

# Matthew 13:1-9

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*Jesus teaches a parable about a sower who scatters his seed on four different types of ground. The first three types of ground fail to produce a crop, but the fourth type of ground is good soil and it produces a very good harvest.*

The parallel gospel accounts of this occasion and parable are found in Mark 4:1-9 and Luke 8:4-8.

In the Gospel of Mark, we are told during confrontations with Pharisees that *Jesus* “began speaking to them in parables” (Mark 3:23). In Matthew’s Gospel, *Jesus* also *spoke many things to them in parables*. This is shown through the author’s organizing a series of seven *parables* immediately after the round of showdowns between *Jesus* and the Pharisees. We will see later in this chapter that *Jesus*’s speaking in parables was a fulfillment of prophecy (Matthew 13:35).

This grouping or organization of *parables* is the third of five extended accounts of *Jesus*’s teachings. It is sometimes called “The Parabolic Discourse.” The first two discourses in Matthew were “The Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5:3-7:27) and “The Missionary Discourse” (Matthew 10:5-42). The final two discourses are “The Discourse on the Church” (Matthew 18); and “The Olivet Discourse” (Matthew 24-25).

A parable is a short story that depicts an important truth that is often moral or spiritual in nature. *Parables* are puzzling and provocative. They require attentive listening and a measure of skill in interpreting the truth they contain. *Jesus* frequently taught in *parables* because *parables* had two unique advantages: they were memorable, and they concealed their core truth from hard hearts (Matthew 13:33-35).

*On that day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea of Galilee, most likely along its northern shore in the general vicinity of Capernaum. His disciples were also with Him (Matthew 13:10). As He was sitting, large crowds saw Him and gathered to Him. So, Jesus moved and got into a boat and sat down with the whole crowd standing on the beach. The reason He did so was likely because with the crowds situated above Jesus on the sloped beach, the boat below created a kind of natural amphitheater. The large crowds would be able to better gather and hear what He had to say. Matthew tells us that Jesus spoke many things to them in parables.*

The first parable Matthew records in this chapter is commonly known as “The parable of the sower.” “The parable of the sower” is also recorded in Mark 4:3-8 and Luke 8:5-8. We will only comment on the literal actions and events of the story in this section of our commentary because *Jesus* later explains their symbolic meaning (Matthew 13:18-23).

The story *Jesus* tells is of a *sower* who *went out to sow seeds*. A *sower* is someone who plants *seeds* that will later grow and reap a harvest. In this parable *the sower* sows the same type of

*seeds*, but as he scatters his *seeds*, they fall on four different types of ground. There are four different results based upon the four different types of ground that *the seeds fell*.

The four different types of ground are:

- 1.) *beside the road*
- 2.) *the rocky places, where they did not have much soil*
- 3.) *among the thorns*
- 4.) *the good soil*.

The first three types of ground are *not-good* for *seeds* to germinate and grow. The fourth and last of them is *good* ground in which to plant seeds, so that they germinate and prosper.

The corresponding results are:

- 1.) *and the birds came and ate them up (the ground beside the road)*
- 2.) *and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched (in the rocky places, with thin soil)*
- 3.) *and the thorns came up and choked them out (in ground among the thorns)*
- 4.) *and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty (in the good soil)*

The first three results are ‘*not-good*.’ The fourth and last result is very *good*.

In a predominantly agricultural society like Judea, Jesus’s audience would have been familiar with all of these actions and outcomes. *Jesus* ends His parable with the refrain, *He who has ears, let him hear*. This proverb-like warning is an invitation for to listen and *hear* the moral message and meaning of the parable.

Matthew records Jesus’s interpretation of His parable, which *He* shares with His disciples, in Matthew 13:18-23.

## **Biblical Text**

**13:1-9** That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach. And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, “Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and

**immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.”**