

Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23

- He who has ears, let him hear -

Author: Evert Jan Hempenius

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Introduction

- ❖ It sounds so easy to do: “He who has ears, let him hear.”
- ❖ The parable of the “sower and the seed” describes what happens when people, in general, hear the gospel.”
 - Some will listen for a moment, then walk on and forget immediately everything that has been said, regarding
 - the message as irrelevant for their lives;
 - the message of the Kingdom of God as outdated in these modern scientific times;
 - the message of the Kingdom of God as one of many options to believe in, but not their option.
 - Some will listen and receive the message of the Kingdom of God with joy. But as soon they discover that this message means that:
 - “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 10:37-39).
 - “Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’” (Mt 16:24).
 - “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life” (Mt 19:29).

- It involves: “ Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Mt 5:44).
 - Then, they will lose their enthusiasm.
 - Some will listen and receive the message of the Kingdom of God,
 - but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth make it unfruitful.
 - Some will hear and bear fruit.
 - They will be rooted in the Gospel and the Kingdom of God.
 - They will grow in faith, hope, love, knowledge of God and wisdom, and perseverance (1 Cor 13:13; Gal 5:22-24; 1 Pet 1:5-8; Jas 1:3-4).

- ❖ A Christian and a longtime churchgoer are not immune to these dangers.
 - It really takes the effort to “hear” the words of Jesus, especially when someone has heard them so often.
 - And not all the words take root;
 - And the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth endanger the Christian life too.

- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Gospel of Matthew. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

Context

Matthew 10:1-11:1	The mission of the twelve to proclaim the Kingdom of God
<i>Jesus and the Crowds</i>	
Matthew 11:2-6	John the Baptist has questions about the identity of Jesus
Matthew 11:7-24	Jesus rebukes the crowds because of their unbelief
Matthew 11:25-27	Jesus praises the Father, who revealed the identity of Jesus to little children
Matthew 11:28-30	Jesus calls the weary to find rest and learn from him
<i>Jesus and the Pharisees</i>	
Matthew 12:1-12	The identity of Jesus – A healing The Pharisees resist Jesus

Matthew 12:13-21	Jesus fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 42:1-4
Matthew 12:22-37	A healing – The identity of Jesus The Pharisees resist Jesus
Matthew 12:38-45	The Pharisees ask a sign from Jesus to “prove” his identity
<i>Jesus, the Crowds, and his disciples</i>	
Matthew 12:46-50	“Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?”
Matthew 13:1-52	7 Parables
Matthew 13:53-56	Unbelief in Nazareth. “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren’t all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?”

❖ The context reveals the following:

- John the Baptist, the crowds, and the Pharisees question Jesus identity.
- The Pharisees’ resistance against Jesus increases.
- Jesus clarifies the reason behind the resistance and the unbelief:
 - At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Mt 11:25-27).
 - “This is why I speak to them in parables: ‘Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “ ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. 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.’ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 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” (Mt 13:13-17).

Parable	Theme
<i>Addressed to the Crowds and the Disciples.</i>	

1. Mt 13:3-9	The sower. <i>The reception of the gospel.</i>
2. Mt 13:24-30	The weed. <i>The harvest and the judgment.</i>
3. Mt 13:31, 32	The mustard seed – <i>The growth of the Kingdom</i>
4. Mt 13:33	The yeast – <i>The hidden power of the Kingdom</i>
<i>Addressed to The disciples.</i>	
5. Mt 13:44	The hidden treasure – <i>The discovery of the Kingdom and joy</i>
6. Mt 13:45, 46	The merchant and the pearl – <i>The discovery of the Kingdom and joy</i>
7. Mt 13:47, 50	The fish. <i>The catch and the Judgment.</i>

- ❖ These seven can be grouped in three pairs of two and a concluding one.

Form and structure

- ❖ The parable of the sower is told and explained by Jesus after the disciples had asked him about the reason why he told the parables.
- ❖ Introduction:
 - “That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore” (verse 1, 2).

