

Matthew 13:1-9

Baseball has been a part of America's lifestyle for over 100 years now. Ever since an army officer named Abner Doubleday **invented** it back in the 1800's, baseball has captured the hearts of the American people. Even with the Milwaukee Brewers playing below their potential, and running in the upper **middle** of the pack, we still watch the games, or at least check the box scores to see what has been happening with our favorite members of the team. At least during the **summer** months, baseball is part of the very **fiber** of most American households.

But it's **not** that way for **everyone**. Perhaps you heard about the Milwaukee man who stopped going to all the Brewers games. No - it wasn't because of their **record**, but rather, he had a whole bunch of his **own** reasons. For starters, he said that the baseball people were only after his **money**, and that every time he went to a game, it cost a little **more**. He also felt that some of the people with whom he **sat** at the stadium were not very **friendly**. They made no effort to make him feel at **home**. Besides that, the seats at Miller Park were kind of **uncomfortable**, and there were many days when the air was just too **hot** and **stuffy**. Now, I don't want to make this guy sound like a **complainer**, but he claimed that even though he attended Brewers games **regularly**, neither the team **manager** nor anyone **else** connected with the Brewers organization had ever **called** on him at his **home**. And even if they **had**, he **still** wouldn't have been too keen on baseball. He felt that the **rules** of the game were rather **restrictive**, and that the umpires made some decisions with which he simply couldn't **agree**. He also had the feeling that there were a lot of **hypocrites** at the ballpark - people who came to **show off**, or just to see who **else** was there. Just to make matters **worse**, there were those games that went into **extra innings**, and of course that made him **late** in getting **home**, and kept him from doing some of the **other** things which he had planned. Besides, the guy who plays the **organ** at the stadium played a bunch of songs he had never even **heard** before, and he had a hard time following along. I could go on talking about this guy for a long time yet, but to make a long story short, he finally came to the conclusion that he didn't like baseball because his **parents** took him to too many games when he was young. He decided that he is going to wait until his children **grow up**, and let them decide for **themselves**.

You know, come to think of it, maybe he wasn't talking about **baseball** after all! Maybe he was talking about going to **church**! The excuses sound pretty much the **same** to me. And **actually**, there are some pretty striking **parallels** between

Baseball And The Christian's Life. This morning, we're going to look at some of those parallels as we consider Jesus' parable of the Sower and the Seed.

Now since this parable has **nine** verses, I thought it might be interesting to treat them like the nine **innings** of a baseball game. So, let's take a look at the first **three** verses. *"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.'"* There's really not much happening in these verses - just a little background information. The same thing is **generally** true in a **baseball** game as well. The nine batters on each team have an opportunity to see a variety of pitches, and the pitchers gradually get into the flow of the game. In our text, it appears that Jesus had been **isolating** Himself from the crowds for a while, but now He was getting back into the **swing** of things. The crowds had not deserted Him during the interim. The only **real** information which we receive in these initial verses, is that Jesus is going to be talking about a farmer sowing **seed**.

However, the emphasis quickly shifts from the **seed** to the **soil**. We read, *"As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the **path**, and the **birds** came and ate it up."* Here we are, early in the **fourth** inning, and the **bad guys** hit a home run! Some of the seed fell on the **path** - the place where the farmer **walked** over and over again. Of course, that soil was hard-packed, and there was nothing for the seed to fall **into**. So, it just sat on **top** of the ground, until a **bird** came by and snatched it up. Perhaps a good parallel would be the way a **robin** gobbles down a big night crawler after a heavy rainfall. The worm crawls up onto the sidewalk in order to keep from drowning, but when the bird comes along he has nowhere to go. The night crawler doesn't stand much of a chance. Jesus later tells us that He was talking about a man who didn't **understand** His **Word**. So, the **devil** came, and snatched it **away** from him. Understanding God's Word is **vitaly** important for us.

Now let's move on to the **fifth** inning. Jesus continued, *"Some fell on **rocky** places, where it did not have **much** soil. It sprang up **quickly** because the soil was **shallow**."* This looks like a **rally** for the **good guys**. There's not **much** soil, but the plant springs up **quickly** anyway. So, score a run for **our team**. However, in the **sixth** inning, that rally is quickly **crushed**, for our text continues, *"But when the **sun** came up, the plants were **scorched**, and they **withered** because they had no **root**."* A plant without **roots** is like a hot dog without **ketchup**! A solo

home run is just a flash in the pan. It takes **roots** - the **basics** - following the **fundamentals** of baseball - to string together a **series** of runs, and **sustain** a rally.

