

## Parables

### **Matthew 13:34 (NIV)**

*Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.*

### **What is a parable?**



The word “parable” comes from two root words, *para* + *ballein*, which means to “place along side” in the sense of setting up a comparison between two things.

A parable is a short, true-to-life story that has one main spiritual comparison to convey. We can also think of it as a narrative riddle that needs to be solved in order to understand a spiritual significance.

### **When studying parables you need to consider:**

- 1) **The Context:**
  - To whom is the story being told?
  - What circumstances evoked this teaching?
  - Was there a question raised or a problem encountered?
  - Was there a teaching that needed correcting?
- 2) **The Story:**
  - What are the key elements of the story?
  - What tension is experienced or addressed?
  - What is the climax of the story?
  - What is the main lesson learned from the story?
- 3) **The Follow-up**
  - What reactions did the people have to this story?
  - What explanation did Jesus provide, if any?
  - Were there any other stories or teachings that accompanied this parable?
  - What is the deeper spiritual application of the story?

**Caution:** there is one main point and every statement in the story drives to this point. However, not every detail necessarily has a deeper significance or spiritual comparison.

### **Matthew 13:10 (NIV)**

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

**Why did Jesus speak in parables that were often hard to understand? Why did he not just explain things clearly?**

**Jesus' Reply:**

**Matthew 13:11-13 (NIV)**

*He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.*

*<sup>12</sup> Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. <sup>13</sup> This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.*

**Did Jesus' explanation help or make things more confusing? What does he mean?**

**Jesus had two main reasons for using parables:**

**1) To reveal truth**

Jesus wanted his faithful followers to understand and live by the nature of the kingdom of God. Those who were eager to understand truths of the kingdom and place their faith in Jesus would be given greater insight into the kingdom through these parables. Considering that, whenever his disciples eagerly sought an understanding of the parable, Jesus was quick to explain its meaning.

**2) To hide truth**

By speaking in parables, Jesus was able to hide truths of the kingdom from those who had no faith in God and were resistant in their hearts to his teaching. Many listening to Jesus' words did not understand simply because their hearts were hardened to the message.

In many ways, parables were a form of judgement against those who were rebellious in heart.

**What are some other advantages of using parables to teach?**

- It makes the teaching easy to remember.
- It causes you to either reflect deeply on the meaning of the message or ignore it.
- It makes it possible to make offensive statements without getting into trouble.

**What are some modern day examples of parables or allegories?**

Political cartoons

Nursery rhymes

Secular example:

**BAA, BAA, BLACK SHEEP**  
(original version)

Baa Baa Black Sheep  
have you any wool?  
Yes, marry, have I,  
three bags full.  
One for my master,  
one for my dame,  
one for the little boy  
who lives down the lane.

**What was the point of this poetic parable?**

It was potentially a complaint against taxes raised by King Edward 1

<b>Bag 1: Master:</b>	Taxes for the king
<b>Bag 2: Dame:</b>	The nobility
<b>Bag 3: Little boy down the lane:</b>	Tax on any wool being shipped out of the country

**Frustrations of being “fleeced”!**

**What were the “secrets” of the kingdom Jesus was talking about?**

The secrets were truths about the kingdom the Jews did not previously understand or grasp. They were concepts that caught the people off guard, requiring them to rethink their understanding of the nature of God’s kingdom and who was part of it.

The Israelites **preconceptions** of what the kingdom would look like and how it would come often blinded them to God’s actual working out his plan for the kingdom.



**Parables of Jesus**

<b>Parable</b>	<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Mark</b>	<b>Luke</b>	<b>John</b>
Lamp Under a Basket	5:14-16	4:21-22		
The Wise & Foolish Builder	7:24-27		6:47-49	
New Cloth on Old Garment	9:16	2:21	5:36	
New Wine in Old Wineskin	9:17	2:22	5:37-38	
The Four Soils	13:3-23	4:1-20	8:4-15	
The Tares	13:24-30			
The Mustard Seed	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19	
The Leaven	13:33		13:20-21	
The Hidden Treasure	13:44			
The Pearl of Great Price	13:45-46			
Fishnet	13:47-50			
House Owner	13:52			
The Lost Sheep	18:12-14		15:3-7	
The Unmerciful Servant	18:23-35			
Workers in the Vineyard	20:1-16			
Two Sons	21:28-32			
The Wicked Tenants	21:33-44	12:1-12	20:9-18	
Wedding Feast	22:1-14		14:16-24	
Fig Tree	24:32	13:28-29	21:29-30	
Faithful and Wicked Servants	24:45-51		12:42-48	
The Ten Virgins	25:1-13			
The Talents of Money	25:14-30			
Secretly Growing Seed		4:26-29		
Servants keeping watch		13:34-37		
The Two Debtors			7:41-43	
The Good Samaritan			10:30-37	
Friend at Night			11:5-8	
The Rich Fool			12:16-21	
Waiting Servants			12:35-40	
Barren Fig Tree			13:6-9	
Lowest Seat			14:7-11	
Wise Planner			14:28-33	
The Lost Coin			15:8-10	
The Lost Son/Prodigal			15:11-32	
The Shrewd Manager			16:1-9	
The Rich Man and Lazarus			16:19-31	
Humble Servant			17:7-10	
The Persistent Widow			18:1-8	
The Pharisee and Tax Collector			18:9-14	
The Ten Minas			19:11-27	

