Do You Really Understand?

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[0:00] It's great to be back with you guys, miss worshiping with you all last week. Please open up your Bibles to Matthew chapter 13. If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand. We'd love to give you a copy of the Bible that you can take home with you and use while you're here.

We're going through this series in the Gospel of Matthew, and we are in chapter 13 today, verses 1 to 23. Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word.
Father, we thank you because you did not leave us to our own devices. But you gave us instead your Word.
The words of life. Word that brought this world into being. Word that now makes the dead, those who are spiritually dead, live again in Christ.
Lord, we now humble ourselves before your living Word. We ask that you will give us eyes to see and ears to hear.
[1:32] exalt the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us cherish and hold fast to his message of salvation.

It's the good news you have given to us in him. Teach us to do that better now as we hear from you in Matthew 13. In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen. Please stand if you're able. Let's honor God as we read from his Word as he addresses us.
That same day, Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.
And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach, and he told them many things in parables, saying, A sower went out to sow, and as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them.
Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil. And immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched.
[2:58] And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

He who has ears, let him hear. Then the disciples came and said to him, Why do you speak to them in parables? And he answered them, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.
For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables.
Because seeing, they do not see. And hearing, they do not hear. Nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case, the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says, You will indeed hear, but never understand.
And you will indeed see, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed.
[4:17] Lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn. And I would heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.

For truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous people long to see what you see, and did not see it. And to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.
Hear, then, the parable of the sower. 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 what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy. Yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while.

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And when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.
[5:28] As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. Please be seated. Thank you. There's an issue that has befuddled pastors and different ministers of the church throughout the generations, and it's that you can tell two people the self-same gospel, and yet one person rejects it outright and scoffs, while the other person receives it eagerly.
Even within the church, people can hear the self-same gospel from the same preachers over many months and years, and while some seem to soak it all in and mature steadily, others stagnate or even fall away.
What are we to make of all of this? What accounts for the varied outcomes? Jesus answers that question in two primary ways.
First is that God only reveals the secret to some. That's his first answer. And the second answer is this, only some people hear and understand.
[6:57] I've mentioned to you before that the Gospel of Matthew is structured around five main discourses, and this is the third discourse, which is on the theme of the kingdom of heaven, kingdom, the word, occurs 12 times in chapter 13 alone.

The kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven refers to the dominion or the rulership of God over his subjects. And this passage, and this third discourse in particular, is concerned with what does it look like when the kingdom of heaven breaks in upon the earth?
What does it take? What does it look like for us to become participants or citizens of the kingdom of heaven? That's the important question that this discourse addresses. Jesus begins this teaching by the Sea of Galilee.
In our cultural context, preachers like me stand, and people who are listening sit. In the near eastern context, the teachers, in the Jewish context, the teachers sit, and then the disciples gather around.
So when Jesus sits down by the sea, the disciples get the cue. They all gather around him to hear what he has to say. But when the crowd gets large, the large crowd gathers around him, he goes onto a boat into the Sea of Galilee and then preaches from there to the people who are sitting on the shore because, I mean, they probably knew this from experience.
[8:22] Sound travels further in water, and so because of that, this would provide natural amplification. And then he says in verse 3, it says in verse 3, Matthew says, Jesus told them many things in parables.

This is one of the distinctive features of this third discourse. It is made up almost entirely of parables. Eight parables to be exact about the kingdom of heaven. Of the 17 occurrences of the Greek word for parable in the Gospel of Matthew, 12 of them occurs in this chapter.
Verse 34 says, in fact, that Jesus said nothing to the crowds without a parable. And this first parable that Jesus tells is one of the most famous ones that we know of in English as the parable of the sower.
But since the focus in Matthew is not on the sower per se, but on the seeds sown on four different types of soil, it may be more aptly be called the parable of the four types of ground.
The word parable comes from a Greek word that means to literally to place alongside something, to juxtapose something for the sake of comparison.
[9:32] So in verse 24, Jesus introduces a parable by saying, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. So a parable is an illustration, a comparison, an extended figure of speech whose meaning goes beyond the literal meaning on the surface.

