's kind of saying the way in which the kingdom gets started on these first three soils doesn't really get started.

And Jesus said elsewhere, He said, you want to know those who are My followers, you will actually see fruitfulness in their lives. You'll see a fruitfulness of character.

[24:51] You'll see, you know, a real aim and a direction and a purpose. They'll recognize that in actual fact where people have one message, and that one message is that there's salvation in no other name under heaven other than the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they'll have a desire to sow the seed of God's Word, even knowing that as they sow the seed of God's Word, some of it will fall in hard hearts that will not respond.

Some of it will fall in hearts and lives that there'll be a little bit of joy, and then it'll dissipate and disappear. Some of it will fall on sort of cluttered lives. They'll try to accommodate Jesus, but the truth of their heart is that they're worshipping idols that are not God Himself, and what they're doing is they're striving for other things.

Usually what happens in the third case is that the person is more important than the only person that matters. We put ourselves first.

That's what's going on in that cluttered heart. And then Jesus says, but what was sown in good soil this is the one who hears the Word and understands it.

And actually, this Word is a living Word. It's active. It penetrates. And as that Word is applied by the Spirit of God, it goes to work in their lives.

[26 : 19] And what they long to do in every area of their life is bear fruit. So the character changes. There's a fruitfulness of character.

The whole purpose changes. There's a fruitfulness about their purpose in living. They've got a driven by a desire to see what God is doing in them multiplied in others.

Because they know how good it is. Not how good they are. How good it is that God is doing. And they want to see it produced in others. And that's why it says hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold. He says, you know, look, the key is there. The Word is sown in good soil. It's sown on a good heart. It's not a good heart to begin with. It's a heart that needs to repent and put their trust in Jesus Christ, right?

But the eyes are open to see that. And then the heart and life are given over just to surrender everything and to say, it is all about you, Jesus.

[27 : 26] And I am going to be obedient to every word that you speak. As you give me insight, as you give me understanding, I'm going to put your Word into practice in my life.

I'm not going to try and justify all those times when I want to tweak your Word, change your Word, make your Word fit my life. I'm just going to be obedient because you've given me insight.

You've given me understanding. I want to be fruitful. I want to be faithful. I want to magnify you. I want to glorify you.

And that's why I say, how is the Word of God landing in your life right now? Because the parable begins this whole section about parables of the kingdom, the reign and rule of God.

The kingdom of God cannot come in any life unless we sow the seed of God's Word. That's why I'm so committed to what we do in make-known. Make-known simply enables believers just to sow the Word into other people's lives.

[28 : 32] That's a biblical principle. The Word of God is powerful to the salvation of souls. So sow the Word of God. Don't sow your own ideas. Don't sow your own sort of little thoughts that you've had.

Sow the Word of God that is powerful to the salvation of souls. And Jesus in the parables is showing how as the Word of God goes out, God in a sovereign way works in people's hearts. And it lands in very different hearts. And the response is very, very different. But for those in which the Word of God lands, with scales removed from the eyes and eyes that see, oh, the work of transformation.

It's beautiful. But how's the Word of God landing in your heart? How much time are you giving to listening to the Word of God?

I don't mean Sunday mornings when you're, you know, you're tied in for 30, 35, 40, whoever's preaching. I don't mean that. I'm glad you're here, and I'm glad it's landing.

[29 : 47] It's interesting, if I preached a message that simply said this, rise up, Cornerstone, go out this week and share your faith with three people, show the Word of God in three people's lives, would we find the result the same?

that 25% of us would do it. Would it be less, would it be more?

How's the Word of God landing in your heart? Jesus says, go into all the world, make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, teach them to observe everything I've commanded you.

We know the commission. Despite knowing it, how often do we find ourselves in life saying, Lord, you know, I'm your workmanship, creating Christ Jesus to do good works, but you're prepared in advance for me to do.

Probably today you've got people you want me to share Jesus with, show me who they are, help me to do it. How many of us let the Word of God land in that way, so that we do these things?

[30 : 57] Or how many of us love just to, you know, that's a good word, but let's just keep it there. Let this Word not change me. How's the Word of God landing?

When you're reading the Word of God in your daily devotions, are you reading that Word in such a way that you're saying, Lord, your Word is like seed sown in my heart, and I want this Word today to be fruitful in me, so whatever it is I'm reading about your Word, whatever it is you're saying to me, would you help me to translate this into living today?

And sometimes it's a call to repentance, and sometimes it's a call to growth and character, and, you know, sometimes it's a call to fruitfulness and sharing our faith, sometimes it's a call to commitment, sometimes it's a call to giving, whatever it might be, but as God speaks, do we find ourselves doing

what He says?

Do we find the fruitfulness of that Word being lived out in our experience? Let me share just a simple little thing about what happened with me when the Word of God was sown in my heart, and I saw.

Like I said, I had the privilege of actually hearing a lot of Bible stories, but I never listened. And then one day God opens my eyes to understand what has been said.

