

to be forgiven of sins and loved by God is the best thing that could ever happen to a person.

Let me try to illustrate what this understanding is like by describing how I came to understand the joy of skiing when I was in high school. I knew that such a thing as downhill skiing existed. But I never thought about it and had no interest in skiing. I was interested in playing football and watching TV and going hunting and fishing and driving around in cars with my buddies. But I had no real knowledge of or interest in skiing. Then one of my friends, who was a member of the high school ski club began talking to me about the ski trips the club was planning for the winter. She was an avid skier and enthusiastically told me about skiing. She finally talked me into going along to Devil's Head ski lodge on one of the club's trips. I rode the bus up to Devil's Head, rented skis, took a half hour ski lesson and headed for the hill. I loved skiing. I was hooked. I began attending the ski club meetings. I learned about the different kinds of skis and boots. I bought my own skis and boots. I spent money to go skiing. In short I organized by life to get more of skiing because now I "understood" how great skiing was. It was obvious to others that I had come to understand skiing because my life was bearing the fruit of understanding the greatness of skiing.

**15.** What always happens when a person understands the message of the kingdom? (Clue: contrast this soil with the "rocky" and "thorny" soils)

When a person understands the message of the kingdom in this way then two things automatically follow. First, contrary to the "rocky soil" person, trouble and persecution don't destroy faith but rather confirm faith. In other words, the "good soil" person knows that trouble and persecution cannot take away what is supremely valuable, the love of God. So they keep on trusting Christ no matter what happens. It's just like my love of skiing. It didn't matter to me how cold it was or how often I fell down or how much money it cost for lift tickets. I loved skiing and no amount of "trouble" because of skiing could keep me from skiing. But second, contrary to the "thorny soil" person the seed produces fruit in the good soil person.

**16.** What does fruit refer to?

Fruit refers to the lifestyle of the godly man or woman and the effect that that lifestyle has on the world around him or her. It is a life that is worthy

of the Lord, that pleases the Lord, that is full of good deeds. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit that is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. It is a life that delights in obedience to the commands of God. Please do not miss the absolute and infallible connection between understanding and fruitfulness. Every Christian bears fruit. If there is no fruit, then no matter what you say you are not a Christian. This is the testimony of the Bible from beginning to end. Note, bearing fruit does not make you good soil, it shows that you are good soil. The gift of spiritual understanding comes first and makes you good soil and then when you hear and understand the gospel you immediately begin to bear fruit. It is the seed, planted in you that contains the life and grows in you.

**17.** Why does Jesus make the point that some good soil produces 100 times the seed sown and some good soil produces 60 and some 30?

He helps us to see that while all good soil bears fruit, some good soil is more fertile than other good soil and so there is a variety in the quantity of fruit that is born. So you should not be comparing yourself to other Christians. The question to ask yourself is this. Am I bearing fruit? The question you should not ask is, "why am I not bearing the same amount of fruit as some other Christian?" Why am I not as patient with my children as Sue is with hers? That's the wrong question. The right question is, "Am I more patient now than I was a year ago?" Again, fruit bearing takes time. You will see the evidence of growth right away but the mature fruit takes time to develop. So Jesus shows us that while we need to be vigilant and examine ourselves, we also need to recognize that we are looking for growth and fruitfulness over time. There are no perfect Christians, only progressing Christians. I need to examine myself for fruit but I also need to know that growth over time is the mark of good soil.

**An understanding heart acts in response to the message of Christ**

**18.** Which of the things Jesus mentions in this parable are the greatest hindrances in your life to being good soil?

**19.** Do you want to be good soil?

**20.** What should you do if you want to be good soil but are not?

Repent of your sins and trust Christ to make you good soil.

*this Christianity business and so I don't see any point in continuing to go through all this hassle."*

**9.** What made this person "joyful"? What should be the source of joy in the Christians life? See 1 Peter 1: 8-9, Luke 9:23-26 & Hebrews 11: 24-26.

*This person's joy is a false joy because it is not joy in God. This person's joy is due to the false belief that being a Christian will make life on earth happy. So when life on earth becomes unpleasant then he or she believes that Jesus is not worthy of her trust. This person is using Jesus to get what she loves not loving Jesus for who he is and what he gives. The source of joy in the Christian life is that we have a future hope. We belong to God and are loved by him. He is going to bring us safely to his eternal home. Our joy in the present is due to the hope of joy we have in the future.*

### **An impulsive heart is disloyal to the message of Christ**

**10.** What happens to the person represented by the seed sown among thorns? Begin by describing what happens to actual seeds that are sown among thorns.