So let's look at the parable of the sower. Its meaning is not immediately apparent. We're so familiar with it now because we've been taught this passage, we've seen Jesus' explanation of it many times, that we can assume that this is, you know, self-evident.
But that's not the case when you hear just the parable. Why is Jesus talking about seeds that fall along the path that are devoured by birds, and then seeds that fall on rocky ground that sprout up quickly but wither away due to lack of root, and other seeds that are choked by thorns as they grow, and still others that produce much fruit?

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Is he trying to relate to and commiserate with the plight of the farmers who labor in the arid ground of the ancient Near East? Is he trying to warn farmers about the need to exercise care when sowing?
Or is he talking generally about the hardships of life, the difficulties of life, the meaning is not immediately clear. And that raises a question. Isn't the goal of the teacher to communicate concepts clearly so that the students understand?
[11:00] Why then employ parables, which by definition need to be deciphered, explained? Jesus' disciples had this exact question.

So they ask him in verse 10, why do you speak to them in parables? And Jesus gives them a plain answer in verse 11. To you, it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them, it has not been given.
The secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given to the disciples of Jesus to know, but it has not been given to the crowds to know. Jesus continues in verses 12 to 13.
For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing, they do not see, and hearing, they do not hear, nor do they understand.
This is why I speak to them in parables, Jesus says. Because seeing, they do not see, and hearing, they do not hear. Maybe some of you have seen this optical illusion that I saw years ago when I was a kid.
[12:15] It's a drawing, a black and white drawing, of a young woman with the headscarf with her head turned slightly this way. I think some of you guys have probably seen it. And if you, you know, if you just look at that, that's maybe all you see.

Until someone points out the contours of another image, and when they do that, you suddenly see, not a beautiful young woman, but an old wrinkly woman with a huge crooked nose and a protruding chin.
And then once you see that, you can't unsee it. Like that's what you see when you see that image. But unless someone points that out or you somehow came to see that second image, you could stare at that all day long and all you see is that first image.
A parable is kind of like that. Because seeing, they do not see. You have heard the parable, but have you really heard it, not just with your ears, but with your heart?
You understand the surface meaning of the words that Jesus speaks, but do you understand the deeper meaning underneath that? That's the point of the parable that some people see and yet not see.
[13:29] The point of the parable, the parable functions for some people to elucidate. For the disciples, when they explain it, it clarifies, helps them to understand.

But for some others, it obfuscates, it makes opaque, more difficult to see and understand. In the parallel version of this parable in the Gospel of Mark, Mark 4, 11 and 12, Jesus makes this point even more explicit.
He says, To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything is in parables, so that they may indeed see, but not perceive, and may indeed hear, but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.
Jesus cites Isaiah 6, 9-10 in verses 14 and 15 to explain this further. In the original context of Isaiah, this is in the commissioning of prophet Isaiah, God tells him to go and prophesy among the people of Israel, but as he commissions him, God tells Isaiah that people will not listen to him.
In fact, he tells him that your prophecy will have the effect of hardening the hearts of the people of Israel. The heat of the sun melts chocolate, but it hardens clay.
[14:45] The word of God functions as an instrument of mercy to some, but as an instrument of judgment to others. It reveals and saves for some.

It conceals and hardens for others. As 2 Corinthians 2, 16 says, witnesses of Jesus Christ, that they are, we are as witnesses of Christ, are a fragrance from death to death for those who are perishing, but we are a fragrance from life to life for those who are being saved.
Jesus cites Isaiah 6, 9 to 10 to explain why he teaches the crowds in parables, not so that they might hear and understand, but so that they might hear yet not understand.
Follow along with me in verses 14 to 15. You will indeed hear, but never understand, and you will indeed see, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can

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hardly hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.
A passage like this makes some of us feel uncomfortable because it seems to negate human agency and will. If we go back to the original quote in Isaiah, it's even more direct and forceful than Matthew's rendering of it, which he quotes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew.
[16:08] Isaiah 6, verse 10 says, Make the heart of this people dull and their ears heavy and blind their eyes lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed.