	Parable (verse 3-9)	Explanation (verse 18-23)
<i>Setting</i>	Then he told them many things in parables, saying: <i>(verse 3)</i>	“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: <i>(verse 18)</i>
<i>Example 1</i>	“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <i>(verse 3, 4)</i>	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. <i>(verse 19)</i>
<i>Example 2</i>	Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they	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. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When

	withered because they had no root. <i>(verse 5, 6)</i>	trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. <i>(verse 20, 21)</i>
<i>Example 3</i>	Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. <i>(verse 7)</i>	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. <i>(verse 22)</i>
<i>Example 4</i>	Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. <i>(verse 8)</i>	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. <i>(verse 23)</i>
<i>Call to hear</i>	He who has ears, let him hear.” <i>(verse 9)</i>	

Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

- ❖ “The story also holds up a mirror to those who make a variety of responses to his message.”¹
- ❖ These parables depict situations with which the crowds were familiar. They were taken from ordinary life. It takes the next step to understand the spiritual meaning.
 - “The four kinds of soil on which the seed fell reflected the common experience of ancient farmers, who employed broadcast sowing—scattering seeds in all directions by hand as they walked up and down the stony paths that divided their fields.”²
 - Jesus had to explain this parable to his disciples. He didn’t explain it to the crowds but called them to listen carefully.
- ❖ When we read this parable, most of us already know the explanation. The parable has been told so often, that it does not surprise us anymore. In that case, we fall prey to the situation Jesus is warning about: We hear but do not understand.

¹ Nolland, J. (2005, p. 531).

² Blomberg, C. (1992, Vol. 22, p. 214).

- “The meaning of the parables must not be too rigidly restricted to one point of comparison. Both Dodd and Jeremias, following in the footsteps of Jülicher, tended to confine the meaning of any given parable to a single application. Metaphorical language, however, has an affective component which goes beyond the straightforward imparting of information.”³
- Neither is it necessary to explain all the circumstances. Just listen to the parable and the explanation given by Jesus. As some commentaries do.⁴
- Therefore, it is not “a question of considerable importance for the dynamic of the story, that of whether we are to imagine here (and in the other case of miscarriage to follow) the loss of seed as a marginal phenomenon or as involving a substantial loss of seed.”⁵ Jesus didn’t want us to focus on the amount of loss, but he wants us to understand what happens when people are just passing by and pause for a moment to listen. And as soon they stopped listening and walked onwards, they had forgotten the message of the Gospel.
- ❖ Nolland lists several possible explanations and applications:
 - “Options include the following.
 - a. This is a word of encouragement to the disciples in their work of preaching. Despite all the failures, they are encouraged to see that there is also success, and that the success adds up to a tremendously rich harvest.
 - b. The parable proclaims that, despite present failure and disappointment, God’s kingdom will surely come. Jesus announces a kingdom whose coming is certain. Despite appearances, the harvest will come.
 - c. The reality of some unfruitful patches in the field should not blind us to the fact that there is a bumper crop to be harvested.
 - d. The parable is to drive home the point that in this world the word of God is not generally welcomed.
 - e. This parable is about rightly hearing the word of God. The different soils are the significant feature.
 - f. The various failures correspond to the various ways in which we can fail to love God: the call is to love God with all our heart, mind, and strength.
 - g. The primary thrust of the parable is that the kingdom of God is breaking into the world as a seed which is sown upon the ground. The kingdom is present

³ Davies, W. D., & Allison, D. C., Jr. (2004, Vol. 2, p. 380).

⁴ Nolland, J. (2005, p. 526).

⁵ Nolland, J. (2005, p. 526).

through the various phases of development, culminating in the splendid harvest.

- h. Despite all difficulties, life proves fruitful for those who will take the risk of really getting engaged.
 - i. Three phases of tragedy are followed by one of vindication. This is an apocalyptic pattern and points to the claim that we are now moving into the final and climactic phase of the history of God's dealings with his people.
 - j. The gap created by the failure to identify the sower points to the identity to be supplied as of central importance. The sower = God, Christ, and the Christian preacher.
 - k. As a plot synopsis the parable comments on the role of conflict in the larger story."
- Nolland concludes: "If, we have rightly identified the drama of the story, then there is a solid base on which to look for a meaning that serves both an original and a Gospel context."⁶

