

WHAT ARE PARABLES?

- A parable is literally something “cast alongside” something else. Jesus’ parables were stories that were “cast alongside” a truth in order to illustrate that truth. His parables were teaching aids.
 - They use a common, culturally relevant story to reveal a moral, spiritual, or Kingdom truth.
 - They reveal the heart of Jesus in practical ways to be lived out.
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WHY DID JESUS SPEAK IN PARABLES?

- We are hard-wired for stories.

The Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would speak in parables:

Psalms 78:1-2 ¹O my people, listen to my instructions. Open your ears to what I am saying, ²for I will speak to you in a parable. I will teach you hidden lessons from our past.

- Jesus didn’t always speak in parables. It wasn’t until part way through His ministry that He shifted to teaching mostly through parables.
 - In Matthew, after chapter 12, Jesus uses parables more frequent, and they become less self-explanatory.

When the disciples asked Jesus why He spoke in parables, He responded:

Matthew 13:11-17 ¹¹He replied, “You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others are not. ¹²To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them...”

JESUS WASN’T SAYING THERE’S NO WAY FOR PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

- He goes on to explain that He is referring to Isaiah 6:9-10.
- In Isaiah 6, God was letting Isaiah know that the people would not listen to his message. They couldn’t understand because of their hard hearts. He was telling Isaiah that if the people really wanted to hear His message and have a changed heart, they would hear.
- Jesus was saying the same thing to His disciples that God spoke to Isaiah.
 - When speaking of the heart, it isn’t talking about feelings. To a Jew, your heart is the seat of your volition—your mind and your will working together.

A CHANGED HEART IS ALWAYS THE GOAL OF THE MESSAGE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD!

JESUS WAS REFERENCING ISAIAH 6 BECAUSE OF WHAT HAPPENED IN MATTHEW 12.

- Jesus healed a demon-possessed man, but the Pharisees said Jesus was only able to cast out demons because He was getting His power from Satan.
- The religious leaders wouldn’t accept Jesus’ message, even when He performed miracles to prove who He is, so He compares them to the people of Isaiah’s day—they would not allow God to change their hearts.
- So Jesus starts speaking in parables. Most won’t understand what He is saying, but those who really want to know the truth will understand.
- Jesus explains to the disciples that those who don’t want to understand won’t. But for those that want to know about Christ and are willing to allow the Holy Spirit to transform their hearts and minds, they will.
- **This should be a warning to us, as well.** Do we truly want to understand God’s Truth and to allow our hearts to be transformed so that it causes us to make changes in the way we live?
- **This is also a promise:** if we will seek God with hearts that want to understand and be transformed, He will do it!

THE SOWER

Matthew 13:1-9 ¹Later that same day Jesus left the house and sat beside the lake. ²A large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat there and taught as the people stood on the shore. ³He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: "Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. ⁴As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. ⁵Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. ⁶But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. ⁸Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! ⁹Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."

- o Without an explanation, you can see where the disciples might have been confused.

WITH PARABLES, THERE IS A CENTRAL TRUTH THAT IS BEING TAUGHT. WE DON'T GET TO CHOOSE OUR OWN MEANING.

- It was actually a good thing that they were trying to discern the meaning.
- In Matthew 13:18-23, Jesus explains the parable:
 - o The seed is the message of the Kingdom of Heaven—the gospel.
 - o The soil is our heart. As people hear the message, we receive it in one of four ways:
 1. The hard ground represents someone who is hardened by sin.
 2. The stony ground represents someone who receives the Word gladly; however, there is no heart-change, so when trouble arises, his so-called faith quickly disappears.
 3. The thorny ground depicts someone who seems to receive the Word, but the things of this world take his time and attention away.
 4. The good soil is someone who has heard and received the Word of God and allows it to take root and grow within his life. This person represents true salvation that bears good fruit. There is true heart-change.

THIS MESSAGE SHOULD CAUSE US TO LOOK AT OUR OWN LIVES.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF WITH REGARD TO THE FOUR RESPONSES TO THE WORD?

- The first three soils received the seed (gospel) in at least some fashion. The seed penetrated people's hearts to a point, but they didn't let it in grow.
 - o **Will you allow the seed to penetrate to the point where it can continue to grow?**
- Recognize that the devil is actively trying to thwart God's plan. (See 1 Peter 5:8)
- God wants to remove the "rocks" in your heart. (See Ezekiel 36:26-27)
 - o Some rocks are too heavy for us to remove ourselves. We need the body of Christ to help us.
- Don't let weeds crowd out the Kingdom of Heaven in your life.
 - o Your life, your heart, is like soil. You only have the capacity to grow so much.
 - o Your life only has so many nutrients. **What are you going to feed?** (See Matthew 6:24)
 - o A seed that is not fed will not bear fruit.
 - o When you receive the gospel, you are receiving One who will penetrate every area of your life.
Are you ready for that!?
- This message also talks about what we are supposed to be about as Christians. While Jesus is certainly the Sower in this story, if we are Believers, so are we! (See **2 Corinthians 5:18-20**)
- Throughout this series, we will keep coming back to this: Jesus revealed the truth about God's Kingdom.
Do you really want to know it? Will you allow God to change your heart?

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS IN LIFE GROUP OR WITH YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS:

Passages to consider: Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15

1. What from the sermon caught your attention?
2. Take a look at one of the passages: Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, or Luke 8:4-15. What's the context of the parable Jesus is telling? A) What is happening around Him? B) Who is listening? Who is He speaking to?
3. What details of the story did Jesus focus on when He explained the parable? A) What was the explanation He gave?
4. What understanding do you gain about God, people, and life through what Jesus taught?
5. What impact does that understanding have on you? A) To whom could you tell the story Jesus told?

Passage to prepare for next week: Matthew 13:31-50