God's telling Isaiah that his prophecies would dull the people's hearts, harden their hearts in some sense, that Jesus is saying that his parables fulfill Isaiah's prophecy by doing the same thing.
It's also important to note that it's not the case that the disciples of Jesus, they don't have dull hearts, they are humble and receptive and therefore they understand these parables without Jesus having to explain it to them.
That's not what sets these disciples apart from the crowds. Matthew makes it clear in the course of the gospel that his disciples also do not understand the parables without Jesus explaining it to them.
So he says in Matthew 13, 36, Then Jesus left the crowds and went into the house and his disciples came to him saying, Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.
[17:15] Again, in Matthew 15, 15, Peter says to Jesus, Explain the parable to us. They ask Jesus to explain the parables because they don't understand. Both the crowds and the disciples do not understand the parables.

The only difference between them is that Jesus does not explain to the crowds, but he does explain to the disciples. Why? Jesus told us in verse 11, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.
Or as Jesus puts it differently in Matthew 22, 14, Many are called, but few are chosen. Jesus did not choose the disciples because they are unlike these crowds and they have hearts that are humble and supple and able to understand.
No, their hearts understand because Jesus chose them and explains things to them. Since this is a difficult topic, let me bring in a few other passages of scripture to demonstrate this to you all.
Psalm 139, verse 16. It says, Your eyes saw my unformed substance. In your book were written every one of them the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.
[18:31] Notice it doesn't say that God foresaw what I will do ahead of time and then he just wrote it down in his book. If that's the case, then what's the point of telling us that God wrote the book before any of our days came to be?

That priority, that priorness of God writing our days in the book is no priority at all if he only wrote down what he foresaw we will do.
In that case, our choices and our actions come logically before God's writing and that's not what Psalm 139, 16 says. It says that our days were written in God's book before any of them came to be.
We need to take God at his word when he tells us that he sovereignly ordains every single one of every single day of our lives before any of it came to be which is a source of great comfort for me knowing that no matter how hard my life gets, no matter what bad things happen, no matter what tragedy strike, all of it came from the loving and sovereign hand of my Father.
Ephesians 1, 11 says this, in him we have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.
[19:54] According to whose purpose did God predestine some of us for salvation? He says, according to the purpose of God who works all things. Well, but doesn't God purpose to uphold our free will and therefore work things out according to our wills and choices?

What is the basis for God's purpose? having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will. It says that our predestination is according to God's purpose and that God's purpose is not based on our will and choices but on the counsel of his will.
So why is there such a wide range of differing responses to the gospel of Jesus Christ? One answer that our passage gives is this, God only reveals the secret to some.

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But if you walk away from this passage way down only by the fate of the non-elect, those who are not chosen by God in this sense, then you're missing the emphasis of Jesus' teaching. All of us were once depraved, hardened sinners.
All of us once had dull hearts. What is remarkable is not that these sinners are not saved. What is remarkable is that some sinners are saved. what is remarkable is that to some it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.
[21:16] So Jesus says to his disciples in verses 16 to 17, but blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear. For truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous people long to see what you see and did not see it and to hear what you hear and did not hear it.

I think it's fair to say that all of us have a fascination with secrets. We like to be privy to secrets. We all wonder what's in that vault or in that secret archive in the MI6 headquarters in London or what's hidden in that CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia or what was hidden in the secret Vatican archives that wasn't open to the historians until like the 1880s or something like that.
What's in there? People want to know these secrets want to be in on it. Jesus says that many prophets and righteous people throughout the ages long to see what you see and did not see it.
Not only the prophets and righteous people, 1 Peter 1, 10-12 tells us that even the angels, angels of heaven long to look and see what it was that God was planning his redemption plan through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ and his resurrection.
God has invited us to be in on a secret that up to the point of Christ that not even his angels were fully privy to.
[22:41] He has now revealed that to us. What exactly are the secrets of the kingdom of heaven? The word secret here is the same word that is usually translated as mystery in the New Testament.