Exposition

Verse 1-2

- ❖ **"That same day"** connects this verse in time and place with the preceding verses.
 - The contrast between the contents of the final words of chapter 12 and these parables, which Jesus is going to tell, is great.
 - "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Mt 12:50).
- ❖ **"Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore."**
 - The practical reasons for Jesus to get on a boat are twofold:
 - Sitting in a boat, he could keep some distance from the large crowd. Many people could see him and listen to him.
 - Jesus made use of the acoustics of the waterfront. Modern speakers make use of a microphone. Jesus made use of the natural environment.
 - When he preached the "Sermon on the mount" (Mt 5-7), the crowds were standing or sitting on the slope of the hill, while Jesus

⁶ Nolland, J. (2005, p. 530).

was sitting (Mt 5:1, 2) at a lower level. The slope carried his voice so that everyone could hear him.

- Now he makes use of the water. Water can carry the sound of a voice much farther than land. The people on the shore could hear his voice loud and clear while he was sitting in the boat.
- **“Sitting”** is the posture of a teacher (also: Mt 5:1, 2).
- ❖ **“Then he told them many things in parables, saying.”** Jesus probably has told (many) more parables than these four, which are collected in Matthes 13:1-35.
 - Previously, Jesus has taught the “Law and the Prophets” (Mt 5-7). Now, Jesus is telling the crowds stories, without explanation! The reason is given in Matthew 13:10-17 and can be understood against the background of chapter 11 and 12 where people and the Pharisees questioned his identity and message. (See above “Context”.)
 - When the disciples asked him about the parables (Mt 13:18-22), Jesus **explained only to them** the purpose and meaning of these short stories.
 - When Jesus starts explaining the parable to his disciples he says **“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means.”** In the original Greek it is even more emphatic: **“You then, listen...”**
 - This emphatic introduction emphasizes the whole explanation. This gives considerable weight to the contents of the parable.

Verse 3 and 18

- ❖ **“A farmer went out to sow his seed.”** It is not necessary to identify the “farmer.” It can be anyone preaching the Gospel. John the Baptist, Jesus the LORD, his disciples, his followers, any preacher.
- ❖ **“Seed.”** This is **“the message about the kingdom”** (Mt 13:18).
 - This parable depicts how the gospel will be received by the people.

Verse 4 and 19

- ❖ **“When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it.”**
 - Understanding is the keyword as is clear from Matthew 13:13-15:
 - “This is why I speak to them in parables: ‘Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, **they do not hear or understand.** In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘**“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;** you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. 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.’”

- ❖ **“The evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.”**
 - Mark has “Satan” (Mk 4:15); Luke has “the devil” (Lk 8:12).
 - **“the evil one” = “ὁ πονηρὸς”**: the devil (who is not defined as a sinner but as one who is morally destructive).⁷
- ❖ **“This is the seed sown along the path.”**
 - There is no soil to germinate.

Verse 5-6 and 20, 21

- ❖ **“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.”**
 - “Joy” is not the problem (1 Thess 1:6).
- ❖ **“But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time.”**
 - The image is clear.
 - The ESV translates: “he has no **root in himself**” which accords with the Greek original. A plant cannot have a root in himself, but man can. His faith is only superficially rooted in his life.
- ❖ **“When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.”**
 - Compare Matthew 726, 27: “But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. **The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.**”
 - **“Persecution”** is a major theme in this Gospel! A summary:
 - “Blessed are those who are **persecuted because of righteousness**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when people insult you, **persecute you** and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way **they persecuted the prophets** who were before you.” (Mt 5: 10-12).
 - “But I tell you: Love your enemies and **pray for those who persecute you**” (Mt 5:44).
 - **“When you are persecuted in one place**, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes” (Mt 10:23).

⁷ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 851).

- **“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted** and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me” (Mt 24:9).

Verse 7 and 22

- ❖ **“Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.” “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.”**
 - See Matthew 6:19-34!
 - See also the story of the rich young man: Matthew 19:16-24.

