

Bi132 The Gospels I

Lesson Bi132-24 Why Parables?

For believers, life can seem like a war, where we are taken captive by the enemy of our souls. Like living in a prisoner of war camp, we long to communicate with our leader and hear his directions and comfort. Sometimes we need to be reminded of important truths that will bring us comfort and hope. In our faith we have special stories to encourage each other and communicate the truth. We find these stories in the parables of Jesus, which he told to reveal the secrets of the kingdom and the spiritual army in which we serve.

The four writers of the Gospels record forty separate parables in their accounts. About half are short, just a couple of sentences long, and contain descriptions about the kingdom. Some of these will be explained in the next lesson. The other half are called story parables. These often reveal the attitudes and beliefs of the characters through their conversations and interactions with others in the story. Jesus used them to describe his kingdom, its values, and the people in it.

Parables are stories in which two things are compared in an unusual way. Often the parable compares some earthly thing with a spiritual reality. The purpose is to reveal or emphasize a spiritual truth. It does this by confronting the listener with a decision he must make after hearing the lesson. The parable grips the listener when he least expects it.

Of the longer parables, the one discussed in this lesson is unique, because Jesus gives a complete explanation of its meaning to the disciples. Parables are memorable because the truth is communicated using ordinary things of life. In this story, Jesus uses a farmer and his work in a field. The truth revealed here enabled the disciples to understand why some people chose not to follow the Master.

After Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, he went out of the house and sat by the lake. The crowd grew so large that Jesus got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore to listen. Then he told them this parable, "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear" (Matt 13:3-9).

This parable falls into three separate parts. In the first part Jesus tells the story of the farmer who planted his seed. Jesus describes something that everyone listening understood—farming. He mentions the four places seed would fall as the farmer planted with the hope for a future harvest. In three places seed falls, no harvest will follow. The encouragement Jesus gives is that some seed will produce a one-hundred fold harvest. Such a harvest was beyond belief for the people of that day. Such a potential harvest surely motivated the farmer in his work! Jesus

finishes by encouraging everyone listening to the story to really try to understand what he was saying.

The disciples then came to him after the crowd left and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?” This then is the second part of the story.

Jesus replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables: ‘Thou seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. ... For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes’ (Matt 13:11-13, 15).

Think about this question, “What was the difference between the crowds and the disciples as they all listened to the stories Jesus told? What was the thing people needed to have before they could understand his message?”

Jesus said to the disciples, “Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 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.”

Jesus referred to Isaiah’s prophecy to teach them this truth: The secrets of the kingdom are only for those who hear with *faith*. Even though the Jews claimed to be looking for the Messiah, their spirits and hearts were hard. Therefore they did not respond with faith to what Jesus said and did. The disciples, because of their faith, received the true understanding of the message of Jesus contained in his parables. Many of the Jews had already closed the eyes and ears of their hearts to Jesus, but the disciples’ hearts were open to learn from him.

In the third part, Jesus explains that the parable indicates how people will respond to the message of the kingdom. The seed is the Word of God and the sower is the one who shares the message. This is what the parable of the farmer means:

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. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 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. 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. 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 (Matt 13:18-23).

Jesus says this message will only produce a harvest when people’s hearts are open to God. They allow the seed of the Word of God to grow and produce a spiritual harvest in their lives. The harvest is people who understand God’s word and his plan for their lives.

The parables direct people to see life from God's perspectives. The secrets of the kingdom of God are no longer secrets to people who place their trust in Christ. In a world filled with spiritual warfare, the parables remind believers about God's purpose for them. Life involves more than provisions for ourselves. What is most important is our relationship with Christ. Our minds and spirits should focus on sharing the Word until we see Jesus return to this earth.

This story is **important** because it shows that not everyone who hears the truth will respond positively to it, either because they have chosen to close the eyes and ears of their hearts or because the enemy has caused circumstances to defeat their faith. The parable should prepare us for our outreach to the lost.

The **main truth** of this story is that Jesus expects us to sow the seed of the Word wherever we go. Wherever the Word is sown we should expect a harvest.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. In the parable of the farmer, what does the seed represent?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds] If you said, "The seed represents the Word of God," you are correct.
2. How much of a harvest did the farmer hope for in the parable?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds] If you said, "In the parable the farmer hoped for a harvest of up to 100 times what he had planted," you are correct.
3. Why did Jesus give the explanation of the parables only to the disciples?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds] If you said, "Because they had faith in Jesus," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn this story from memory and tell it to someone who has never heard it before. After telling the story, ask, "What do we learn here about the things that cause people to reject the free gift of salvation Jesus offers? Knowing the causes, what can we do to protect ourselves from being unfruitful and help to ensure the best harvest possible?"