

May I speak in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The well-known parable of the Sower. What can be said that hasn't already been said?

The English Standard Version Study Bible claims that, using a common farming method at the time, the sower sows the seed without first ploughing the ground, which surprised me. It seems unlikely that a farmer would buy (or save from a previous year) seed that they would rely on for their survival, physically and financially, and then fling it about with abandon. Broadcast sowing used to happen in England about 2 centuries ago, but the seeds were always thrown on a field cleared of rocks and weeds.

In 1 Samuel 13 The Philistines forbade the Israelites to become blacksmiths, so that they could not forge weapons. The Hebrews had to pay 2/3 of a shekel for plowshares, mattocks, forks and axes. So, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica online, 1 Samuel was written in 500 BC. So they were ploughing 500 years before the birth of Christ – the author of the Study Bible displays their status as a life long city dweller.

This is something the Lord has been drawing our attention to since Christmas, the necessity to check everything and go deeper in our Bible reading, and to check everything we read or hear against Bible truths. And to check details even from mainstream books, the ESV Study Bible was recommended during our LLM training, and this example doesn't make the book useless or heretical, it just demonstrates how vital it is that we check everything.

The Parable of the Sower is not about farming, or experiencing poor yields when ¾ of the seeds don't germinate. The disciples themselves didn't understand it, so Jesus had to explain it to them.

The sower sows the Word. Now if we had a path beneath our feet we might think that we're on solid ground, we might think we are already following the path, but where we are, and where we believe ourselves to be, can mean that the Word of God cannot reach us. The seed falls "on the path" and immediately the birds eat it. Satan removed the Word from them. Jesus is very clear about the spiritual battle that is taking place around us.

When the seed is sown on rocky soil (a mixture of fertile soil and rocks) the people receive the Word with joy, but as soon as troubles begin, they fall away. I'm sure for those of us who have been a Christian for many decades can bring to mind someone – or more than one person – to whom this applies. After all, this is one quarter of the people who have faith, they believe in God until something tragic happens in their lives, or it may not be that traumatic, something upsetting has upset them, and they are finished with God. It is a common occurrence and it is fueled by the belief that a loving God would not allow x, y or z to happen.

Our faith can be shaken, especially when it involves children suffering, and the place to take that question is the foot of the Cross.

Another quarter of the seeds fell among thorns – well, the soil had to be fertile otherwise the thorns could not grow, it would be barren. They hear the Word, the seed germinates, but it is only one of many things that they attend to, verse 19 "The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches" render the Word unfruitful. They have not given it top priority.

Verse 20 "But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit 30 fold, and 60 fold, and 100 fold. Now let us compare that with Matthew 13 v.23 "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 100 fold, in another 60, and in another 30." Those who accept the Word in Mark bring forth increasing yield, 30, 60, then 100 fold. Those who understand the Word also bring forth a yield 100 fold, then 60, then

30. Accepting is having faith that God is God and God is good brings forth increasing results, while understanding reduces God from His Godliness to just another subject to be mastered, a bit like algebra or technical drawing.

The parable displays the grace of God, because the path, the rocky soil, the thorny soil and the good soil are helpless to improve themselves. They are what they are, remember the good soil only produces results after the application of the Word.

Jesus may have used this parable to prepare the disciples for the tribulations to come, for all His speaking in parables, He never minced His words.

It is quite a dispiriting parable in some ways. The Word being preached and mostly ignored or failing. To our human minds, we would not consider this a success. But as Isaiah 55, 8 reminds us “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways.”

Don't just take my word for it – check it for yourselves, like the people in Acts 17,11.

Amen.