Verse 8 and 23

- ❖ **“But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it.”**
 - To hear the word implies the understanding of the word, not only with the mind but foremost with the heart (Mt 13:15).
 - “To understand” = “**συνίημι**”: **to have an intelligent grasp of something that challenges one’s thinking or practice, understand, comprehend.**⁸
- ❖ **“He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”**
 - Jesus could have summarized this verse by saying: **“He produces a crop.”**
 - Jesus gave three examples of failure and now he gives three examples of yield.
 - The fruit is a visible proof of faith. James wrote: “Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do” (2:28).
- ❖ What is the fruit of the word?
 - They are manifold.
 - Wisdom, faith, joy, purity in heart, meekness, goodness, patience;
 - Righteousness, mercy and grace, faithfulness, peace; comfort, perseverance, stability, trustworthiness.

Verse 9

- ❖ **“But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 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” (Mt 13:16, 17).**
- ❖ People might react: yes we know, we have seen these things happening. What do you mean by this story?

⁸ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 972).

- ❖ Hear and do (Mt 7:24-27)
- ❖ Bear fruit = takes some time.
 - “The crowds may be characterized as undiscerning, but the Matthean Jesus is always eager to invite people to open themselves up to new insight.”⁹

Application

General

- ❖ Tell the story and explain the scenery. A sower went out and took some seed in his hand scattering it over the soil, which contained rocks (Galilean soil). He wasn’t using machinery, to plow, to sow and to harvest, everything was done by hand.
 - The focus is not on the sower or the farmer but on the seed and the soil, the heart and mind of individuals who listen to the message of the Kingdom. This message is summarized in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) and its fruit.
 - It is not necessary to identify the “farmer.” It can be anyone preaching the Gospel. John the Baptist, Jesus the LORD, his disciples, his followers, any preacher.
- ❖ This parable depicts how the gospel will be received by the people.
 - “The parable provides a sober reminder that even the most enthusiastic outward response to the gospel offers no guarantee that one is a true disciple. Only the tests of time, perseverance under difficult circumstances, the avoidance of the idolatries of wealth and anxiety over earthly concerns (recall 6:25–34), and above all the presence of appropriate fruit (consistent obedience to God’s will) can prove a profession genuine.”¹⁰
- ❖ If someone doesn’t understand the message about the Kingdom of God, he should ask for further explanation.
 - And the preacher must clarify himself if everybody did **understand** his message, just like Jesus did:
 - When Jesus starts explaining the parable to his disciples he says **“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means.”** In the original Greek it is even more emphatic: **“You then, listen...”**
 - **The importance of LISTENING and UNDERSTANDING**
 - **“Have you understood all these things?”** Jesus asked. “Yes,” they replied (Mt 13:51).

⁹ Nolland, J. (2005, p. 531).

¹⁰ Blomberg, C. (1992, Vol. 22, p. 218).

- A positive relationship is required. What is the attitude of the listener?
 - The Scriptures warn for a calloused heart:
 - “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” (Mt 13:15; Ac 28:27).
- At the same time: understanding is also a gift:
 - “He replied, ‘The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them’ (Mt 13:11)
 - “Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Lk 24:45).

No faith

- ❖ Some will listen for a moment, then walk on and forget immediately everything that has been said, regarding
 - the message as irrelevant for their lives;
 - the message of the Kingdom of God as outdated in these modern scientific times;
 - the message of the Kingdom of God as one of many options to believe in, but not their option.
- ❖ “the evil one” = “ὁ πονηρὸς”: the devil (who is not defined as a sinner but as one who is morally destructive) is at work.
 - There is a spiritual warfare going on in the hearts of people.

A shallow faith

- ❖ No root: the word of God needs to become part of your thinking and living.
 - Like Matthew 7:24-25: “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”
 - His faith is only superficially rooted in his life.
 - A shallow faith is vulnerable. It can be accompanied with easy promises, and forgiveness, words but not deeds.

An unfruitful faith

- ❖ See also Matthew 6:19-34!

- ❖ This is also warning against the Prosperity Gospel.¹¹

A fruitful faith

- ❖ Strongly call people to hear, understand and do the words of Jesus (Mt 7:24-27).
- ❖ To Hear and to understand means:
 - you will stand strong in the struggle with The Evil One;
 - you will grow in faith, hope, love, knowledge, and wisdom.
 - KNOWING CHRIST.
 - “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”
 - “For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:5-8).
 - “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-24).

Quotes

- ❖ “Listen to God with a broken heart. He is not only the doctor who mends it, but also the father who wipes away the tears.” (Criss Jami)

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