

Week 1

Parables/The Parable of the Sower A Parable, Video, Scripture & Lesson

Opening Exercise #1:

Parables... in your own words, try to capture a good definition. Think of the function a parable had in Jesus' ministry. How often were they used and in what context?

- How would you define the term: "parable"?

Consider This:

Parables are one of the many tools that Jesus used in his teaching.

- Parables always conveyed a purpose
- They were teachings that could be interpreted, remembered, and applied
- They were designed to provoke, challenge, and inspire
- Parables reveal (a) what we already know or (b) *ought to* already be aware of
- Parables were taught so that they could be retold among people in our own communities.
- They were relatable and held a component of something profound – an “ah-ha” lesson
- They were investigations all in their own telling: they required thought and application

Opening Exercise #2:

- Why might Jesus have highlighted someone like “The Good Samaritan” in his day? Who do you think his audience may have been?

- 1) The Samaritans were despised. Practically no one felt they were “good.” They were never considered worthy of being classified as a hero. **Is there anything Jesus may have wanted his audience to consider about the outcast? The topic of inclusion or exclusion?**
- 2) **Who would be a modern-day “Good Samaritan” that you can think up: someone who is commonly despised (now) that a teacher like Jesus may use in a parable as the hero?**
- 3) **Can you think of an example in the Bible where Jesus uses a tax collector as the hero of the passage? (He did this in both teaching and in real world examples.)**

Hint: look up Luke 19:1-10

- Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to everything: from leaven to a mustard seed. Jesus wasn't afraid of anything when it came to making the point, and he often used hyperbole when describing God's amazing love.
- Jesus used humor and the profound: he liked to take our understandings and flip them on their head. Jesus tells story in memorable and relatable ways – he wants to engage with us and make us think. Jesus took the very things we walked beside everyday and didn't even notice.

Video: WHAT IS A PARABLE?

<https://app.rightnowmedia.org/en/player/video/338460?session=338463>

VIDEO NOTES:

- PARA-ble
Beside / Throw (from Greek)
- A parable is a comparison of sorts:
As Jesus wants to teach about God's Kingdom or God's love, he will "throw" down a story. There's always a comparison: these parables of Jesus are designed to be anecdotal. They are story-like: "Parables are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning."
- They're longer stories yet always have a point (often *multiple* points).
- "Extend the Parable" = ex: The Good Samaritan as Jesus says, "Go and do likewise." Jesus kept the story going and to play out the characters, plot, ending, etc.
- Parables are also true-to-life stories: it starts in reality and then depicts the world as we know it.

For this Lesson, The Parable of the Sower:

- The Sower who Spread the Seeds: we can imagine this happening in the day of Jesus.
- Jesus often included geography references, times of day, and very specific details.
- Parables will often leave you dumbfounded: something might seem strangely out of whack... something just won't make sense, and then BAM: he connects all the dots!
- Components of a Parable: 1. Comparison, 2. Anecdotes, 3. True-to-life, 4. Dumbfounded
- Parables (C.H. DODD): *"At its simplest, the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought."*
- Jesus often tells the story that's about YOUR HEART, not really about the object lessons your ears are hearing.

Read the Text: Matthew 13:1-23, NIV

The Parable of the Sower

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds

came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

¹⁰ The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”

¹¹ He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹² Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables:

“Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

¹⁵ For this people’s heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts

and turn, and I would heal them.’^[a]

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. ¹⁷ For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ 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. ²² 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. ²³ 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.”

- Reflections/Discussion Questions:

The seeds in Jesus' parable had to survive:

- What has your faith had to survive along the way?
 - Intentionally share a story where you felt you may not survive – what extreme circumstance has the Lord delivered you through?
 - What suffering or pain has your faith endured that you can now share “on the other side” of such hardship and trial?
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- On the other side of survival, can you point to any “harvests” God has brought about through your trials, challenges, or spiritual journey?

- What has God led you to plant along the way?
 - As you look back now, are you able to see any fruit from those efforts where you planted in faith?
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- Similarly, Jesus teaches that a specific seed, a mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32), is so perfectly tiny, yet it grows into such a large result that birds are known to perch and people can even use the leaves as shelter.

- When you review *your* faith journey, what experiences can you point to that may have felt small or insignificant at the time, but have been transformed into results that you never thought possible? _____
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- Do you see any connection to Jesus' teaching on seeds in Matthew 13? (Parable of the Sower, Parable of the Mustard Seed, Parable of the Mustard Seed and Yeast, and Parable of the Weeds)

- What type of hobbies or careers do we presume the audience had in common in this section as Jesus teaches?

- Does this seed have to do with your heart: hard soil vs receptive? Incapable of growth vs seeking and searching for more of God in your life?

- Meaning of the Soil:

- ON THE PATH = the one who does not understand the message of faith
 - ROCKY = the one who receives the Word but is not rooted and falls away as difficulties arise
 - THORNS = the one who allows the deceit of this world to choke the Word out and become unfruitful
 - GOOD = the one who receives the Word and produces an abundant harvest.
- Having a receptive harvest to all the seeds the Lord is planting requires much more than rules alone (as the Pharisees were focused upon). Aligning with the truth of Scripture is hard to do, but alignment is essential if we are to have our hearts open to all God has in store.
- Wrapping-up/Homework:
- Take just a moment to reflect on examples from your own life of when you were like each type of soil: along the path, rocky, in the thorns, or in the good soil.
 - Have you ever experienced a hardened-heart moment?
 - What led to that reality?
 - Have you ever overly-focused on a rule, a law, or a flaw in someone else – to your own detriment?
 - Describe what a receptive heart looks like when evaluating all that God is trying to impart through your home, relationships, family, work, studies, faith, etc. _____

 - Notice that Jesus says the purpose of a parable is to reveal the mysteries of heaven and that the Spirit reveals the meaning and translation of each teaching.
 - What do we learn about God’s sense of inclusion and empowerment as we read about seeds?
 - What actions do seeds go through that can apply to our own spiritual journeys, as well?
 - Describe the way in which you see your own faith journey: did it start large and grow small? Did it begin as a mountaintop, or did you ease your way into faith? Has your faith needed constant nourishment? Have you had multiple influences on your faith: sources of water, strength, support, encouragement, etc.?
 - Thinking of the life of a seed: have you ever had to be entirely **repotted**?!?
 - Thinking of the life of a seed: how are your roots? What do you do to establish, strengthen, and deepen your root system to full strength?

- What other observations do you make about this particular parable regarding seeds?
- In what ways has God called YOU to scatter seeds or improve the condition of others' soil in your Christian walk?

One last observation:

- Why do you think Jesus included quotes from the Old Testament in his teaching?

Summary Questions:

- What other contexts might use parables as a mode of teaching and imparting knowledge, new skills, causing someone to think or reflect, etc.?
- What thoughts about seeds, soils, learning, or other concepts did this lesson bring up for you?
- Did you see any applications from what Jesus was teaching in this parable to your own walk with Christ? What lessons might those observations include?