

The Good News of God's Kingdom (A Series on the Parables of Jesus)

**Do you have the heart to enter God's kingdom?
(The Parable of the Sower)**

Intro: As Christians we need to keep our focus on Jesus. So with that goal in mind we looked last year at the character of Jesus, thinking each month about one of the amazing features of his character. This year I want to focus on another aspect of Jesus' life--his teaching, especially His parables. We will call the series "The Good News of God's Kingdom."

In chapter 8 of his gospel, Luke tells us of a remarkable change in Jesus' approach to teaching. The crowds were coming to him in large numbers. The chief priests and Pharisees were getting restless as they saw His popularity and were looking for any occasion to discredit him. It was a difficult time; and suddenly it appears Jesus changed his whole style of teaching.

Imagine the scene as the multitudes gathered around expecting to hear another sermon, another exegesis of an OT verse, another explanation of a principle of righteousness found in the Law. Instead they heard the following:

The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road; and it was trampled under foot, and the birds of the air ate it up. And other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it, and choked it out. And other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great. As He said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Luke 8:5-8)

Perhaps that day the masses went away with a bit of bewilderment; and Jesus' opponents with disappointment. Maybe the former said, "This is the Christ? He only tells stories about farmers." And perhaps Jesus' opponents said, "There's nothing in that we can criticize." But the real truth seekers came near and asked the Lord to explain why He spoke as He did and what He meant by these stories that He called "parables."

Why did Jesus teach in parables?

And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, in order that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand. (Luke 8:10)

Jesus could clearly see two kinds of people in His audience. There were those who came for validation of previous beliefs and permission to stay as they were; and there were those who came for the truth and with a desire to change! Thus, Jesus explained that His parables would separate the former from the latter. His approach was deliberate and was intended to reveal hearts

of the people. The parables would in effect exclude those unworthy of the kingdom. But for those truly seeking, the parables would give insight into the true nature of the kingdom of heaven and reveal important truths about the kingdom to come.

What is a parable?

Our word parable transliterates the Greek word for parable, parabole. The word literally suggests something "placed or thrown beside." In that sense the parable is a story that is placed beside truth to illustrate it. It may do so in a brief statement like a verisimilitude or it may do so by a more extended story which embodies several truths which are symbolized by the details of the story like an allegory. The parable of the sower might be more in the latter category.

A parable then is an extended physical story designed to symbolize spiritual ideas. It is what is sometimes popularly called "an earthly story with a heavenly message."

What did Jesus want to say through the parable of the sower?

Jesus' explanation is simple and straightforward. Each of the soils represents a certain kind of listener and reveals a certain kind of response to the word of God. In just the same way that sowing seed may have various outcomes, so preaching the word of the kingdom may also have different outcomes.

"Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. And those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not believe and be saved. And those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. And the seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. And the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance. (Luke 8:11-15)

Why was this message important then and now?

It revealed important "secrets" about the kingdom of God that people had not known.

The pathway into the kingdom is through the teaching of the word of God.

The typical Jewish conception in the first century was that their kinship to Abraham was a one-way ticket into the kingdom of God. To be a Jew was to be entitled to the blessings of the kingdom of Messiah. They were wrong!

God's kingdom had always been for those who honored His word! And the kingdom of the Messiah would be no different! God's method for bringing people into His kingdom is not

through subjective mysterious experiences or spiritual hunches, but through the proclamation of His word.

“No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. “It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught of God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. (John 6:44-45)

Not all who hear the kingdom message will become true kingdom citizens.

The conception Jesus was giving was radical to the first century Jew and would have not pleased most of those who heard Him. Jesus declares that:

The kingdom is not for the closed mind.

For some the kingdom message is unimpressive. They have been conditioned by past life to see no need for God or for His redemption. They cannot see themselves as sinners as God sees them, for they have become comfortable with who they are and will not give thought to the need for change. The word doesn't get in and the devil makes sure to keep it that way.

The kingdom is not for the crazed mind.

For some the kingdom message is allowed a superficial entrance into the heart; but time reveals that they lack the sincerity and earnestness to continue. They have an unwillingness to count the cost and pay the price of service to God. Perhaps there are expectations that everything will be easy and when they are tested they cave in.

The kingdom is not for the crowded mind.

For some there is a sincere reception of the word and the beginning evidence of a spiritual life, but what is missing is the single-mindedness to stay committed to the goal. Such people are distracted by the alternatives Satan places before them--pleasure, fame, or riches.

That's why Jesus ended the parable with this appeal: *“He who has an ear to hear, let him hear”*. He realized that not all who “heard” physically would have the “ears” to “hear” spiritually.

The kingdom belongs to those with a good and honest heart.

The first three soils suggests three barriers to the kingdom of heaven (inattention, lack of resolve and commitment); but the final "soil" suggest two features of all who enter the kingdom.

We must be honest—we must be willing to see ourselves as God sees us. We must have integrity with

the word of God and let it change us rather want to change it!

We must be good—we must have love of and an attachment to what is right. We must have an appreciation for the character of God and want to be with Him and become like Him! And having this heart, we must believe, obey, and endure!

I am convinced that every person who comes into this world has the potential to be a citizen of the kingdom. But our hearts may be corrupted by life (by incorrect nurture in childhood, by bad choices in adolescence, by neglect in adulthood) so that our spiritual “hearing” and “eyesight” have been impaired. At times we must make significant effort to overcome what has been lost; but even so, we have the power to become what we should be to enter the kingdom.

The word is living, powerful, and life changing.

When we are good enough to long to be with God and honest enough to receive his instructions, our lives can be radically transformed. There is power in God’s truth to produce fruit in our lives, depending upon the level of our faith. And there is no greater blessing than to let God’s word work in us to produce the fruit of the Spirit. Jesus suggested the immensity of that blessing by describing produce of a hundred-fold. Such would not have been 10 times more than the typical yield in Palestinian agriculture; but it fittingly describes the abundance that comes through the reception of the word of God.

But if parables reveal the secrets of God's kingdom...

They challenge the listener to respond!

How we respond to the truth now has implications for our future.

“Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, in order that those who come in may see the light. For nothing is hidden that shall not become evident, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light. Therefore take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him shall more be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him.” (Luke 8:16-18)

Jesus in his final warning stresses three points:

The light we receive should never be hidden. The truth was made to be lived and shared with others!

The condition of our heart becomes manifest with time. A proper attitude toward truth leads to increase in knowledge and wisdom; but failure to hear properly (with honesty and goodness) will lead to self-deception and darkening of understanding.

Conclusion: Jesus' simple parable was designed not only to inform, but also to challenge his listeners to stop and take stock. How have we responded to the good news of God's kingdom? Do we see it as good news at all? Have we embraced it only to quickly fall away through temptation? Have we allowed the distractions of life to take over and keep us from making any real progress in faith? Have we had the honesty and goodness to hear, obey, and endure? It's your call.