[32 : 29] And I repent and I believe. Here's what I understand. I understand that all the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to me.

I am in a right standing with God in Christ. How amazing is that, right? I only understand this because God has opened my eyes to see how amazing His Word is.

I'm in a right standing before God. Now, sometimes I stand before God knowing I'm in a right standing thinking, Lord, I am awful.

And God says, John, don't worry about that because that's why I'm not finished with you yet. That's why every single day I want you to hear my Word. And I want my Word to be applied by the Holy Spirit into your heart and life.

It's a little thing called sanctification, John. I'm making you holy holy because you are as unholy as they come. But I'm doing a work in you, John.

[33 : 31] I'm going to make you holy. That's amazing. How are you going to do that? I'm going to do that as you engage with my Word. But I tell you, John, I don't want you to be hard-hearted about my Word.

I don't want you to sit there and think, oh, does God really mean this? Because I have spoken and I mean every single word that I say. So what I want to do is I want to apply my Word to your life.

And there's a real danger here, John, because you're going to discover that it's not easy. You know, my Word can be quite hard to stomach at times. My Word will call you to things that you don't necessarily feel like doing.

You know, my Word, but, you know, it's powerful and it'll change you, it'll transform you, it'll be worth it, worth all of it. And so the reality is I give myself to that daily.

Now I say, Lord, please don't let me just get this in a shallow way so that I could repeat all the texts and the verses. Don't let me get this in a cluttered way so that I would do what your Word said, but in actual fact this temptation is too great.

[34 : 35] Or I would do what your Word says, but in actual fact that call to obedience is too tough. Help me to be the kind of person that this Word really takes root in my life in order that I am fruitful in my faithfulness for you.

In order that people would say, by their fruit shall you know those who are my disciples. By their fruit. And he says, that's my little work of sanctification, John.

Got a promise for you, John. He says, one day you're going to enter into my very near presence, fully redeemed. everything that Christ has purchased, all that the Father has given to him, he's going to deliver.

That's the promise. I'm going to be with God. Here's the interesting thing. On the journey, I ought to be becoming more Christ-like.

And God does that through his word.

[35 : 52] Now, the parable of the sower, we've got to take it evangelistically, and we've got to say, let's sow the seed of the gospel, the word of God, into people's hearts and lives. Let's rest in the knowledge that God caused us to be faithful in sowing the seed, and only God can open blind eyes.

But he does call us to go and sow. But as we think about the word of God landing in our lives, in whatever way you engage with God's word on a daily basis, are you moving into fruitfulness?

Is there fruitfulness? remain in me as I remain in you, remain in the vine, you'll be fruitful. Isn't the word of God beautiful?

Isn't the word of God powerful? Isn't the word of God all that we need to grow and become word and spirit in our lives?

And I love Jesus' description. salvation. He said, the word that was sown in good soil is the one who hears the word, they understand it, and they indeed bear fruit. And they yield a crop.

[37 : 18] Hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold, they yield a crop. It's interesting to journey with the people of known us most of our life.

Did he see the difference that the word of God is having every single day that we live? Parable of the sower. It's a well-known parable that opens up Matthew 13.

It exhorts us to sow the seed of the word of God. It shows how God is at work in a sovereign way, opening blind eyes to see the good news of the gospel, but it acknowledges that hearts are very different.

Our hearts can be very different. And the response of the heart to the word of God can give us insights as to how we're living and how well we are honoring the God that we worship, the God that we serve, the God that we claim we have surrendered all to.

Friends, even as I preach this morning, there's a wrestle going on, but it's a healthy wrestle.

[38:40] I'm in an interesting stage of ministry at the present moment in time. In the past, I've known what it is to live by faith and be a faith missionary.

that didn't pay well, but I never wanted. Currently, I'm paid well, and yet sometimes there's a real want.

There's a little wrestle that goes on. Will you take me at my word? Will you trust me? Will you do what I'm asking you to do?

As we wrestle together with what God is saying to us, as we hear his word, that it's applied to our life, is it sown in the kind of heart that you're ready to obey, ready to do your will?

God. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the parable of the sower. We thank you, Lord, that as you were teaching in parables, what you were actually doing is declaring the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

[40:06] You're very honest with us about the fact that it takes a move of your word and your spirit to open the eyes of the heart that we might see, that we might understand, and that we might obey.

Father, we thank you that the parable of the sower exhorts us very much to share our faith with others and to sow the seed with great regularity, great liberty, to throw it out there.

But, Father, we also take time just to acknowledge your word landing in our hearts, pray that you would keep any of us from a hardness of heart.

Pray that you would keep any of us from a shallowness of heart. Pray that you would keep any of us, Lord, from a cluttered heart. But instead, pray, Lord God, that you would always, each day, bring us to a place where we are listening and as your word falls on our hearts, we are ready to hear and to obey and to put into practice all that you say, that we might magnify you, that we might glorify you.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.