

## Sowing the Seed

Why is the parable of the sower in three out of the four gospels (Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:1-15)? Is it possibly because it is important enough for God to remind us three times of its lesson? What is the lesson of the parable of the sower?

Ezekiel 33 reveals two quintessential and foundational truths related to evangelism, or the sowing of the seed, which helps lay the groundwork for understanding the parable of the sower. First, Ezekiel 33 clearly lays out the responsibility and accountability that is on those of us that carry the message of God to the lost world: that is we are, *“accountable for his [referring to the wicked or the lost] blood”* (v. 6), if we do not warn the lost of the coming judgment. This somber message is repeated clearly again in verse 8, *“When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood.”* Ezekiel 33 in this regard is an extremely sobering message for any Christian to hear for it places on us a responsibility to reach out for lost souls. If we carry the message, we had better speak it, that much is clear.

In somewhat of a contrast then, Ezekiel 33 also provides an equally important comfort for those carrying the message; that is, when we do speak the warning, we are then relieved of any further accountability, *“Since he heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning, his blood will be on his own head”* (v. 5). And again in verse 9, *“But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself”*. It is clear then that if we carry the message and do not speak it the blood of those that perish will be on our head, however, if we do speak the message and they do not heed the warning, then we are innocent of the blood of those that perish. Of course, what we earnestly desire with all our heart is that we speak the message and the lost repent, in which case they are saved, *“If he had taken warning, he would have saved himself”* (v.5). Furthermore, it is clear that the desire of God as Judge is for people to be saved not for them to perish, *“Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?’”* (v. 11).

Fast forwarding then to the New Testament, in Acts 20:26-27, Paul refers back to Ezekiel 33 giving it relevance and applicability to the New Testament apostle/evangelist when he states, *“Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.”* In addition, Paul states in 1 Corinthians 9:16, *“Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”* Both of these New Testament statements by Paul remind us of the responsibility and accountability, originally laid out in Ezekiel 33, which is on us to witness. Furthermore, like Ezekiel 33, the Acts passage again reminds us of the fact that we are then freed from further accountability when we do speak the message.

So, while it is clear we are indeed responsible and held accountable for speaking the message, it is just a clear that we are not responsible or held accountable for whether or not the message is received and heeded. It becomes quite clear then, does is not, that we are simply to spread the Word [capital “W”] and not get caught up or burdened by whether or not the Word is heeded. Furthermore, this leads to the conclusion that while we are fully capable of speaking the message, as it is our responsibility to do so, we are not capable of converting the soul – that is the role of the Word of God. The power of the Word of God in converting the soul is clearly articulated in Isaiah 55:10-11 and Hebrews 4:12-13:

### **Isaiah 55:10-11 (Emphasis Mine)**

<sup>10</sup> *As the rain and the snow  
come down from heaven,*

*and do not return to it  
without watering the earth  
and making it bud and flourish,  
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,  
<sup>11</sup> so is my word that goes out from my mouth:  
**It will not return to me empty,  
but will accomplish what I desire  
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.***

#### **Hebrews 4:12-13 (Emphasis Mine)**

<sup>12</sup>***For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.***

<sup>13</sup>*Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

Many times we either 1) remain silent or 2) get discouraged by the fact that when we do speak the gospel message of salvation, it is not heeded; neither of these is a Biblical stance. Rather, we must speak the message, which is God's Word, and then rely on the power of His Word to work on the heart of those hearing the message and pray for conversion of the soul – God's will be done. It is the Word of God, not the messenger, which holds the power to convict and convert – this is a quintessential point of understanding in evangelism. This point is stated clearly by the Paul in his letter to the Corinthians:

#### **1 Corinthians 3:6-9 (Emphasis Mine)**

<sup>6</sup>***I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.*** <sup>7</sup>***So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.*** <sup>8</sup>*The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor.* <sup>9</sup>*For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.*

Finally, then, bringing this all back to the original objective which was to more fully understand the lesson of the parable of the sower, we can start to establish some similarities and complimentary messages between the foundational meaning of Ezekiel 33 (and the other supporting scripture we have now covered) to that of the parable of the sower.

In the parable of the sower, it is interesting that the farmer does not research where he places the seed; nor does he seem to be careful about how he applies the seed. This is all evident from the fact that, “*some fell along the path*” (Matthew 13:4), “*Some fell on rocky places*” (Matthew 13:5), and “*Other seed fell among thorns*” (Matthew 13:7). In all this “scattering” some of the seed did manage to fall on fertile ground, “*Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop*” (Matthew 13:8). In closer examination of these passages, the farmer almost seems careless, does he not, in how he applies the seed? Shouldn't he be a bit more careful with the seed and only sow the seed on fertile ground, thus maximizing the return on the seed?

This story that Jesus tells does not suggest in any way that the farmer strategically tries to place more seed on the seemingly fertile ground as one would expect, but rather simply scattered the seed in seemingly all directions so that no more reached the fertile ground than reached the other non-productive areas. Is the farmer simply careless in this regard? Or, was the point that the farmer should not concern himself with differentiating or distinguishing between fertile and unfertile ground? I would suggest it is the latter and rather than “careless” spreading of the seed, the farmer is simply “freely” spreading the seed and fall where it may, allowing the fertility of the ground to become evident as the growing season progresses. The seed is fully capable of indentifying the fertility of the ground and will naturally do so as will become evident in the eventual bearing of fruit from the mature plant that is rooted in the fertile soil.