*If you've ever been in a field of corn you have seen what happens when the corn planter puts a row of seeds in the grass and weeds growing in the fencerow. The corn seed will put up a plant and the plant will remain through the whole summer and into the fall but it never gets very tall and never develops an ear of corn. There is no fruit because the weeds it is living in the midst of use up the nutrients and water that it requires to grow and bear fruit. However, it does look like all the other corn plants in the field. It is different only in that it is much smaller and has not ear of corn on it.*

*In the same way the person who is "thorny soil" looks like a Christian but is not truly a Christian because there is no fruit. A person can profess faith in Christ and show up in church week after week and not get involved in really bad sins but yet never produce fruit because all the life is being sucked out by the worries of the world and the deception of wealth.*

**11.** What are the "worries of this life" and how do they "choke out" the word? See Matthew 6: 24-33 & Luke 14: 18-20

*The worries of this life are too numerous to list. Whatever causes you to worry can choke out the word. It is the worry that effectively chokes out the word. What you worry about shows what you believe you must have to be happy. The things we worry about are not in and of themselves sinful. It is simply that our worry proves that our hearts are not set on what God promises but what the things we are worrying about promise. Worry shows what we are trusting in and hoping in. You cannot trust in and hope in other things and God at the same time.*

**12.** What is the "deceitfulness of wealth"? What does wealth tell us that is not true?

*Wealth promises us that we will secure and happy when we have it and what it provides. As Jesus says in Matthew 6: 24, "You cannot serve God and money". You cannot believe that money will make you happy and so spend your time and energy pursuing it and believe that God will make you secure and happy and spend your time pursuing him. You must do one or the other, you cannot do both.*

*William Hendricksen in his commentary on this passage says, "When this person is poor he deceives himself into thinking that if he were only rich he would be happy. When he is rich he deludes himself into imagining that if he were only still richer he would be satisfied." The basic problem in this person is a lack of faith. They don't really believe that having Christ and nothing else is to be the richest person in the universe. They love money and what money provides and not Christ and what Christ provides. They use religion to get them more of what they truly love, money and the security in this life that money provides.*

### **A greedy heart is indifferent to the message of Christ**

**13.** What makes good soil, good?

*They understand the message of the kingdom.*

**14.** What does it mean to understand the message of the kingdom?

*It is spiritual understanding that is given by God. It is an understanding that not only knows but loves the message of Christ's kingdom. A child can have the understanding referred to here because it is not about understanding all the ins and outs of theology but about understanding that*

*in front of their eyes. They are willfully ignorant of that which they know is obviously worthy of knowing. In other words, they do not understand, not because they are handicapped or because they have not been given enough information. Rather they are ignorant and uninterested in Christ because they choose to despise what is obviously wonderful.*

*Imagine that you took a family vacation to visit the Grand Canyon. Your family travels in one of those new conversion vans that have a TV with a 6" screen and a VCR. When you arrive at the Grand Canyon and pull up at one of the overlooks everyone jumps out of the car except for your 10 year old daughter. Everyone runs up to the rail and stands in awestruck silence before the beauty and majesty of this amazing canyon. Suddenly you realize your daughter isn't with you. You go back to the van and she is watching a Dora the Explorer video on the TV. What do you say to her? "Honey, what are you doing? We're at the Grand Canyon. Come and look." She says she doesn't want to come and look. You then tell her she doesn't have a choice. She has to come and look. You turn the TV off and she comes out to the edge grumbling all the way. She looks at the Canyon, yawns and then says, "Can I go back and watch my video now?" Wouldn't we say that there is something wrong with this child? She doesn't understand what she is looking at. But her failure to understand isn't due to the fact that the Grand Canyon isn't a million times more attractive than a video playing on a 6" screen. Her lack of appreciation for the majesty of the Grand Canyon shows a deficiency in her, not the Grand Canyon. It is the same with the gospel of Christ. The existence and majesty of God is blazing in front of our face every day of our lives. Our own existence, the created order, our sense of justice, the reality of beauty and love all display the greatness of our Creator. Then in the person of Jesus Christ the full radiance of God's beauty is poured out and yet people refuse to love and adore the one who is obviously praiseworthy. It isn't just atheists who have hard hearts to the beauty of the gospel. There are millions of people in the world who give intellectual assent to God's existence and to the facts of the gospel but who still do not understand the gospel in the sense that Jesus means here. Like the daughter who acknowledges the presence of the Grand Canyon and can describe its features but who has no sense of awe at its greatness.*

5. Why does Satan come and snatch away the message of the kingdom that this person heard? What does this tell us about Satan's goal?

