**THE CERTAINTY OF A KINGDOM HARVEST**

**(Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23)**

 I grew up in OKC. Since I was born, OKC has had three different AAA minor league baseball teams. Over the last several years, the OKC Dodgers have played at the Bricktown ballpark. Prior to the Dodgers, the first team to occupy the newly built ballpark in Bricktown was the OKC Red Hawks. But the longest running minor league team in OKC was the 89ers. They lasted for 35 seasons, from 1962 to 1997, and they played at All Sport’s Stadium. It was next to the OKC fairgrounds, and wasn’t nearly as luxurious as the $34 million Bricktown ballpark.

 Growing up as I did in OKC, I assumed that the land run of 1889 was the only land run there was in Oklahoma. Moving to Stillwater did nothing to change that assumption because on the evening of April 22, 1889, after the land run had begun at High Noon, the township of Stillwater was already a tent city numbering 300 people.

 It wasn’t until I moved to Enid that I learned about the Cherokee Outlet or the Cherokee Strip, as it is more commonly known. Our land run was in September of 1893. It was the sixth of seven land runs in Oklahoma, and it was the largest, by far.

 As a comparison, 50,000 people participated in the initial land run of ’89, and some 2 million acres were claimed. In the land run of 1893, 6.5 million acres of land were up for grabs and some 150,000 settlers crossed the line. The Cherokee Strip is larger than the states of Connecticut, Delaware, and Rhode Island combined. It is makes up 13 or our counties.

 This past week I met an elderly gentleman named Charles. Charles is a retired farmer, but he still lives on the land that was homesteaded by his grandfather after the run on 1893. I believe his farm is close to Aline in Major County.

 His sons farm the land today. I talked with him about the wheat crop and the difficulty they face harvesting their wheat this season. Charles explained to me, “We plant the best seed we can get, and we do the best job we can do planting that seed, but then it is up to the Lord to grow that wheat.”

 I thought about Charles as I was working on today’s message. Today, we are going to look at the first of at least eight different parables that Jesus taught in Matthew 13. Jesus spoke these parables to explain the nature of the Kingdom. Seven times in this chapter, Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like . . .” and then He told a parable about the Kingdom. The only time He didn’t say those words prior to speaking a parable in this chapter is when He taught the first parable, but when He gave His interpretation of that parable later to His disciples, He mentioned the Kingdom of heaven; so, this first parable is about the Kingdom, also.

 We are going to ask the Holy Spirit to help us understand what Jesus had to say about the nature of God’s Kingdom. I am convinced that if we fail to understand what the Kingdom is about, then we fail to understand the basic message of the Bible and the central message of Jesus. Jesus spoke more about the Kingdom that any other single subject.

 Now, let’s look at this first parable and Jesus’ explanation of it to His disciples (13:1-9, 18-23).

 The main point of this parable is that the Kingdom harvest is certain. It is inevitable that when the good seed of God’s word is sown, it will bear fruit. This morning, we are going to look at **why** we can bank on a Kingdom harvest, **when** this Kingdom harvest will come, and **where** it will take place.

**I. THE KINGDOM HARVEST IS CERTAIN BECAUSE THE SEED IS POWERFUL.**

 According to Jesus’ interpretation of His own parable, the seed represents the word of God, and it is the word that is used to bring about a great harvest (v. 23). That truth is entirely consistent with the teaching of Scripture. Isaiah recorded the promise of God in Isaiah 55:10-11, “My word will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” God’s word is powerful, and whenever it is preached, it brings about exactly what God wants it to accomplish.

 Let’s consider a few qualities about seeds that also characterize God’s word. **1) Seeds are small when compared to what they produce.** Look at 13:31-32.

 How much of God’s word does it take to change a life? Before my 9th birthday, I sat in my pastor’s office, and he shared with me four or five verses of Scripture that transformed my life (Rom. 3:23; 6:23, 5:8, 10:9-10).

 **2) Seeds work secretly.** You can’t see a seed growing. Seeds are buried in the ground, and they work mysteriously. Likewise, you can’t observe the word of God at work, either.

 **3) Seeds must be buried to work.** A seed is no good until it is placed in the ground. God’s word will have no effect on a person’s life until it finds a place in his heart to grow.

 **4) The seed is the secret to growth.** A farmer or a gardener can work the soil, till it, fertilize it, and water it, but he cannot bring anything to life. He is dependent on the life-giving power of the seed.

