

Lesson 18

Kingdom Parables

Introduction:

After finishing the Sermon on the Mount several noteworthy events occur in Jesus' life. Immediately after making the descent from the mountain He heals a leper and then returning to Capernaum, heals a Roman centurion's servant who is sick and about to die. Soon afterwards Jesus goes to the city of Nain where He encounters a funeral procession and raises a widow's son from the dead. Seeking reassurance that Jesus is the Messiah, John the Baptist, who is in prison, sends his disciples to interview Him. After this Jesus enters the home of Simon, a Pharisee, where He has an encounter with a sinful woman. She washes His feet with her tears and anoints them with perfume and then amidst controversy He forgives her sins.

Jesus then embarks on a missionary journey with His disciples and the women who support Him. Going to surrounding cities and villages, He preaches and proclaims the kingdom of God. Returning to Capernaum Jesus is again surrounded by the multitudes. There, scribes from Jerusalem begin accusing Him of being possessed by Satan. He confronts their charges in a series of parables and proclaims that all of men's sins would be forgiven them except blasphemies against the Holy Spirit. Then Jesus gets into a boat and teaches eight parables concerning the kingdom of God.

Before proceeding to Jesus' teaching, two basic concepts must be understood: what a parable is and what the kingdom of God is. First, let's consider what a parable is.

1. A parable is a narrative or short story.
2. When people hear a parable they are easily able to comprehend its literal meaning.
3. The parable has a main subject and contains one or more truths, concepts and/or principles that relate to it.
4. And the purpose or goal of a parable is to compare the truths, concepts and principles concerning the parable's main subject to another subject that is more difficult to understand.

Group Discussion:

1. Make up a simple parable with you as the main subject and tell it to the group.
2. Let the group try to guess what truths, concepts or principles you are trying to communicate in the parable.
3. After a brief time tell the group the truths, concepts or principles that you are trying to communicate through the use of the parable.

Now, let's consider the meaning of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God simply means the rule of God. However, to firmly grasp the idea of the *kingdom of God* and its *coming* is sometimes difficult. I'll try to make it a little easier. To be a kingdom, five elements must be present:

1. **Person** (the king)
2. **Process** (the method of ruling or reigning)
3. **People** (the subjects who are in submission to the rule of the king to do his will)
4. **Place** (the area over which the king's authority has extended)
5. **Period of existence** (the length of time that the king rules)

Therefore it can be said that: (1) God, the king (2) is ruling by His Spirit (3) through Jesus Christ and those who are His (4) in heaven (5) forever.

Kingdoms are extended through either gift or warfare. Most commonly they are extended through warfare, the people of one kingdom must battle those of the opposing kingdom. Conquering the opposing people in warfare is necessary in order to extend territory. Conquest of the opposing people can occur in one of three ways:

1. Convincing the opposing people to change sides or switch allegiance.
2. Defeat of the opposing king either by capture and imprisonment or death. (However in this type of conquest some of the people's allegiance may not change. Though they are forced to serve the new king they are waiting for an opportunity to rebel)
3. Death of the people.

By analogy, Jesus Christ was offered the kingdoms of this world, as a gift by Satan.¹ In order to get them Jesus would have had to switch His allegiance from God to Satan. He did not and warfare ensued. The Kingdom of God is currently engaged in warfare against Satan, the ruler of the kingdoms of this world. Jesus Christ and all those who are His (Christians) are battling for the earth against Satan, his demons, principalities and powers. They are extending the Kingdom of God in the earth.

At this present time the Kingdom of God is persuading opposing people to change sides. In the nearer future, Jesus will return, capture the opposing king and imprison him for a thousand years. Jesus will reign during this thousand-year period and everyone on earth will serve God. At the end of that time, the opposing king will be released from prison and lead those people whose hearts have not changed allegiance, in rebellion against the Kingdom of God again. Death is their destiny.

God could easily defeat His opponent, but His desire is to win the hearts of the people so they will switch their allegiance willingly. He does this through love: displaying acts of loving-kindness through His Son Jesus and those who are His (Christians). The disciples of Jesus are to wage a benevolent warfare. Even allowing themselves to be killed, anything to convince the enemy of the goodness of their King.

One of the reasons God raised Jesus from the dead was to demonstrate that He has the power of life and death. It acts as an encouragement to a disciple in his struggle to extend the kingdom of God. Jesus makes His disciples ambassadors so they can extend amnesty to His enemies. In the amnesty agreement God promises to forgive every sin and atrocity that His enemies have committed against Him and His people. To those who switch their allegiance God promises eternal life with Him.

Reading The Scripture:

Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:4-15

The Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:1-9, Mark 4:1-9, and Luke 8:4-8

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible, authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a Journey with Jesus)

¹ Matthew 4:8-9 and Luke 4:5-7

And He began to teach again by the sea. And such a very great multitude gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land. And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching, "Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; and it came about that as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. And other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. And other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. And other seeds fell into the good soil and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." As He said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

“Why Do You Speak To Them in Parables?”