Paul speaks of this mystery that God revealed to him in Ephesians 3, 4 to 6. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.
This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.
The secrets of the kingdom of heaven, the mystery of the ages is this, that Christ Jesus fulfilled the law of God by living the life of perfect obedience and then dying as the atoning sacrifice for sin on the cross in our place, in the place of sinners, and then he was raised from the dead in victory so that lawbreakers like you and I who were once enemies of God can be forgiven, pardoned, and become citizens of the kingdom of heaven.
but how can the kingdom, the secrets of the kingdom of heaven be mine? See, that's the true wonder of the doctrine of election.
[24:03] It's meant to make us wonder why would it be that God would choose me? I wouldn't choose me if I were God.

I'm slow to change. I'm like a stubborn mule, right? Really, really long times. I change slowly and gradually. I'm a Gentile dog, an ethnic mutt in all likelihood, even though I haven't taken one of those DNA tests, but just look at me.
Definitely don't look 100% Korean if you ask me. I was alienated and hostile in mind to God, doing evil deeds, as it says in Colossians 1.21.
My forefathers were engaged in idolatrous, futile ways. Opposed to the truth of God. If you go far back enough, my ancestors persecuted the Jews, the chosen people of God.
I am the foremost of sinners. I was far off, separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.
[25:28] That's me. So God, I think you've got the wrong person. I'm not your guy. I'm not supposed to know the secret.

These precious secrets are not for my blind eyes to see, not for my deaf ears to hear, not for my dull heart to understand. God. But if God as the king gets to choose, then he can say, it doesn't matter what you say, I'm choosing you and revealing this secret to you.
Pastor, he's still a pastor, I think, Stephen Um, who's an acquaintance of mine, when he used to do submissions work in South Korea, he would minister to prostitutes, and no matter how many times he would tell them the gospel and God's forgiveness and God can forgive you, you can have a new life in Christ, they wouldn't listen.

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They felt so much shame, so much shame from their lifestyle and what they had done, they said to themselves, God cannot possibly receive us.
But it was when they were taught the doctrine of election, when they were taught that God is the king who sovereignly chooses and saves people for himself, that's when they said, oh, if that's the case, then I can believe that.
[27:10] That's the wonder of election. How can God choose me? Because my son died for your sins, he has fulfilled the law on your behalf, you whom I have chosen, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

Remember, that's why Andrew preached on this passage in the preceding passage, Matthew 12, 41 to 42. What did Jesus use as examples when he was denouncing the Pharisees? He says, the men of Nineveh will rise up to condemn you.
For Jonah came to them and preached and they listened and they repented, but something greater than Jonah is here. The queen of Sheba, the queen of the south, came to hear the wisdom of Solomon and she listened and she will rise up to condemn you in the day of judgment because something greater than Solomon is here.
Both of those examples, they're Gentiles, sinners. He's kind of rubbing it in the face of these Pharisees, the Jewish religious elites.
you think you're saved because you're a Jew. You think you're saved because of your own righteousness, not a chance. Those whom God sovereignly chooses and reveals himself to, those who repent and believe in Jesus Christ, only they who recognize that their own righteousness is inadequate can be saved.
[28:39] and so with the religious elites, the cream of the crop, the moral exemplars that they thought themselves to be behind him, Jesus turns to his ragtag bunch of disciples, the collection of sinners and tax collectors who have gathered about him and he says, here are my brothers, here are my mothers, here are my sisters.

brothers, Jesus turns upside down the conventional Jewish understanding of who is in and who is out. Jesus has made a way for sinners like us to be saved.
And yes, God sovereignly chooses some to be saved, to be his disciples, but implicit in this passage is also an invitation. Yes, the purpose is to make people hear, some people hear yet not understand, but there's also an invitation to believe and follow the only person who can explain the parables and give its meaning.
When I defined the word parable for you earlier, I didn't mention that parable is a Greek word that's used to translate the Hebrew word for proverb in the Old Testament. So when it says in verse 3 that Jesus told them many things in parables, it recalls 1 Kings 4 32 which tells us that King Solomon spoke in many proverbs, more specifically 3,000 proverbs.
And remember Jesus, we were just told in chapter 12 verse 42 that Jesus is something greater than Solomon. if the queen of the south traveled 1,500 miles to hear the wisdom that God had given to Solomon, then how much more when the wisdom of God in the flesh, when the word of God incarnate is in our midst, how much more should we pay attention to him and listen to him?
[30:33] Divine sovereignty and salvation does not abrogate human responsibility. The geologist Frank Rhodes, who was the ninth president of Cornell University, once used this analogy to explain multiple types of causes.

