

PARABLES

THE PURPOSE OF PARABLES AND THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

I. THE PURPOSE OF PARABLES

a. What are parables?

- **Matthew 13:3a, 34** And he told them many things in parables...All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable.
- The word 'parable' (Gk. 'parabolē) means '*to place or throw alongside of something else.*'
- In Jesus's case, a parable is an illustration that is placed alongside a truth that he is teaching. He puts a story next to what he is trying to explain and if you get the story, you will understand the teaching.
- Illustrations are drawn from everyday life using common elements.
- Parables make a comparison for the purpose of teaching a spiritual lesson and that lesson is, for the most part, the only point of the parable.
- A common mistake is to try to allegorize every single detail to discover additional layers of meaning.
- The lessons of parables are simple and focused word pictures illuminating a profound spiritual lesson.

b. Why did Jesus use parables?

- Some have suggested Jesus's use of parables was to make hard truths easier and clearer to grasp. Using familiar things that were easily recognizable to his audience would make it easier for them to comprehend.
- We don't have to guess because Jesus told us exactly why he spoke in parables.
- **Matthew 13:34-35** - Quoting Psalm 78:2-3 - Jesus used parables in fulfillment of prophecy where parables fulfill the purpose of revealing hidden truths.
- **Matthew 13:10-15** - Quoting Isaiah 6:9-10 - Parables serve a dual purpose.
 - To the hard-hearted, the spiritually blind and deaf, the spiritual truth is obscured. They will not have understanding. The parable serves as a word of judgment and condemnation.
 - To the humble seeker, who presses into Jesus for understanding, they are given spiritual insight. The parable serves as a word of mercy to the disciple of Christ.
- Jesus used parables because the hearing of the parable revealed what was in the heart of the listener. Parables were a sifting mechanism. The hearer would either respond with a rejection of the message or the messenger, or they would press in and move closer to Jesus for the explanation.
- It is important to understand the context in which the parable is told. Who was the specific audience or controversy that prompted the parable?

II. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER (Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8)

a. The Components of the Parable - Matthew 13:3-9

- A sower, seed, and different types of soil. This is an agricultural illustration.
- Jesus mentions four different types of soil that the seed falls upon:
 - Soil along the path: these are the footpaths along the side of fields that were unplowed and likely hardened. Birds would snatch seed that was scattered on the hardened path.
 - Soil on rocky ground: shallow soil with a rock bed that would prevent a deep root system. With little moisture and shallow roots, this crop would wither quickly with the scorching sun.
 - Soil among thorns: this is soil infested with wild vegetation that takes over the field and chokes out everything else growing that might be beneficial.
 - Good soil: This is fertile, prepared soil, free from weeds with room for the crop to flourish and produce. Seed sown on good soil produces an abundant crop.

- Note: nothing is said about the sower or his skill, and nothing is said about the quality of the seed. Everything Jesus is teaching in this parable has to do with the condition of the soil.

b. The Interpretation of the Parable - Matthew 13:18-23

- **The Sower:** primarily Jesus and anyone who proclaims the gospel.
 - **The Seed:** the word of the kingdom. The seed is the word, this is key to unlocking the parable.
 - **The Soil:** the response to the word proclaimed by the sower.
- The **four soils** represent the condition of the heart.
 - The heart is like soil that must be prepared to receive the seed before that seed can take root and produce a harvest.
 - Jesus explains there are four responses: three negative and one positive. Only the positive response bears fruit.
 - **THE HARD HEART (THE PATH):** The word never penetrates and is immediately rejected. The 'evil one' snatches the word before it can take root through his tactics (e.g., deceit, confusion, fear of man, pride, sinful passions).
 - **THE SHALLOW HEART (ROCKY GROUND):** There is initial reception of the word but eventual rejection. The word is received with immediate joy, but there is no root. When tribulation or persecution comes, they fall away.
 - **THE CROWDED HEART (THORNS):** The cares of the world and deceitfulness of riches chokes out the word. There are too many things vying for the affections of the heart so there is no room for the word to grow and so proves to be unfruitful.
 - These three negative responses have something in common—they don't bring forth any fruit!
 - All of these would be classified as unbelievers who have rejected the word.
 - **THE FRUITFUL HEART (GOOD SOIL):** This heart pictures the true believer because there is evidence of a changed life, they produce fruit. (John 15:8, 16)
 - **Luke 8:15** As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience—Perseverance with fruit is a sign of genuine, saving faith.
 - Why makes the soil good? God's sovereign grace and the regenerating work of the Spirit!
 - The fruit produced is abundant. The word that takes root in the heart explodes with life producing a great return (thirty, sixty, hundredfold).
 - Principle: Not all true believers are equally productive but every true believer will bear fruit.
 - This parable reminds us that when we proclaim the gospel, the results will vary according to the condition of the hearts of the hearers. Only those who have heard rightly and understood will bear fruit.
 - We need to be faithful to scatter the seed, and trust that some will find prepared soil that will result in abundant fruit for the glory of God!

REFLECTION AND APPLICATION

- Does the sovereignty of God in preparing the heart make you more or less confident in sharing the gospel with people?
- The crowded heart describes how the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke out the word making it unfruitful. Which specific "thorns" of this modern life compete for your heart's affections above the cultivation of God's word in your life?
- Knowing that all true believers bear fruit but are not all equally productive, how does that change your perspective on professing believers who struggle with their faith or don't show much evidence of fruit?