So here is where we finally reach our conclusion in all this – just as Ezekiel 33 states that we have a responsibility to sound the trumpet as a warning (i.e. speak truth using the Word of God), so also the farmer has a responsibility to sow the seed (i.e. spread the Word of God). Likewise, just as Ezekiel 33 relieves us from the accountability once we have sounded the trumpet, so also the farmer in the parable of the sower is not responsible for identifying the fertility of the ground or even ensuring any specific seed produces a plant. In both cases, the responsibility and accountability is on us to speak the truth via the spreading of the Word of God, and in both cases we are not held responsible for whether or not the Word sticks or has any impact at all. Our sincere desire and life's passion should be to seek the lost by sowing the seed, but we must always remember that the power to transform comes from the seed not the sower.

### Supporting Scripture

#### Ezekiel 33:1-20

##### *Ezekiel a Watchman*

<sup>1</sup> The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, speak to your countrymen and say to them: 'When I bring the sword against a land, and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, <sup>3</sup> and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people, <sup>4</sup> then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not take warning and the sword comes and takes his life, his blood will be on his own head. <sup>5</sup> Since he heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning, his blood will be on his own head. If he had taken warning, he would have saved himself. <sup>6</sup> But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood.'

<sup>7</sup> "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. <sup>8</sup> When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for <sup>[a]</sup> his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. <sup>9</sup> But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself.

<sup>10</sup> "Son of man, say to the house of Israel, 'This is what you are saying: "Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of <sup>[b]</sup> them. How then can we live?"' <sup>11</sup> Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'

<sup>12</sup> "Therefore, son of man, say to your countrymen, 'The righteousness of the righteous man will not save him when he disobeys, and the wickedness of the wicked man will not cause him to fall when he turns from it. The righteous man, if he sins, will not be allowed to live because of his former righteousness.' <sup>13</sup> If I tell the righteous man that he will surely live, but then he trusts in his righteousness and does evil, none of the righteous things he has done will be remembered; he will die for the evil he has done. <sup>14</sup> And if I say to the wicked man, 'You will surely die,' but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right- <sup>15</sup> if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die. <sup>16</sup> None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he will surely live.

<sup>17</sup> "Yet your countrymen say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' But it is their way that is not just. <sup>18</sup> If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, he will die for it. <sup>19</sup> And if a wicked man turns away from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he will live by doing so. <sup>20</sup> Yet, O house of Israel, you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' But I will judge each of you according to his own ways."

#### Acts 20:26

<sup>26</sup>Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men.

**1 Corinthians 9:16**

<sup>16</sup>Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

**Matthew 13:1-23***The Parable of the Sower*

<sup>1</sup>That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. <sup>2</sup>Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup>Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup>As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup>Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup>But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup>Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup>Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. <sup>9</sup>He who has ears, let him hear."

<sup>10</sup>The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

<sup>11</sup>He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.

<sup>12</sup>Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. <sup>13</sup>This is why I speak to them in parables:

"Though seeing, they do not see;

though hearing, they do not hear or understand. <sup>14</sup>In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

" 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding;

you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

<sup>15</sup>For this people's heart has become calloused;

they hardly hear with their ears,

and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,

hear with their ears,

understand with their hearts

and turn, and I would heal them. <sup>16</sup>But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. <sup>17</sup>For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

<sup>18</sup>"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: <sup>19</sup>When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. <sup>20</sup>The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. <sup>21</sup>But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. <sup>22</sup>The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. <sup>23</sup>But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

**Mark 4:1-20***The Parable of the Sower*

<sup>1</sup>Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. <sup>2</sup>He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: <sup>3</sup>"Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup>As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup>Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup>But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup>Other seed fell among thorns, which

*grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. <sup>8</sup>Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times."*

*<sup>9</sup>Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

*<sup>10</sup>When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. <sup>11</sup>He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables <sup>12</sup>so that,*

*" 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,  
and ever hearing but never understanding;  
otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!<sup>[a]</sup>"*

*<sup>13</sup>Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?"*

*<sup>14</sup>The farmer sows the word. <sup>15</sup>Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. <sup>16</sup>Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup>But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. <sup>18</sup>Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; <sup>19</sup>but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. <sup>20</sup>Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown."*

### **Luke 8:1-15**

#### *The Parable of the Sower*

*<sup>1</sup>After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, <sup>2</sup>and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; <sup>3</sup>Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.*

*<sup>4</sup>While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: <sup>5</sup>"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. <sup>6</sup>Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. <sup>7</sup>Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants.*

*<sup>8</sup>Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown."*

*When he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

*<sup>9</sup>His disciples asked him what this parable meant. <sup>10</sup>He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that,*

*" 'though seeing, they may not see;  
though hearing, they may not understand.<sup>[a]</sup>"*

*<sup>11</sup>"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup>Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. <sup>13</sup>Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. <sup>14</sup>The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. <sup>15</sup>But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.*