He asks, so why is the kettle boiling? Two types of explanations can be given. At one level, the stove top is applying thermal energy to the base of the kettle, which then generates kinetic energy and the molecules are moving faster and faster and that is what you're measuring and then when this reaches 100 degrees centigrade, that's boiling.
That's one way to explain why the kettle is boiling. A second answer that you can give is this, the kettle is boiling because someone put it on to make a cup of tea. That's the just as valid of an explanation.
Rhodes writes this, now these are different answers, but both are true. Both are complementary and not competitive. One answer is appropriate within a particular frame of reference, the other within another frame of reference.
We have a hard time reconciling divine sovereignty and human responsibility because we presume that divine will functions at the same level on equal footing as human will, as if they function on the same plane, but it's not like that.

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[31:54] Our will is that of the creature. God's will is that of the creator. Our will is that of the characters in a book. God's will is that of the author of the book.

When I was a child, I only knew how to draw two-dimensional things, right? Circle, rectangle, it's a human being, right?
It's like a, and then as I got older, took some art classes in high school, right, you learn about perspective, and you learn about shading, and then you learn to use the contrast and color to give depth and volume to drawing.
And then when you jump from that two-dimensional world to a three-dimensional world, it revolutionizes art, right? That's what makes it look good, right? Being finite creatures is like living in a two-dimensional world.
We function on the X-Y plane. So we can't quite grasp the third dimension, the Z-axis, right? We know that the two are connected, but from our limited human perspective, we cannot search the reaches of God's infinite mind.
[33:06] It's important to note, however, that this does not therefore in any way abrogate our responsibility to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ in faith.

If we think to ourselves after believing in the sovereignty of God and salvation, well, if God chooses whom he will save, well, then it doesn't matter what we choose in the end. If you're tempted to think that way, I just want you to know that that's not a biblical idea.
That type of, that kind of thinking, that line of reasoning is completely foreign to biblical thought. It never occurs to the writers of Scripture. The authors of Scripture did not have the difficulty that we have of holding divine sovereignty and human responsibility together.
It says, choose this day whom you will serve, Joshua 24 15. That's what Jesus says in verse 9, he who has ears, let him hear. That's an invitation.
Only those to whom God has given ears to hear can hear, yes, but it is not our business to know whom exactly that is. The only thing we can do is to take heed to hear and understand the gospel.
[34:12] Instead of wondering whether other people are chosen by God or not, we share the gospel with them all. Isn't that what Jesus does here? I mean, I don't know if it's exactly, you know, 25%, 25%, 25%, but if you look at that as 25%, his success rate's not very good.

He sows seeds everywhere on paths that will be devoured by birds, on shallow ground, on rocky ground, among the thorns, he sows everywhere.
God, Jesus sows liberally everywhere, and so we must do as well. We can't tell who is elect, who belongs to God's chosen people. God has not given us that knowledge, not for us to know.
No, it is our responsibility to go and liberally sow the gospel seeds everywhere we go. Instead of wondering whether you are chosen by God or not, do what you can do, which is to put your faith in Jesus Christ and follow him as a disciple, for that's the only way to know whether you belong to him or not.
That's the point of Jesus' explanation of the parables in verses 17 to 23. The word understand comes up a number of times, and it's a key word. Verse 13, hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.
[35:27] Verse 14, you will indeed hear, but never understand. Note this contrast between just mere hearing of the ear and understanding of the heart. Verse 15, lest they understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.