*Satan knows that the word of God is powerful and so he is not going to permit it to "lay around" a person's life. The devil aims to stop the saving work of God and so he interferes with faith. He does not want the person to believe the word. Satan works to destroy faith and distract people from faith.*

6. What are some ways Satan snatches the seed away? See Matthew 9: 12-14 & 22-24, John 5: 41-44, Luke 14: 15-20, 18: 9-14?

*Satan's deceptions are many. At the heart of them all is pride and self-sufficiency. The hardhearted person does not understand the greatness of Christ because he does not understand his true "smallness". He is convinced that he can give himself what he needs to be happy and Satan is all too glad to help further this deceived way of looking at reality.*

**An unbroken heart is unyielding to the message of Christ.**

7. How does a "rocky" soil person respond to the message of the kingdom?

*This person responds with great enthusiasm and eagerness. He is sure that Jesus is the answer to all his problems. He is passionate about knowing Jesus and being involved with God's people. He has a lot of very positive feelings about Jesus and the things of God.*

8. What happens to this person and why?

*When trouble comes to her life, she doesn't feel so happy about Jesus and quickly abandons her faith. She is a follower of Christ because she believes that Jesus will give her what she wants and when he doesn't fulfill her wishes she abandons him. Or when the emotional highs are not as high and the cost of being a Christian is not being offset by intense emotions, then she abandons Christ. When others begin to hassle her for what she believes, she doesn't find the idea of having her sins forgiven or of having eternal life with God to be sufficiently adequate to offset the cost she is incurring. When being a Christian doesn't "feel good" anymore, then she wants nothing more to do with it. She reasons like this. "I thought that when you became a Christian God promised to take care of you. Look at my life, my boyfriend broke up with me (I lost my job. My child is sick. I got in a car accident. My friends won't talk to me anymore. My parents tell me I'm crazy to be going to church.). I'm not getting anything out of*

# THE RULE OF GOD COMES BY HIS WORD

## Matthew 13: 1-9 & 18-23

*Review this weeks catechism question*

### INTRODUCTION

“People watching” is a favorite pastime of some. Imagine that you and a friend are sitting at the mall or another public location and watching the people go by. What things would tip you off that a person is a...

- Packer fan
- GM worker
- Mom
- High School Student
- Deer Hunter
- Fiancé
- Grandparent

While this exercise is based entirely upon superficial and stereotypical characteristics it does point to a significant truth. Some of what you are can be seen by how you act and or look. If a person spends large amounts of time fishing, talks about fishing with all who will listen, wears hats with fishing lures attached to it and spends money on fishing equipment, then you would probably be right to say this person loves fishing. He or she is a fisherman.

Jesus by telling the parable of the Sower and the seed is describing this same reality when it comes to our relationship with God. He is seeking to answer the question, how does a person know that he or she belongs to the kingdom of God? What are the “signs” that show that we are people who love God, who are truly Christians. The vast majority of people that Jesus spoke to, like us, presumed that God liked them. So Jesus is seeking to help them and us know whether or not this presumption is correct.

**Your response to the message of Christ shows what kind of a heart you have and where you stand with God**

### STUDY

1. Tell the story of the parable of the Sower and the seed from vv. 1-8 in your own words. Which elements of the story seem most important?

2. According to v. 19:
- What does the seed represent?

*The seed is the “message about the kingdom”. In summary form we would say that the message of the kingdom is that Jesus is the King and Savior God has appointed to rule over and save his people. His people are those who trust Jesus enough to obey him.*

- Who is the Sower?

*The Sower is anyone who tells the message of the kingdom. In this context it is Jesus himself. It is also the apostles and then every Christian pastor and every Christian who ever tells another person about Jesus as God’s Savior and Judge.*

- What do the soils represent?

*The soils are people or more directly, people’s hearts. The various soils represent the various responses there are to the message of the kingdom. Notice the repeated phrase, “the man who hears the word”. Jesus is not teaching that 25% of those who hear the message are “path” soil and 25% are “rocky” soil, etc. Rather he is seeking to show how different people respond to the same message.*

3. How does the person represented by the “path” soil respond to the message of the kingdom?

*He does not understand the message about the kingdom. His heart is impervious to God’s truth and so it has no effect on him. Therefore, Satan takes the message away from the person who hears and does not understand.*

4. What does it mean to “not understand”? Why does the person not understand? See Psalm 14: 2-3, Jeremiah 5: 20-25, John 1: 3-5, 3: 19-20 & Matt. 13: 13-15.

*He does not mean by this word that the message is difficult to understand or that these are people who have some sort of learning disability. He is not talking about mental capacity. Rather he means that these are people who willfully, on purpose, refuse to acknowledge and love what is blazing*