## Parable of the Four Soils

### **Mark 4:1-9 (NIV)**

Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. <sup>2</sup> He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said:

<sup>3</sup> "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed,

① some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

② <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

③ <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.

④ <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times."

<sup>9</sup> Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

### **THE CONTEXT:**

#### **What is the context of this story? Who is Jesus speaking to?**

As Jesus' fame grew, he started drawing a crowd wherever he went. The people that gathered around him were doing so with many different motives. What do you think some of the various motives might have been?

Jesus tells this story as a warning to people to evaluate where they truly stand in relationship to the teaching he has been giving.

### **THE STORY:**

**Draw pictures illustrating the four types of soil and their effects.**

①

②

③

④

**What do the following elements represent?**

Have students share various opinions and then read the passage below to hear Jesus' explanation.

**The Sower:** Jesus

**The Seed:** Word of God

**The Path:** People with hardened hearts so the message does not sink in.

**The Birds:** Evil spirits  
**How do you think the evil one takes the Word away from us?**

**The Rocky Soil:** People initially receptive to the word of God but with no spiritual depth.

**The Sun:** Pressures in life that cause us to lose faith.  
**What are some examples of pressures that might cause us to stumble spiritually?**

**The Thorns:** Distractions, desires or deceptions in this world that prevent us from spiritually growing and maturing.  
**What are some examples of these that might choke our spiritual growth?**

**The Good Soil:** People responsive to the word of God allow it to sink in and take root in their lives.

**The Crop:** Spiritual growth and effectiveness.

#### **THE FOLLOW-UP:**

##### **Mark 4:10, 13-20 (NIV)**

<sup>10</sup> When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables.

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?"

<sup>14</sup> The farmer sows the word.

<sup>15</sup> Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.

<sup>16</sup> Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; <sup>19</sup> but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

<sup>20</sup> Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop--thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown."

What is the message Jesus was trying to get across?

What are the implications for each person in this story?

Have you seen people as represented by these four soils? Without sharing names or specifics, can you give insights as to what you saw happening?

Which kind of dirt are you, or more tactfully stated, where do you place yourself in this story?

Do you see any influences that could potentially cause you to fall from the spiritual journey you have started?

How can we ensure we represent the productive soil?

Jesus expressed this idea of fruitfulness through the following allegory.

**John 15:1-8 (NIV)**

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

*<sup>5</sup> "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

**What does Jesus mean by bearing fruit?**

Fruit in this sense could mean either personal spiritual maturity or spiritual impact in the lives of other people as we introduce them to Jesus Christ. Both thoughts are reflected in the verse below.

***Daniel 12:3 (NIV)***

*Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.*

**What is the condition for bearing fruit?**

The success of bearing fruit is dependent upon us staying connected to Jesus Christ and allowing his life to flow through ours.

**What does it mean practically to “remain in Jesus”?**

To remain in Jesus means to maintain our close, intimate, covenant relationship with him where we die to self and him to rule through us. Further in John 15 he talks about obedience to all his commands, of which the greatest expression is to love God and others.

**What does Jesus mean when he says, “*apart from me you can do nothing*”?**

Apart from the leading and empowering of Jesus through his Holy Spirit, we can do nothing of eternal significance. Everything we do in our own strength will pass away and we will have nothing to show for our life when we stand before God.

***1 Corinthians 3:10-15 (NIV)***

*By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. <sup>11</sup> For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, <sup>13</sup> his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. <sup>14</sup> If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. <sup>15</sup> If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*

**The parables of Jesus contain many thought provoking truths about the nature of the kingdom of God: what it is like, when it will fully come, who will be accepted into the kingdom, who won't be, how to prepare for its arrival, and the signs of its coming.**

**We encourage you to read through the parables carefully, reflecting on each truth Jesus is mysteriously presenting as a riddle and considering how it relates to you right now.**