*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

September 26 – October 1

“The Sower and the Seed”

**Monday, September 26 Matthew 13:1-3a**

*“He told many stories in the form of parables”*

 During much of chapter 12, Jesus has been in “the house” (13:1), most likely Peter and Andrew’s home in Capernaum (see 8:14). Jesus now leaves the house to go sit by the lake, that is, the Sea of Galilee. Sitting was the typical posture for teachers. The crowds apparently understand that he is ready to continue his teaching ministry, so they come in great numbers to hear him. Such large crowds only heighten the animosity of the Pharisees, who up to now have been popular with the people and see their influence continuing to shift to Jesus.

 On another occasion large crowds also pressed on Jesus so that he taught from a boat (Luke 5:1-3). The boat on that occasion belonged to Peter, so Jesus may have used it again here. Local tradition locates this discourse at a distinctive cove or inlet called the “Cove of the Parables.” The land surrounding the cove slopes down like a natural horseshoe-shaped amphitheater, providing environmental acoustics for Jesus’ voice to carry over one hundred meters from the boat to a crowd of hundreds gathered on the shore.

*You share God’s truth with me, Lord, through your parables. Amen.*

**Tuesday, September 27 Matthew 13:3b-9**

*“A farmer went out to sow his seed”*

 The brilliance of Jesus’ parables is that they come directly from the everyday experiences of his listeners. This parable uses the story of a farmer who went out to sow his seed. Jesus’ listeners are well aware of farming techniques, since most of them take care of their own fields and gardens or work the fields of their landlords. The history of interpretation has had two primary points of focus in the parable. The first is the sower himself, the Christ figure who does the work of proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom of God, here represented as seed. The second is the four soils that receive the seed, contrasting various soils and the fate of the seed that falls on them. In verses 18-23 Jesus will explain the meaning of the four soils.

Path – it was common for seed to be scattered accidentally on the hard paths surrounding the fields. Shallow/Rocky – in many places the terrain was rocky, with only thin layers of soil covering the rock. Thorns – seed fell among thorn bushes that battled with the agricultural plants for nutrients. Good/Fertile – here the seed germinates and matures, yielding a good crop.

*I thank you, Lord, for sowing the seed of your Gospel in my life. Amen.*

**Wednesday, September 28 Matthew 13:10-12**

*“Why do you speak to the people in parables?”*

 Jesus’ teaching in Matthew has primarily been addressed to his disciples, that is, to those who have made a commitment to follow him. But here Jesus is teaching “the crowds.” They are interested in hearing what he has to say, but have made no commitment to follow him. Realizing that Jesus is using a different teaching style with the crowds than he has with them, his disciples approach him and ask why he is speaking to the people in parables. The distinction between “disciples” and “crowd” is crucial in order to understand Jesus’ purpose for speaking in parables.

 The reason why Jesus speaks to the crowd in parables is because God has given the secrets of the kingdom of heaven to the disciples, not the crowd, to know. “Secrets” is the Greek word *mysteria* (“mysteries”). Jesus’ message from the beginning has declared that the kingdom of heaven has arrived, but it hasn’t been apparent to those observing. The mystery is not that God will establish his kingdom, which was a well-known prophetic hope within Israel, but that it has arrived in a form different from what was anticipated.

*I praise you, Lord, for giving me understanding of your mysteries. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

September 26 – October 1

“The Sower and the Seed”

**Thursday, September 29 Matthew 13:13-15**

*“This is why I use these parables”*

 Some in the crowd are leaning toward becoming Jesus’ disciples, while others are leaning toward following the Pharisees and opposing Jesus. Still others are riding the commitment-fence. But Jesus has insisted there is no middle ground (e.g., 12:30). The crowd must make a decision, and the parables force the issue. God knows those who will harden their hearts against Jesus’ message, and the parables will reveal their unresponsiveness. God also knows those whose hearts will be receptive to the Good News, so the parables elicit a positive response to come to Jesus, become his disciple, and ask for explanation (cf. 13:10). The passage from Isaiah quoted by Jesus balances God’s divine sovereignty with each individual human’s responsibility.

 God does not force anyone to accept the message of the kingdom, so the crowd’s response to the parables is dictated by the nature of their hearts. If a person in the crowd has no spiritual ears his or her heart will be increasingly hardened and will turn away from Jesus and the healing that comes with the kingdom of heaven (v. 15).

*I praise you, Lord, for creating a soft heart within me. Amen.*

**Friday, September 30 Matthew 13:16-17**

*“But blessed are your eyes . . . and your ears”*

 Jesus disciples are spiritually alive with spiritual eyes and ears that see and hear the reality of the kingdom of heaven. The significance of the catchphrase that concluded the parable of the soils (v. 9) is now revealed. Jesus’ parables are designed to test the spiritual “ears” of his audience. The spiritually alive disciples will seek further explanation from Jesus, causing their life and understanding to be enhanced. All that the prophets and righteous people of the Old Testament had longed to see, Jesus’ disciples are privileged to take part in.

 “The prophets” are those who spoke for God, and “the righteous” are those in the Old Testament who eagerly awaited the arrival of God’s gracious redemption and kingdom but who died before its arrival. In this way the unhearing crowd parallels the spiritually blind and ignorant of Isaiah’s day (vv. 14-15), while the disciples parallel the prophets and righteous people of the Old Testament who faithfully responded to God’s revelations. To summarize: the parables test the heart of the listener, and gives instruction to those who are responsive.

*Thank you, Lord, for all you teach me through your parables. Amen.*

**Saturday, October 1 Matthew 13:18-23**

*“Now here is the explanation of the story”*

 **Hard Hearts.** Some in the crowd have hardened their hearts against Jesus’ message. That hardness of heart prevents the seed of the gospel from taking root, and they cannot understand its truth. **Shallow Hearts.**This type of heart has sufficient receptivity to allow the seed to sprout up, but it is not deep enough to develop any root. When the environment is suitable, the life in the seed will begin to germinate. But, when difficulties come its way the true nature of the heart is revealed, and the seed’s life bears no fruit.

 **Thorny Hearts.** This type of heart receives the gospel but has competition from the world. As with the second soil, this type of heart has enough potential for productivity that the life in the seed begins to develop. But the opposition from the world is too much, and the young seedling is choked out. **Receptive Hearts.** Only the fourth soil is called “good.” This represents the person who not only hears the gospel message but understands it and allows it to take full root in his or her heart so that it produces fruit. This soil represents a true believing disciple.

*Your Gospel, Lord, has produced the fruit of salvation in my life. Amen.*