This theme of understanding is continued in the explanation of the parable in verse 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 seed sown along the path is contrasted with the seed that is sown on good soil. In verse 23, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit.
Only the last seed planted on good soil bears fruit because that's the only one that is described as having understanding. The seed on the path gets eaten by birds.
The seed on rocky ground sprouts up quickly but withers in the heat. The seed among the thorns are choked by it. These three kinds of seeds all eventually lose what they had at the beginning. That's what Jesus is talking about in verse 12.
[36:31] For to the one who has more will be given and he will have an abundance but from the one who has not even what he has will be taken away. Only those who hold fast to the word in an honest and good heart, those who do not, only those who truly understand the gospel will bear fruit

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in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty and another thirty but to others who do not hear and understand, even what they had will be taken away from them.

So let me ask you this all important question. Do you really understand? to use this parable, what kind of soil are you?
Verse 4 tells us that some seeds fell along the path and the birds came and devoured them. A seed cannot germinate, it can't lay roots through a path.
So it just sits there, lies there until the birds come and devour it. This, Jesus explains in verse 18, is when anyone hears the word, the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.
The enemy of God, Satan, is always looking to snatch away the gospel seeds that are sown on the hearts of people. Even today there may be people who hear and then will turn around and forget about this gospel.
[38:07] Please don't let that happen. Don't let the good news of Jesus Christ go in one ear and out the other and slip away from your consciousness, slip away from your life.

Hold on to the gospel. Meditate on it, think on it, understand it, ask sincere questions. Don't let the evil one come and snatch away what you hear this morning.
Some seeds, Jesus says in verse 5, fall on rocky ground where they did not have much soil and immediately they sprang up. Sometimes this happens in real life, that seeds sprout faster on shallow soil because it doesn't have long ways to go down in terms of roots and it doesn't have long ways to come up because it's on shallow soil.
It doesn't take much energy to sprout its leaf past the soil. and because it receives more warmth because it's closer to the surface, it germinates faster and sprouts up faster. However, such plants are prone to drying out and withering away more quickly because when the heat gets hotter, the root system is too shallow, it doesn't get enough moisture.
Jesus explains in verse 20 to 21, notice that phrase, he has no root in himself.
[39:44] I've seen many people move here to the northeast, to Massachusetts, from the Bible Belt or from the south, and when they are no longer surrounded by Christian community, when Christianity is no longer a badge of respectability but a badge of disrepute and dishonor, when Christians are viewed as ignorant bigots, they abandon the faith that they once had.

I've also seen many young people who were very active and zealous in church youth groups abandon their faith once they go to college when they're no longer under their parents' roof and supervision, when they have the independence that they never had and when they face temptations and peer pressure to sin like they've never had before, they reject God's word and turn away from it.
They fall away. Jesus says that this person is someone who has no root in himself. This person is like a moss. Mosses don't have real roots.
mosses they absorb their moisture water directly through their leaves and from the air. This is why you find mosses only in shady, moist environments because they have no root and they would dry out and get scorched by the sun easily when it's left out in direct sunlight.
They catch some water from their environment here and there and they survive for a little while but they have no roots in themselves. They don't know how to receive spiritual nourishment from Christ directly.
[41:21] They don't know how to abide in Christ divine. It's like when you do barbecue with coals and let's say when you're done barbecuing and you spill the coal on the street to burn out and the coals that really cut fire they're all white.

They've all been burning but you will occasionally find some coal that's still black. Maybe it's singed a little bit from the heat of the surrounding coals but it never actually cut fire.
When they're all together in the same barbecue pit it looks like they're all flaming hot and they're hot they've all caught fire but it's when they are scattered individually that's when you see oh that one didn't really ever catch.
Never had fire in itself. What about you? Have you caught the fire of God's love in your heart?
Do you have root in yourself or are you merely deriving semblance of life from your environment by proximity to other Christians? Can you endure when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word?

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[42:40] If you grew up in a Christian household with godly parents like I did that is an amazing blessing but make sure that your faith is your own. That you have root in yourself.

