

05-13-18 Parable of the Sower

Matt. 13-1-23

Chuck Swindoll relays the following story... *I smile as I remember the Mother's Day card I saw that was really cute. It was a great big card written in little child's printing – little first-grade printing. On the front was a little boy with untied sneakers. He had a wagon, and toys were everywhere. He had a little cut on the his face and there were smudges all over this card. It read, "Mom, I remember that little prayer you used to say for me every day," inside read, "God help you if you ever do that again." ☺*

That story is my only connection to Mother's Day in this sermon. The message has nothing to do with Mother's Day, that why I gave you your own video skit in your honor ☺

Today we are going to start a new mini-series on the Parables of Jesus. We will look at 12 parables of Jesus over the next few Sundays.

John found a Book called [Parables – The Greatest Stories Ever Told](#) by John White

Introduction – READ Parables, p. 4 – Getting the most out of Parables.

Elaborate ...

Jesus told these parables to an audience in His culture and environment. Did you ever hear the expression when a joke doesn't go over well?– "I guess you had to be there!" That's the same with parables. We are at a disadvantage in capturing the depth of meaning or being able to place ourselves into the story, since we are over 2000 years removed from the context. If we study the literary and cultural context, we can get the idea of what's being taught, but we lose the element of surprise that is part of a parable for the most part. The people of Jesus time were sucked into the story as He told it, then Wham! He gets them right where He wants them, and the lesson is delivered with full impact.

Let's start by defining what a parable is. It is an extended metaphor or illustration turned into a story to reel the hearer in. Jesus was a supreme teacher, and He delivered parables with maximum impact. Jesus was accustomed to preaching to large and diverse crowds. "He based each parable on the common, everyday events that made up first-century life." (Parables, p. 5)

Parables usually have one central point. Parables are not allegories. Allegories are stories where the details abound with hidden meanings. Parables are plain, real, understandable stories with a specific lesson and no hidden or mysterious meanings.

Parables were designed and told by Jesus to show us, the hearers, about the Kingdom of God. They demand a response, but often we hear the story and do not respond as desired due to our sin and rebellion. Today we will look at the Parable of the Sower. This may be Jesus' most important parable, since "it provides more clues than any other parable as to the nature of parables and how they should be interpreted. The parable is followed by Christ's own interpretation and discussion of its contents." (Parables, p. 9)

READ: Matt. 13:1-9

How many of you like gardening? Can you relate at all to this story?

I am not into gardening at all. I say – I can kill dirt, and it's true. I have never had a plant live under my care, no matter how hardy it was supposed to be. My friend George gave me a spider plant for my office. I killed it in a couple of months. Mary Ann still has the spider plant from George's office at her home and it's still thriving. Green Thumb/Black Thumb 😊

Jesus told this parable to an agricultural culture. They understood exactly what He was saying, since they lived these conditions out on a daily basis. However, they did not expect Him to relate their daily lives to a lesson about the Kingdom of God. So some got it and others did not.

Let's look at this parable in more detail...

"Have you ever wondered why the same book or the same sermon will produce strikingly different results in different people? How is it, for instance, that some people seem unable to grasp the simplest and most obvious spiritual truths while others are transformed by them? In the parable of the sower, Jesus talks about different types of soil in order to tell us why this happens." (Parables, p. 8). It comes down to the heart of the hearer.

We do not have to guess if this is a parable or not. Vs. 2 tells us plainly that He told stories in the form of parables like this one... Then He begins to tell the story of a farmer sowing seed. This immediately captures the attention of the hearers. They were farmers and can relate. He always tailored the story to the crowd He was addressing.

So, imagine you're a farmer in Jesus' time period. As He begins to tell the story, you're thinking, "yeah – that happens all the time when I'm planting." Jesus is drawing you into the story as you relate to the details and begin to imagine your own experiences with farming. We may not be able to relate to the exact condition of this arid country, but maybe we can relate to our own environment...

Say you are scattering grass seed on your freshly thatched front lawn in the spring time. You are sowing by hand (like I do). You can't control the spray of seed too exactly, so you have these conditions that you hardly notice, but God can use as an illustration to get your attention.

Jesus mentions four type of soil: the footpath, shallow rocky soil, weedy soil, and fertile soil. As you cast the seed on your lawn, some of it sprays onto your concrete or paver front walk. You may or may not even notice this, but you're not going to get down and start picking up the seeds by hand to re-position them, right?

The parable tells us that the birds come and eat that seed – Haven't you seen this with grass seed. Birds come from all over and start eating your seeds. Birds are never good in the Bible. So, the birds come and eat that seed and it's gone. Corinne always plants a vegetable garden. As soon as it's planted, it becomes fair game for birds, squirrels, etc. Even when the sprouts start coming up, the birds snip off the tops with their beaks and leave them. They don't even eat them; they just destroy them. Squirrels dig up everything on a daily basis. It isn't easy to have a fruitful garden with these evil pests around, but they are a part of the environment. This seed doesn't stand a chance.