 You and I can witness, preach, testify, and encourage others but if someone is going to be saved, it will be a result of the life-giving power of God’s word. Paul taught, “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word” (Rom. 10:17).

 I have shared this story before, and I’m going to share it again, and I will probably share it in the future because it is one of my favorite stories. One day, a missionary tried to give a NT to a man who seemed very discontent with life. The man warned the missionary that he would just tear out the pages and use them to roll cigarettes. The missionary responded, “I understand, but at least promise to read the page before you smoke it.” The man agreed, and the two went their separate ways.

 Fifteen years later, those two men met at a religious convention. The Scripture-smoking pagan had given his life to Christ and was serving as a full-time church evangelist. At the conference he gave his testimony. He said, “I smoked Matthew, and I smoked Mark, and I smoked Luke. But when I got to John 3:16, I couldn’t smoke anymore. My life was changed from that moment.”

 If you and I want to see lives changed and a harvest of people brought into God’s Kingdom, we must plant the seed of God’s word. Why can we be certain of a Kingdom harvest? We can be certain because the seed is powerful.

**II. THE KINGDOM HARVEST IS CERTAIN WHEN THE SOWER IS FAITHFUL.**

 Regardless of how powerful the seed may be, it will make no difference in the life of anyone if that seed is never sown. For the seed to grow, there must be someone who goes out scattering the seed.

 Listen again to the parable: 3-4a, 5a, 7a, 8a. Notice that the farmer sowed his seed indiscriminately. He didn’t say to himself, “I think the seed will grow here, but I don't think it will grow here; so, I won’t scatter seed in this area.” He simply scattered seed as he went.

 As we said before, the seed stands for the word of God, but Jesus did not specify exactly who the farmer signified. I believe the farmer represents every believer, because every Christian has a responsibility to scatter the seed of God’s word. You are the farmer, and I am the farmer. We are not to decide where we think the seed will best take root; we are to simply scatter as we go. The Great Commission tells us to make disciples as we are going through the world.

 If you are a student, you are to share God’s word with your friends at school. Adults, we are to share the truths of Scripture with our co-workers. We are all to let our neighbors and those we know have the opportunity to hear the life-changing message of God’s word through our personal witness. We are all to scatter the seed of God’s word as we journey through life.

 Peter wrote in his first letter, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have . . .” (3:15). Are you always ready to scatter God’s word? Or do you say to yourself, “I don’t think this person is ready to hear or receive my witness; I just need to pray for him first.” Well, you do need to pray for him, but it is not up to us to judge the soil. We are to scatter the seed.

 His name was John Chapman. He was born in Georgia in 1774, and he died in 1845. At the young age of 23 he entered Pennsylvania. As he traveled the Allegheny River to the Saint Mary’s River, he planted apple orchards. You probably know him better by the name he gave to himself –Johnny Appleseed.

 Apple seeds, however, were not the only seeds that Mr. Chapman planted. It is said that whenever he met someone, he would tear out a page from a Bible and give that person a portion of God’s word. Johnny planted the word of God into the hearts of people as he traveled about the country.

 Do you call yourself a Christian, a disciple of Christ? Then you and I are to plant the word of God in the lives of those we meet. The harvest will certainly come. **Why** will it come? Because the seed is powerful. **When** will it come? When the sower is faithful. Who is the sower? You and me.

**III. THE KINGDOM HARVEST IS CERTAIN WHERE THE SOIL IS FERTILE.**

 In this passage, four different kinds of soil are described. Only one soil is fit to receive the seed in such a way that the seed will grow and bear fruit.

 ***1) There Is the Soil of a Closed Heart.***

 Jesus described this person in v. 19. This person has a hard heart and will not allow the word of God to penetrate his or her life.

 You’ve met people who have shut their minds to the possibility that God’s word is true. They refuse to allow the word to gain entry into their lives. Some people have a closed heart because they have a **proud heart.** They think they know it all already. Some have **fearful hearts.** They don’t want to admit that God might be real because they are afraid of what that will mean to their lifestyle. Some have **angry hearts.** They are mad at God because He didn’t come through for them when they prayed. Now, they don’t want to have anything to do with Him. Some have **wounded hearts.** They have been hurt by the thoughtless words and deeds of other Christians. To protect themselves, they have closed themselves off to those who call themselves Christians.

 Don’t close your heart to God’s word.