Heed the exhortation of 2 Timothy 3 14-15 but as for you continue continue brothers and sisters in what you have learned and have firmly believed knowing from whom you learned and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.
hold on. Remain there. Stay there. Still other seeds Jesus says in verse 7 fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked them.
Jesus explains in verse 22 that this is the one who hears the word but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and it proves unfruitful.
what are the cares of this world that are choking the spiritual life out of you and depriving you of the nutrients that you need.
[43:48] Are you weary with care about your job, your prospect, your future, your bank account, the ups and downs of the stock market?

are you weighed down with anxiety and cares about your health, your future, your children? Are you weighed down with cares about the world, politics, wars, and rumors of wars, the condition of our country?
Are you consumed with cares about what you eat and drink, the clothes you wear, what other people are thinking about you or is saying about you? Don't let these things choke the spiritual life.
What about the deceitfulness of riches? Have you been deceived? by the false promise that money, that money can buy you happiness, security?
Isn't that a very interesting description? That the deceitfulness of riches. Do you know that money is, riches deceive you? They trick you.
[45:07] They trick you into thinking that yes, if you have me, if you have riches, you will be secure. If you have me and you can spend me, you will be happy. But it deceives. Are you being deceived by the riches?

What desires do you have for this sinful world that are choking the word of God in your life so that it doesn't bear fruit? It could be other things, other things that this world offers. Maybe for some of you it's romance and fantasies about romance.
Maybe it's sex. Maybe it's fame. Maybe it's renown. Maybe it's your desire for authority and power.
Maybe it's nothing so grand. Maybe you're just consumed with entertainment.
One diversion after another. One video after another. Are you so preoccupied with these things so that your spiritual appetites are getting duller and duller?
Seemingly perfectly harmless things on their own can do a great deal of spiritual harm if they siphon away our time and attention and energy from the things of God and things eternal.
[46:19] In C.S. Lewis' book Screwtape Letters, which is an imagined correspondence between senior devil Screwtape and his junior nephew, junior devil Wormwood, Screwtape advises Wormwood in this manner.

You will say that these are very small sins and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the enemy.
Does not matter how small the sins are, provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the light and out into the nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick.
indeed, the safest road to hell is the gradual one, the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.
how many Christians have you known in life were professing Christians who fell away from faith, who fell away in that kind of spectacular fashion, just turned and then going to headlong into wickedness?
[47:36] Probably rare if you've seen any. But how many of you've seen take that gradual turn?
murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick.

What are the cards in your life that are edging you gradually away from God? How tragic would it be for us to be turned away from God by cards?
Beware of these things. If you do not take care to hear and understand the gospel, if you do not make use of the means of grace that God has provided for us to keep the gospel real in our hearts, the reading and preaching of his word, the worship, corporate worship and singing, Bible reading,

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the personal time, prayer, corporate worship, the fellowship of believers.
If we're not using these things, means of grace that God has given to stoke the flame of our love for God and the love that he has shown us in Christ, then what used to be a raging flame in your heart will soon weaken and then it will begin to smolder.
And then soon he will start smoking and snuff out. Jesus, whom you thought you shared loving intimacy with, will soon seem distant and aloof and eventually he will seem unreal.
[49:01] am I suggesting that the elect, the regenerate, those who are chosen by God for salvation can lose their salvation?

No, I'm a good reformed pastor, I'm not saying that. Yeah. Nevertheless, a professing Christian who checks all the right boxes and possesses all outward appearances of faith can fall away from Christ. The Bible teaches that. Apostasy is a real sin. For this reason, there is no room in the Christian life for complacency and false assurance.
The warnings and threats of the Bible, like what you see even in this parable, are not merely hypothetical. And if some fall away, of course, it wouldn't mean that they were not truly regenerate. How do we know that? Because Hebrews 3, 12-14 says this, take care brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God, but exhort one another every day as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.
[50:13] For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. Note the tense of that last, that first, the first clause of that last sentence.

we have come to share in Christ. Perfect. It's already happened. It does not say that only those who persevere till the end will come to share in Christ.
It says that we have already come to share in Christ if we hold our original confidence firm to the end. It's perseverance till the end that proves our participation in Christ, that we have partaken in him, have shared him.
1 John 2, 19 is similar. They went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us, but they went out that it might become plain that they all are not of us.
Referring to those who apostatize and abandon the church of Christ, John says that they were never one of us. For if they had been of us, one of us, then they would have continued with us. Apostasy is proof that they never truly belong to the spiritual family of God.
[51:23] So then, what's the relationship between these two things? The more you persevere in faith and obedience, the more you will be assured of your salvation. And the more you are assured and secure in God's grace, the grace of God given to you in Jesus Christ, the more you will persevere in faith and obedience.