That's true of the **Christian** as well. Many times Christians stand here at the altar as **confirmands**, and **promise** to sacrifice **everything** - even **life itself** - rather than fall away from their Savior. It's a **bold** and **sincere** confession of their faith. But as the weeks, and months, and years go by - and as the **troubles** and **persecutions** mount in their lives - many times those confessions fall by the wayside, because they were not **sustained** with a steady diet of the **basics** of Christianity - God's **Word** and the **Sacraments**.

Back to the ball game. As we move into the seventh inning, it appears that the **bad** guys are going to turn this game into a **rout**. We read, "*Other seed fell among **thorns**, which grew up and **choked** the plants.*" Those of you who are **gardeners** know what **that's** all about. Weeds **always** grow faster than plants. You have to **remove** the thorns and thistles if you want your plants to be able to **grow**. In **baseball** the picture looks like **this**. A batter is in a **terrible** hitting slump. But he **finally** gets a perfect pitch, right down the center of the plate. He literally **crunches** the ball, sending a searing line drive down the third base line - but unfortunately, it's straight at the third baseman. The batter did what he was **supposed** to do, but he lost **anyway** - because someone **else** was already **there**. Let's remember that the **devil** plays great **defense**. He will always try to put **obstacles** in the way of our faith - things like the **worries** of this life, and the **deceitfulness** of wealth. If we can't get **past** those things, they will **swallow up** our faith.

Well, it's time to get into the **relief** innings, numbers eight and nine. We read in verses 8 and 9, "*Still other seed fell on **good** soil, where it produced a **crop** - a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear.*" Finally the **good** guys come through. We score some **runs** - **lots** of runs - with players producing 30, 60, and even 100 times their potential. How? Not because the **good** guys are so **good**, but because the **seed** is good. Although the soil is called **good**, it is the **seed** that produces different results in the very same soil. One of the biggest questions in baseball today is: How much is a player **worth**? How much is it **worth** to have an **Alex Rodriguez**, or **Randy Johnson**, or **Roger Clemens** on your team? Let's put it **this** way. If a ball team makes a profit of 10, 20, or 30 million dollars a year, and they can attribute it to having a certain **player** on the team, the owners will be **happy**, won't they? Of course, at the same time,

they won't pay every player the same exorbitant amount, because they won't expect the same **financial** results from every player on their roster. Just because **one** player performs at a certain level, that doesn't mean that **all** the players will perform at the **same** level. That wouldn't be very **realistic**.

Perhaps one of the reasons we enjoy baseball so much is that it's such a **human** sport. Did you ever stop to realize that baseball is one of the few things in the world where you can **fail** over 50% of the time, and still be a **superstar**? For example, a player who has a batting average of .400 means that he is **failing** to get a hit 60% of the time. Yet, if he **continues** to bat at that pace for an entire season, he will be **guaranteed** a spot in baseball's hall of fame.

What can we **Christians** draw from that example? We need to be very **careful** about what we **expect** from our fellow believers. Even if a person doesn't live up to **our** standards, and doesn't produce the **kind**, or the **volume**, or the **quality** of fruit which we **expect** - nevertheless, if he is producing **any** fruit at all, then he has **faith**. He is a child of **God**, and he is playing on **our team**. We dare not try to claim that each believer has to achieve the same level of sanctification which **we** have achieved. Faith simply doesn't **work** that way.

OK, so we've covered nine innings. And since I wouldn't want people to start to **walk out** because we went into **extra** innings, I think I'll wrap things up with **this** thought. The goal in the game of **baseball** is to get all your players **home**. The goal in the life of a **Christian** is to get your players home **too**. As you and I play the game of **life**, I'll **guarantee** you that we **won't** make all the right moves. We **won't** get a **hit** every time we step up to the plate. We may not even win a majority of the **games** or **battles** against the devil and **his** players. But, if we continue to put our faith and our trust in **Jesus**, we **will** make it **home** to heaven - and that's the **only** thing that really matters. Amen.