 ***2) There Is the Soil of a Shallow Heart.***

 Look at v. 20. In the land of Israel, it is common for there to be a thin layer of topsoil covering a shelf of limestone rock. In such soil it is possible for a seed to sprout, but the growth will be unable to take root, and when the sun beats down upon it, the plant will wither and die.

 There are those who receive God’s word quickly, but they have embraced the word with their emotions and not their wills. Since they lack commitment and depth, they fall away after a short time.

 You and I need a faith that is deeper than surface level. We are to let your roots sink down deep into the Lord. In his letter to the church at Colosse, Paul prayed, “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

 I like Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of that passage. He wrote in part, “You know your way around the faith. Now do what you’ve been taught. School’s out; quit studying the subject and start *living* it! And let your living spill over into thanksgiving.”

 The reason so many people fall away from the faith after facing adversity is that they have no depth. The way to grow up is to grow down. Go deep with God and His word. Don’t settle for a shallow faith. It won’t be enough when life gets tough, and believe me, life can get tough.

 ***3. There is the Soil of a Crowded Heart.***

 Some soil is infested with thorns, and the thorns choke out the new growth. That is descriptive of those whose lives are filled with other concerns (v. 22). Is your life marked by constant busyness or a multitude of worldly concerns? Are you in danger of crowding out the word of God? The word of God should now and always occupy the number one priority in your life.

 ***4. There Is the Soil of a Receptive Heart.***

 The person who has a receptive heart is the one who hears, receives, and orders his life by the word of God (v. 23). Notice that what makes this person or his soil different from the others is not what he does, but what he does not do. He simply does not do anything to get in the way. He doesn’t close himself off; he doesn't let an unwillingness to make a commitment or lesser things hinder the progress and growth of the seed. This soil simply lets the seed take root and grow. The seed will be faithful to grow if we will just do not get in the way.

 I know a man back in Stillwater who is a soil scientist. His friends call him the dirt doctor. He once told me that he and his colleagues were doing some work in Pawnee County. He said that in that one county alone there are 80 named soils and hundreds of other types of soil that aren’t even named.

 Planet earth contains a multitude of different kinds of soil, but in the spiritual realm there are only four types of soil, and those soils represent the human heart.

 There is . . .

1. The Soil of a Closed Heart.
2. The Soil of a Shallow Heart.
3. The Soil of a Crowded Heart.
4. The Soil of a Receptive Heart.

 \*In his book, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens,* Neil Cole warned, “Our churches are full of bad, unfruitful soil. A common refrain from pastors is that 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people. Re-read this parable and you will understand why in a new light.”

 Instead of spending an inordinate amount of time trying to get church members to take God more seriously, we need to invest our time in planting where the soil is more fertile.

 There is a saying, “Bad people make good soil—there’s a lot of fertilizer in their lives.”

 Every time we come to church or whenever we come into contact with God’s word, we need to ask ourselves, “What is the condition of my heart? What is my soil like right now?” Then we need to pray, “Lord, make the soil of my heart receptive to Your word.”

 We can be certain the harvest will come.

* Why? Because the seed is powerful.
* When? When the sowers are faithful.
* And where will the harvest take place? It will occur in the fertile soil of a receptive heart.

 We already have the powerful seed. So, let me ask you, “Are you a faithful sower, and do you have fertile soil?” I have no doubt that over time there will be a great harvest for this church, but will there be a harvest in your life? Will you let God's word enter your heart and grow the fruit God desires?

 There was an elderly man who was known for his ability to give wise answers to difficult questions. One day a young man decided to trick him. He approached the older man and said, “I have a small bird in my hands. Is the bird dead or alive?” The young man had a plan. If the older man said the bird was alive, he was going to give the poor bird a quick squeeze, thus killing it, and he would open his hand to reveal a dead bird. If the older man said that bird was alive, he would open his hands to reveal the live bird.

 When the young man asked, “Is this bird dead or alive?” the older man looked deep into his eyes and answered, “It is as you wish.”

 So it is with you.

* Will you receive the word of God? It is as you wish.
* Will you obey the word of God? It is as you wish.
* Will you plant the word of God into the lives of others? It is as you wish?

 God has given this Church everything it needs to be part of a great harvest. If we will be careful to avoid the substitute seed that the world has to offer, and if we will plant the good seeds wherever we go, that seed is going to find some good soil, and the harvest will most certainly come.

 The apostle Paul had some wonderfully encouraging words to seed-sowers. We will close with what he wrote to the churches of Galatia. Look at Galatians 6:6-10.

 Don’t give up. Keep sowing the good seed of God’s word.