2 Peter 1 verses 10 to 11 says this, Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election. for if you practice these qualities, you will never fall.
For in this way, there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We're meant to confirm our calling and affection by persevering in faith and good works.
So, brothers and sisters, are you persevering and holding fast to the gospel? My prayer is that all of us will be like the seeds described in verse 8.
Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some 60, some 30. Jesus explains in verse 23, as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it.
[52:35] He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another 60, in another 30. This is the only type of seed out of the four that is saved in the end. We know that because it's the only one that bears fruit.

And according to scripture, all true believers bear fruit. That's why Jesus says in John 15 verse 2, every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away.
And every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that he may bear more fruit. How can we become fruitful? In that passage, how does it tell us to bear fruit?
It says that happens by abiding. Jesus says, whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me, you can do nothing. What does it mean to abide in Jesus?

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This leads from one question to the next, right? Jesus says in John 15, 90, then as the father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.
[53:36] We abide in Christ by abiding in his love and living out of that love in obedience to him. it is when we are rooted and grounded in love.

It says in Ephesians 3, 17, when we know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that's when, according to Ephesians 3, we comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of God and are filled with all the fullness of God.
You want more of God and less of me? You want more of the Holy Spirit to fill you, to enable you to bear fruit in your life? Abide in Christ by abiding in his love, knowing and seeing and beholding and believing the great love that Jesus showed you on the cross in his death and resurrection.
And by this we know love that he laid down his life for us, 1 John 3, 16, by beholding and believing the gospel, beholding and believing the glory of the gospel in the face of Jesus Christ, that is how we are transformed.
That is how we bear fruit. That is how we grow. And we have every reason to hold that dear, don't we?
[54:51] What is the seed that we're planting? What is the seed that we're holding on to this gospel? It's nothing less than the personal work of Jesus Christ himself. Jesus said in John 12, 24, truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone.

But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Jesus was speaking of himself. If Jesus did not die on that cross to save us from our sin, there is no seed.
There is no seed to be planted in our lives. There is no secrets of the kingdom of heaven to reveal. it all hinged on Jesus, the scion of the kingdom of God, the heir, the prince, to whom belongs all of the riches and inheritance of heaven.
Yet he divests himself of the riches of heaven, of the glories of heaven, to come and die a common criminal's death on the cross, to give his life for us so that in his death, we might be fruitful.
That's why he gave himself for us. We're not saved by our good work, we're saved by the good news of Jesus Christ, but we are saved for good works, aren't we?
[56:20] God wants us to bear fruit a hundredfold, a sixtyfold, a thirtyfold, and we do that by following in the footsteps of Christ.

dying to ourselves, dying to our sins, carrying our cross daily, and following Jesus, and like Jesus who died, the kernel of wheat to bring forth grain and fruit and salvation for all.
That's how we bear fruit in this life. Let's pray that we may all do that. Lord, we long to bear fruit for you.
We don't want to be a fig tree that you come to and has no fruit, fruit, to be fresh. Lord, we want to be fruitful bows with way down heavy with bounty, with innumerable fruits to please you, to honor you, to glorify you.
And Lord, to that end, you have called us to come and die. Die to ourselves, die to our selfishness, die to our sin, and that is what we want, Lord.
[57:58] Let us die like the kernel of wheat and help us to behold Christ who died for us. that we might bear fruit for you.

Make us a fruitful church. Preserve every single one of my brothers and sisters here.
And for those who do not yet know you, Lord, give them ears to hear. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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