

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, 859 5th St., Hancock, MN 56244  
www.hancocklutheran.org  
Pastor Gregg Bitter (320) 392-5313 - GreggBitter@gmail.com  
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## **God's Word Produces a Harvest. So Welcome It with Understanding Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The word from God through which the Jesus speaks to us is Matthew 13

*That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear."*

*"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." (NIV11)*

Dear friends in Christ, fellow saints washed clean in the blood of our risen Savior:

God's Word works. "It will not return to me empty" (Isaiah 55:11 NIV84), the Lord God himself promises, as you heard in the First Lesson today.

But what do we see? Many despise and ridicule God's Word as if the Bible were ancient myths garbled through the ages. Others say that the Bible is an important book, but their actions reveal that they do not believe what it says. Others claim to believe it but seldom open the Bible and rarely come to church. If God's Word is so powerful and effective, why doesn't it unite all Christians and convert all unbelievers?

And what about our own hearts? If God's Word is so powerful and effective, why doesn't it bring us greater peace and joy? Why do we still struggle with doubts and apprehensions? Why aren't we happier? Does God's Word really work?

Yes, dear friends, yes it does. God's word works. It produces a harvest. God's Word produces a harvest, so welcome his word with understanding. That's the theme to take to heart today.

God's Word produces a harvest. Jesus made that clear at the end of the parable. Talking about the seed the farmer was sowing, he said, "Still others fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown" (Matthew 13:8 NIV84). This is God's good and gracious will, dear friends. This seed, as Jesus clearly states later, is the message of the kingdom, the word of God (Matthew 13:19; Mark 4:14). The Lord God earnestly wants and fervently desires for his word to be planted in hearts, so that his kingdom comes to us and to many others. For his word brings us Jesus to reign in our hearts as our King. His word brings us the victory over sin, Satan, and death, the victory that our King, Christ Jesus, won for us. Welcome his word with understanding. That's God's good and gracious will for you, dear friend.

But will that word save everyone who happens to hear it? Jesus gives a very clear answer through this parable. No, not all who hear will be saved. Is God's Word defective for some, then? That answer is also very clear. No, the same seed, the same Word of God, is sown by the farmer. And as you well know, life is in that seed. It is the living and active Word of God. Wherever it's sown, wherever it's correctly preached and taught, it has the power to produce a harvest.

But it doesn't always, does it? The problem though is not in the seed; it's in the heart. And with the words, "He who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 13:9 NIV84), Jesus calls on each of us to pay attention and examine our own heart. He doesn't tell this parable as if we should examine other people's hearts and label them as hard or rocky or weedy. He who has ears, let him hear. Let each of us examine our own heart.

"When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path" (Matthew 13:19 NIV84). In Jesus' day, farmers didn't have GPS controlled planters determining exactly where to plant the seed. Rather the farmer took a handful of barley or wheat and scattered it around. Some would fall on the hard path and not sprout at all.

Some hear God's Word, they may even come to church regularly and read their Bible at home, but they do not understand how much we need our Savior. They do not understand that we were dead in sin and could not come to Jesus or make a decision to follow him. They do not understand that our own works in no way at all make us right with God, but only Jesus and his righteousness can cover our guilt. Only Jesus and his blood has paid for our sins. They view hearing God's Word as a way to earn God's favor. They look to the Bible as a rule book telling us what to do to attract God toward us.

How easily those thoughts can infect our own hearts and harden them once again! The devil can be so tricky this way. He starts on the edges. He tells us that we can ignore certain parts of the Bible. Then he keeps picking away one part of God's word after another, like birds eating seeds. And before we know it our hearts once again become as hard as they were when we began life. We might still hear God's word out of habit, but it falls on a hard path.

Rather, dear friends, welcome God's Word with understanding. Don't simply let it lie on the surface as empty words. Think about his message, ponder it, work it into the soil of your heart seeking to understand what God is saying so that you believe his promises and apply his word to your life. Welcome his word with understanding so that it produces a harvest.

“The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away” (Matthew 13:20, 21 NIV84). When we understand that by grace alone God has freely forgiven guilty sinner, yes forgiven even you and me, because Jesus paid the penalty for us by his death in our place, what joy! What relief! What gladness! But if we build our faith on those happy feelings, it has no roots. In some places in Palestine the bedrock was so close to the surface that there was only a inch or so of soil. The crop looked good for awhile, until the sun dried it up.

As faith sends its roots deep down into God's word, we learn that the Christian life is not a series of emotional highs. Rather times of trouble, sadness, and pain come to the Christian as well as the unbeliever. In fact, following Jesus attracts the worlds hatred so that believing God's word actually brings us more ridicule and persecution. Will you give up on God's word so that your faith withers away under the heat of troubles? Or will you send your roots all the more deeply into his word?

Notice that it's the heat of the sun that dries up the plant in the rocky soil. But its the same sun that plants need to grow and produce a harvest. God wants to use the troubles of this life and the persecution that comes with his word to more deeply root your faith in that word. Always seek to grow more deeply into his word. Never be satisfied that you already know enough. Who knows how hot the day may be? To welcome God's word means to continually be sending our roots deeper and deeper into that word to understand his message better and better. That is how his word produces a harvest within us.

“The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22 NIV84). If you want to see how harmful weeds are for a good crop, come and look at my garden.

What are the weeds that want to choke out your faith? Jesus lists two categories. One is the worries of life. Those worries might change over the decades. In the fifties and sixties many worried about nuclear war. Today we worry about terrorism. Worries change as we grow. A child worries about losing mommy or daddy. A young person worries about making friends, school work, or winning the game. Young adults worry about job and family. As the years go by, they mature into worries about grandchildren, retirement, and our own health. But worry is the opposite of faith. Rather than trusting God, it doubts God. It chocks out faith.

The other category Jesus lists is the deceitfulness of wealth. Even though we might say that money can't buy happiness, how much of our money don't we spend trying to make ourselves happier? Wealth holds out that empty promise: “If I had just a little

bit more ..." But such thinking is trusting money rather than God. It chokes out faith.

Do you see how dangerous the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth are? Pull out those weeds day after day before they choke out your faith. Just as a garden needs to be weeded until the harvest, so also we need to keep weeding our hearts throughout life. And let God's word grow all the more thickly within you, giving less room for the weeds to grow. Welcome his word with understanding so that it produces a harvest.

God's Word works. Keep on letting it grow in your own heart and scatter it to the hearts of others. The sower spread the seed no matter where it would land. As God's Word produces a harvest in you, spread that word to others. Don't worry or wonder whether your sowing seed on to hard paths, rocky ground, weedy patches, or good soil. The word changes hearts, just as it changed our hearts. Our heart was cold, solid stone, but his word shattered it. Our heart was dead in sin, but his word made it alive in Christ. That word does the same in others as we share his word. Keep on welcoming his word with understanding, so that it produces a harvest in you. Keep on sowing his word generously so that it produces a harvest in others. God's word works.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.