Matthew 13:10-17 and Mark 4:10-12

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authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: “Follow Me: A Message from God”, a Journey with Jesus)

And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" And He answered and said to them, "To you it has been granted to know the **mysteries** of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, '**YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I SHOULD HEAL THEM.**' But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it; and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:18-23, Mark 4:13-20, and Luke 8:9-15

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible,
authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: “Follow Me: A Message from God”, a Journey with Jesus)

And His disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable might be. And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? And how will you understand all the parables? Heard then the parable of the sower. Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. The sower sows the word. 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 in a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it, and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."

Mysteries. Secrets or things hidden, not previously understood, or revealed.

Isaiah 6:9-10, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME

DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I SHOULD HEAL THEM. 'Before Jesus begins teaching the parables He calls out to the multitude to listen to what He has to say. He begins the first parable with the word “Behold”, which means to see or perceive and closes with the words, “He who has ears, let him hear.” By using these phrases Jesus is challenging the multitude to gain understanding of what He is saying, not merely hear the sound of His words or visualize the story. But the multitudes are clueless as to what Jesus is talking about.

The Commands:

1. Behold. Listen to this.
2. He who has ears, let him hear.
3. Hear then the parable of the sower.

The Lesson:

Before Jesus begins teaching the parables He calls out to the multitude to listen to what He has to say. He begins the first parable with the word “Behold”, which means to see or perceive and closes with the words, “He who has ears, let him hear.” By using these phrases Jesus is challenging the multitude to gain understanding of what He is saying, not merely hear the sound of His words or visualize the story. But the multitudes are clueless as to what Jesus is talking about.

The disciples are puzzled too, so they ask Jesus why he is speaking in parables. Jesus explains to them that He is fulfilling prophecy: that some will understand the parables and some will not. He goes on to explain that the disciples have been given the right to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God whereas the prophets and righteous men before them had not.

Jesus seems to be saying that the only ones who were to be privy to the secrets or hidden knowledge of the kingdom of God were the disciples. But that wasn't the case. The multitude could see the miracles but could not understand “who” was performing them or why they were being done. They heard the “Word of God” but could not understand His words. Their interest level was so low that they didn't even ask Jesus what He meant.

Though the literal sense of a parable is easy to understand the context in which it is used may be difficult to discern. It is always wise to ask the person using a parable what he is indicating by its use. For example, if you were told that you were like an oak tree you might have an immediate assumption as to the meaning, but it would be wise to get clarification. Many of us would immediately think that the person who said we were like an oak tree was implying that we are strong. But that may not be what is being implied. To make this point more clear I've listed several things that might also be implied.

1. You are a thick-skinned person.
2. You have a rough exterior.
3. You are so inflexible you can't even bend a little.
4. You provide shelter for others.

The disciples were wise to ask Jesus what He meant because it was the key to unlocking the hidden things concerning the kingdom of God. Jesus began His reply by saying, “Do you not understand this parable? And how will you understand all the parables?” He is alluding to the fact that it is essential to understand the first parable, if they are to understand other parables. They must grasp its concepts and word interpretations. He tells them, “Hear then the parable of

the sower.” Jesus wants them to hear with understanding, to meditate upon His words and discover the truths of the kingdom of God.

Group Discussion:

1. What is the main truth concerning the Kingdom of God that can be discerned from this parable? (The Kingdom of God is extended through speaking the Word of God)
2. What is the direct interpretation of the following words according to Jesus?
 - a. **Seed (The Word of God)**
 - b. **Soil (The condition of people’s hearts)**
 - c. Birds (Satan, the adversary)
 - d. Sun (Affliction or persecution)
 - e. Thorns (The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things.)
3. What is the Word of God? (Jesus Christ and everything that God says)
4. Who is the sower? (Primarily Jesus Christ, the Son of Man but can include anyone who speaks the Word of God, including the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles and us)
5. How is sowing accomplished? (By speaking) The method that Jesus is describing is called broadcasting. The sower takes a handful of seed from his bag and releases it as his arm makes a sweeping outward arc through the air.
6. How does planting occur and what is it likened to? (By hearing) (Believing)
7. What two things do the hard path, rocky soil, thorny ground and good earth tell us? (The conditions of the human heart and what planting there will produce) In the broadcast method of sowing, seed is scattered everywhere. The farmer does not intentionally scatter seed in unproductive ground because it is wasteful. However some of it can’t be helped. The path that the sower walks on through the field scattering the seed is hard ground. Rocky soil is ground that has not been prepared yet and usually lies adjacent to good soil. Thorny ground is normally found at the ends of the fields near fence lines.
8. Who is responsible for the preparation of the ground? (The owner of the field)
9. What are the remedies for the various soil conditions?
 - a. The hard path - can be plowed, the birds chased off, and the sower can take a different path each time to prevent hardening the soil.
 - b. The rocky soil – can be turned into usable soil by digging down to remove the rocks.
 - c. The thorny ground - can be weeded.
 - d. The good earth – can be improved by adding nutrients or allowing the ground lie fallow. God commanded the Israelites to let their fields rest on the seventh year.