

The Parable of the Sower and the Kingdom



“A farmer was sowing grain in his fields. As he scattered the seed across the ground, some fell beside a path, and the birds came and ate it. And some fell on rocky soil where there was little depth of earth; the plants sprang up quickly enough in the shallow soil, but the hot sun soon scorched them and they withered and died, for they had so little root. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns choked out the tender blades. But some fell on good soil and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as he had planted. If you have ears, listen!”

His disciples came and asked him, “Why do you always use these hard-to-understand illustrations?”²

Then he explained to them that only they were permitted to understand about the Kingdom of Heaven, and others were not.

“For to him who has will more be given,” he told them, “and he will have great plenty; but from him who has not, even the little he has will be taken away. That is why I use these illustrations, so people will hear and see but not understand.”³

“This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘They hear, but don’t understand; they look, but don’t see! For their hearts are fat and heavy, and their ears are dull, and they have closed their eyes in sleep, so they won’t see and hear and understand and turn to God again, and let me heal them.’

But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. Many a prophet and godly man has longed to see what you have seen and hear what you have heard, but couldn’t.

“Now here is the explanation of the story I told about the farmer planting grain: The hard path where some of the seeds fell represents the heart of a person who hears the Good News about the Kingdom and doesn’t understand it; then Satan⁴ comes and snatches away the seeds from his heart. The shallow, rocky soil represents the heart of a man who hears the message and receives it with real joy, but he doesn’t have much depth in his life, and the seeds don’t root very deeply, and after a while when trouble comes, or

1 – By BPL (Flickr: The sower) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons
(commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_sower_(Boston_Public_Library).jpg)

2 – “Why do you always use these hard-to-understand illustrations?” is implied. (BibleGateway.com)

3 – Those who were receptive to spiritual truth understood the illustrations. To others they were only stories without meaning. (BibleGateway.com)

4 – Literally, “the evil”. Rendered “the evil one” or Satan. (BibleGateway.com)

*persecution begins because of his beliefs, his enthusiasm fades, and he drops out. The ground covered with thistles represents a man who hears the message, but the cares of this life and his longing for money choke out God's Word, and he does less and less for God. The good ground represents the heart of a man who listens to the message and understands it and goes out and brings thirty, sixty, or even a hundred others into the Kingdom.*⁵”⁶

What is this parable about – at face value? Is it a Kingdom parable?

Jesus didn't introduce it by stating, “The Kingdom of God is like...”, but it is about the Kingdom. Actually, it's about “the word of the Kingdom”⁷. Or, as J.B. Philips translates it, “the message of the kingdom”. This is the straight substance of verse 19.

So why do translations like TLB above call it “the good news of the Kingdom”, i.e. meaning the Gospel?

The Greek term *logos* (λόγος) translated as 'word' in this passage is the point of confusion. *Logos* means: 'something a person says'; 'a discourse'; or 'a teaching' – among other things. It is not *euangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον) which is translated as the 'gospel'.

The Gospel (of salvation) is not what Jesus was talking about in this parable. He was referring to the message of the Kingdom that he was teaching. This is the full message of the Kingdom: that it has arrived; that it is destined to take over the world; that it's a treasure, overflowing with benefits for all; etc.

Many heard this message from Jesus, but not many embraced it and so disallowed the Kingdom to profit from it by their rejection.

So why does the TLB translation say that the outcome of accepting the message of the Kingdom is that lots more people are brought into the Kingdom: “The good ground represents the heart of a man who listens to the message and understands it and goes out and brings thirty, sixty, or even a hundred others into the Kingdom”⁸.

And why do most preachers in churches describe this parable as a proselyting scenario and use it evangelistically? The parable does not refer to that – even though the TLB has this mindset in its translation. Take a look at what the AMPC translation has for verse 23:

*As for what was sown on good soil, this is he who hears the Word and grasps and comprehends it; he indeed **bears fruit** and yields in one case a hundred times as much as was sown, in another sixty times as much, and in another thirty.*⁹

There's a case in point here where translators and theologians for centuries have read into this parable that it's about getting people 'saved'. But it's not about that. They never really understood the message of the Kingdom that Jesus teach.

The parable is about bearing fruit for the Kingdom.

What does that mean?

5 – Implied. Literally, “produces a crop many times greater than the amount planted—thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much.” (BibleGateway.com)

6 – Matthew 13:3-23 (The Living Bible)

7 – This is what the AMPC states, as does about half the translations in BibleGateway.com.

8 – Matthew 13:23 (TLB)

9 – Matthew 13:23 (AMPC)

Bearing Fruit

Here are some references to 'bearing fruit' which make what Jesus said quite straight forward:

Matthew 3:8 (NKJV) – *Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,*

Matthew 3:10 (NKJV) – *And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

Matthew 7:17-18 (NKJV) – *Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.*

Matthew 21:43 (NKJV) – *“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.*

Luke 6:42-44 (NKJV) – *Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother’s eye. “For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush.*

Luke 13:8-9 (NKJV) – *But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.’”*

John 15:2, 4-5, 8 (NKJV) – *Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit...Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing...By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.*

John 15:16 (NKJV) – *You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.*

Romans 7:4-5 (NKJV) – *Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.*

Fruit is what develops in a person's life as a result of the Kingdom manifesting in it. It's also about what they do in the Kingdom as Kingdom citizens (as sons) while they are about Father's business.¹⁰ It's not about multitudes being evangelised and brought into the church.

Kingdom Teaching

So this parable is not about evangelism and the Gospel of Salvation. That's what theologians, bible college lecturers and their students have interpreted it as and teach it as being so. That's why the TLB translates it that way. It's not what the original text stated or what Jesus was wanting to get across to his hearers.

The parable is about hearing Kingdom teaching and responding to it, not just the full message of the Kingdom.

¹⁰ – Matthew 6:10

Looking at the essence of the parable personally, you can now ask yourself this question: “What will you do with the Kingdom teaching that is given to you by a spirit-led Kingdom teacher?” And also: “What type of ground is your spiritual heart: Hard, stony, weedy or friable?”

NOTE: I use the term 'spiritual heart' because the Greek word *kardia* (καρδία) used in the 1st Century wasn't just the physical heart, it was seen as the emotional as well as the physical & spiritual centre of life.¹¹ As Helps^(TM) states “Heart (2588 /*kardia*) is mentioned over 800 times in Scripture, but never referring to the literal physical pump that drives the blood. That is, "heart" is *only used figuratively* both in the OT and NT.”¹²

Laurence

12-2-2017

(www.CanberraForerunners.org)

COPYRIGHT

Quotes are copyright to respective authors/owners.

This document is free to copy, republish and distribute, but only 'as is'. It is free to quote from at length.

All Canberra Forerunners' documents are licensed under

Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License

11 – Strong's Concordance (biblehub.com/greek/2588.htm)

12 – Helps Word-studies cited in BibleHub (biblehub.com/greek/2588.htm)