The Good Seed gets scattered everywhere. It all depends on where it lands that makes the difference. The second type of soil is shallow soil with underlying rock. I think of this as if the grass seed lands in the gutter in front of my house. There is a thin layer of sand, but underneath is rock and pavement. This seed starts to grow quickly, but the roots can't get down to anything substantial. The grass dies as soon as the sun hits it; it just withers and dies.

The third type of soil is thorny or weedy soil. Here the seed actually starts to grow. It has some roots and actually looks pretty good for a while, but the weeds are stronger than the tender shoots and eventually they get choked out by the weeds and also die.

So we're not doing too good so far with our grass planting. Three out four types of soil fail to produce anything. The seed is the same, but the soil is different. The seed that falls on the nicely prepared part of the lawn takes root and grows well and strong. Over time, the lawn looks rich, thick, and green. The parable tells us this is like the seed sown on fertile soil. It produces 30, 60, or 100 times what was sown. It not only grows, but it multiplies. We can't tell ahead of time how much it will multiply, but it will yield something. There's no magic formula for how successful it will be. That's in the hands of God.

Then Jesus says, "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand." Sounds important to me. So that's the parable Jesus told the crowd. However He will explain it to His disciples later on, but first He will give an explanation about teaching in parables in general.

READ: Mt, 13:10-17

v. 10 – “Why do you use parables when you talk to the people?” Jesus’ answer almost sounds mean or unloving. The disciples have been permitted to know the secrets of the Kingdom, while others have not. How could God be so selective? Is this partiality? Doesn’t everyone have the same privileges with God. For God so loved the World – not just certain people. Jesus puts the responsibility on the individual. It’s not God being selective, but the people choose to listen or not. Those who listen to Jesus gain more and more understanding about spiritual things. Those who don’t listen, even what little understanding they may have withers away.

“That is why I use parables, for they look, but they don’t really see. They hear, but they don’t really listen or understand.” v. 13

Then in v. 14-15 Jesus quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10...

***¹⁴ This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that says,
‘When you hear what I say, you will not understand.
When you see what I do, you will not comprehend.***

¹⁵ For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes — so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.’

God isn’t being arbitrary here or selective as to who can receive and who can’t. He just knows who will and who will not get it. We need to examine ourselves and our heart toward God. As Mike said last week, if we are finding ourselves in places Paul instructed us we shouldn’t be (anxiety, worry, turmoil, etc.) we may need to examine our walk more closely and come back to that place of our first love for God – in Christ.

Jesus tells His true followers... v. 16-17

¹⁶ “But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. ¹⁷ I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn’t see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn’t hear it.

Matt. 11:25 – Jesus prayed this prayer, “O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike.”

1 Cor. 2:10 – “But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God’s deep secrets.”

1 Cor. 2:14 – “But people who aren’t spiritual can’t receive these truths from God’s Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can’t understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.”

The disciples and we who walk in the Spirit with God are given spiritual understanding and knowledge. But, we need to be in the Lord – all in. We must always be growing in our relationship with the Lord. God will cultivate our spirit to be in tune with His Spirit. The Bible will come alive for us, and we will understand spiritual things more clearly. Those around us, while they have the same opportunity to know and understand spiritual things, do not take the responsibility seriously enough and eventually fall away from the faith and are lost.

READ: Mt. 13:18-23

You do not have to read too deeply into the meaning of this or any parable. Jesus wanted them and us to understand what the meaning of His teaching was. However, is your heart receptive to His teaching? This depends on the condition of your heart. Will you act on it?

“How easy it is to agree with Christ with no intention of obeying. It is easy to denounce worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth and still do nothing to change our ways. In light of eternal life with God, are your present worries justified? If you had everything you could want but forfeited eternal life with God, would those things be so desirable?”

The four types of soil represent different responses to God’s message. People respond differently because they are in different states of readiness. Some are hardened, others are shallow, others are contaminated by distracting worries, and some are receptive. How has God’s Word taken root in your life? What kind of soil are you?”

So, why are the parables so important for us to understand?

Mt. 13:34-35 – Jesus always used stories and illustrations like these when speaking to the crowds. In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables. This fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet: “I will speak to you in parables. I will explain things hidden since the creation of the world.”

If you want to know the hidden secrets of the Kingdom of God – study the parables. Your heart has to be in the right place of receptiveness in order to truly hear – though. Are you the footpath, the shallow soil with rocky foundation, the weed-choked soil, or the fertile soil? It will make all the difference in your spiritual life and your relationship with God. Don’t you want all He has for you? It’s up to you. You have the choice how deep you want to go with God personally.