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~ **The Farmer, The Seed, and the The Soils** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read the story in Matthew 13 and Mark 4.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

1. Read the text of the story from the New American Standard Bible and from the Easy Read Version

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Matthew 13:1-45 - NASB	Matthew 13:1-45 – Easy-to-Read Version
<p>That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. ² And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach.</p> <p>³ And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, “Behold, the sower went out to sow; ⁴ and as he sowed, some <i>seeds</i> fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ 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. ⁶ But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. ⁸ And others fell on the good soil and *yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear.”</p> <p>¹⁰ And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” ¹¹ Jesus answered them, “ To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. ¹² For whoever has, to him <i>more</i> shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. ¹³ Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,</p> <p>‘ YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; ¹⁵ FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND</p>	<p>Later that same day Jesus left the house and sat beside the lake. ² A large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat there and taught as the people stood on the shore. ³ He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:</p> <p>“Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. ⁴ As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. ⁵ Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn’t have deep roots, they died. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. ⁸ Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! ⁹ Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”</p> <p>¹⁰ His disciples came and asked him, “Why do you use parables when you talk to the people?”</p> <p>¹¹ He replied, “You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others are not. ¹² To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them. ¹³ That is why I use these parables,</p> <p>For they look, but they don’t really see. They hear, but they don’t really listen or understand.</p> <p>¹⁴ This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that says,</p> <p>‘When you hear what I say, you will not understand.</p>

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UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.’

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. ¹⁷ For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*.

¹⁸ “ Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹ 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 the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. ²⁰ The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²³ And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”

²⁴ Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, “ The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. ²⁷ The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ ²⁸ And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this!’ The slaves *said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ ²⁹ But he *said, ‘No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.””

³¹ He presented another parable to them, saying, “ The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; ³² and this is smaller than all *other* seeds, but when it is full grown,

When you see what I do, you will not comprehend. ¹⁵ For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes— so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.’

¹⁶ “But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. ¹⁷ I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn’t see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn’t hear it.

¹⁸ “Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds:¹⁹ The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don’t understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. ²⁰ The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. ²¹ But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word. ²² The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God’s word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. ²³ The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”

²⁴ Here is another story Jesus told: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. ²⁵ But that night as the workers slept, his enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat, then slipped away. ²⁶ When the crop began to grow and produce grain, the weeds also grew.

²⁷ “The farmer’s workers went to him and said, ‘Sir, the field where you planted that good seed is full of weeds! Where did they come from?’

²⁸ “‘An enemy has done this!’ the farmer exclaimed.

“‘Should we pull out the weeds?’ they asked.

²⁹ “‘No,’ he replied, ‘you’ll uproot the wheat if you do. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds, tie them

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it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES.”

³³ He spoke another parable to them, “ The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.”

³⁴ All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. ³⁵ *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

“ I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES;
I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.”

³⁶ Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, “ Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.” ³⁷ And He said, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, ³⁸ and the field is the world; and *as for* the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil *one*; ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, ⁴² and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

⁴⁴ “ The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid *again*; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, ⁴⁶ and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

into bundles, and burn them, and to put the wheat in the barn.”

³¹ Here is another illustration Jesus used: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. ³² It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches.”

³³ Jesus also used this illustration: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.”

³⁴ Jesus always used stories and illustrations like these when speaking to the crowds. In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables. ³⁵ This fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet:

“I will speak to you in parables.

I will explain things hidden since the creation of the world.”

³⁶ Then, leaving the crowds outside, Jesus went into the house. His disciples said, “Please explain to us the story of the weeds in the field.”

³⁷ Jesus replied, “The Son of Man is the farmer who plants the good seed. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed represents the people of the Kingdom. The weeds are the people who belong to the evil one. ³⁹ The enemy who planted the weeds among the wheat is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world, and the harvesters are the angels.

⁴⁰ “Just as the weeds are sorted out and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² And the angels will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father’s Kingdom. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!

⁴⁴ “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field.

⁴⁵ “Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls.

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2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.

- The yields of 30, 60, and 100 show the generosity of God and the greatness of the kingdom. Normally, a farmer could expect a yield of 4-5 times the amount of seed.
- Black mustard is the most likely plant referred to by the Greek word It is the tallest of the mustards in the Holy Land, at times reaching more than six feet. The seeds in the pods below the blossoms are very tiny. Black mustard, which also grows wild, was widely cultivated in ancient times and was used both as a condiment and as a medicine. Its bright yellow blossoms are a common sight in the spring and summer throughout Palestine.
- The parable of God as sower and different kinds of soil representing human hearts was a standard understanding in Jewish circles. The birds as representing Satan finds its background in 1 Kings 16:4 and in noncanonical writings (Jubilee 11:5-24; Apocalypse of Abraham 13)
- In Palestinian farming, sometimes, sowing preceded plowing and there would be a greater wastage of seed.
- The use of seeds and plant growth as a metaphor for behavior are found in the Old Testament. See Hosea 10:12; Jeremiah 4:3-4; Isaiah 55:10
- The harvest was typically seen as a metaphor for judgment.

(Note: these cultural insights are from Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels by Bruce Malina and Parables by Craig Blomberg)

3. Answer these reflective questions.

Jesus said he used parables to see who “had” and who “did not have.” Why do you think he did this?

Jesus quoted from the Isaiah 6 prophecy about people being dull of hearing and not being able to see? Why do God’s people become this way? Why were the people in Jesus’ time this way? How would you describe your “hearing/seeing ability” of spiritual things?

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Jesus described four kinds of hearts – hardened (the road), shallow (rocks), distracted (worries, wealth), and good. What are some of the things that make hearts like this?

What do you think are the main points of the parable of the wheat and the weeds?

The parables of the mustard seed and leaven were designed to show that people should not let the small beginning of the kingdom and its hidden work discourage them? Do you ever feel discouraged about God's work in your life or in the world, that not enough is happening or that it is so slow or small? How would these parables encourage you?

What is the primary meaning of the parables of the treasure and the pearl? How would you apply these in your life?
