

Gospels Study and Discussion Questions

Lesson Six: Christ's Teaching Ministry: Parables and Stories – Matthew 13; Luke 10, 15; John 10

Read Matthew 13:1-23 – The Parable of the Sower

- 1) To whom is Jesus speaking...
 - a) when He tells the Parable of the Sower (include verse reference)? **Jesus is speaking to large crowds (13:2-3).**
 - b) when He offers an explanation for using parables as a teaching method (include a verse reference)? **Jesus is answering His disciples' question (13:10).**
 - c) when He gives the interpretation of this parable (include verse reference)? **Jesus is still in conversation with His disciples (implied as a continuation of discourse, beginning in verse 10).**
- 2) What four types of soil exist in the Parable of the Sower and what does each represent? **The first is un-groomed soil (soil on a path, verse 4). It represents hearers who never receive truth at all (verse 19). The second is soil dominated by rocks (verse 5). It represents hearers who like what they hear, but never take the truth to heart and so, reject the truth altogether once hardships come (verses 20-21). The third is soil with thorns (verse 7). It represents hearers who receive the truth but never mature in it because they are preoccupied by life (verse 22). Fourthly, the good soil (verse 8) represents hearers who receive the truth and change their lives accordingly, becoming "fruitful" (verse 23).**
- 3) Parables became Jesus' primary method of preaching to the crowds. When asked by His disciples why He spoke in parables, Jesus gave an answer that relates to the Parable of the Sower. What was His answer and how does it relate to the parable? See Matthew 13:9, 11-15, 18-19, 34, 43b and Mark 4:10-12, 34. **According to Matthew 13:19, the Parable of the Sower is about *hearing* the message of the Kingdom and four different responses to hearing. In between telling the parable and interpreting it, Jesus explained why He spoke in parables by quoting a passage in Isaiah (6:9-10) about those who hear and see without understanding or perceiving. He told the disciples that they were blessed because their "eyes" see and their "ears" hear (13:16). Jesus' meaning is variously interpreted. He may have been saying that He chose to speak in parables so that those whose hearts were too calloused to understand spiritual truth *could* more easily understand. This understanding of Jesus' words is supported by the facts that 1) parables clarify truth, 2) everyone has ears and Jesus said, "*He who has ears, let him hear,*" 3) God desires to turn and heal all who are willing (verse 15), and 4) the quote from Isaiah is about the response Jesus' disciples should expect to their presentation of truth, not a preprogrammed determination. The alternate interpretation is that Jesus meant that He spoke in parables in order to prevent the "outsiders" (Mark 4:11) from perceiving spiritual gems of truth, a kind of judgment on those who had refused to believe in Him. They could have believed and "heard," but once they repeatedly hardened their hearts to Jesus' message, God's judgment fell so that they no longer were able to understand.**

Read Matthew 13:24-52 – The Parables of the Weeds, Mustard Seed, Yeast, Hidden Treasure, Pearl, and Net

- 4) What do you learn about "the Kingdom of Heaven" (13:11, 19, 24, 31, 33, 38, 43, 44, 45, 47, 50) from Matthew 13? **Jesus established His Kingdom. The secrets of the Kingdom were given in His teaching. Some will hear and receive them, others will not. For now, the Kingdom includes true children of God and imposters. At the end of this age, Christ will remove the imposters and judge them harshly (13:30, 42, 50). The Kingdom may seem small, but its impact will be widespread. The Kingdom of God is of more value than any earthly possession and worth any sacrifice. It began in this age but transfers into a coming age; in between, a severe judgment will remove all but the righteous from it. The Kingdom of Heaven contains teachers who can relate both "old truths" (possibly referring to the Old Testament) and "new truths" (Jesus' teachings) to those they instruct.**

- 5) What do you learn about God’s character, ways, and plans from these parables? **God has allowed false teachers and imposters to remain in His church for a season of time, but only to serve His good purposes. In the end, He will judge them. He is the “planter” (the initiator) of His Kingdom and He ensures its prosperity. He is judge over all and everything occurs on His timetable.**
- 6) What do the parables teach about what God expects of His people? *Specifically*, how does this relate to your life today? **The parables give us confidence in the impact and success of His Kingdom. They encourage patience and perseverance in building His kingdom and willingness to sacrifice anything in order to gain Kingdom treasures. Personal sharing**

Read John 10:1-16, Ezekiel 34, and Psalm 23 – The Parables of the Gate and Good Shepherd

- 7) Identify the following people:
 - a) The “one shepherd, my servant David” that Ezekiel refers to prophetically in 34:23 (the prophecy was given long after the time of King David)? **The “one Shepherd” is a Messianic reference to Jesus (John 10:11, 14), the Son of David.**
 - b) Ezekiel’s “shepherds of Israel” (34:2) and the implied bad shepherds of John 10? **The teachers and religious leaders of Israel**
 - c) The sheep of Ezekiel 34? **Israel**
 - d) The “other sheep” of John 10:16? **Gentiles**
- 8) From the stories in John 10:1-16, list the things that make the relationship of the Good Shepherd and the sheep unique and precious (“the Good Shepherd” is also “the Gate”). **The Good Shepherd has a personal relationship with the sheep. They listen to His voice. He leads and they follow. He offers the sheep fullness of life. He never abandons the sheep. In fact, He sacrifices Himself for them.**
- 9) How did the relationship between the religious leaders and the people of Israel in Jesus’ day *differ* from the relationship between the Good Shepherd and His sheep (use any knowledge you have from the *Gospels* study to answer this)? Relate these differences to what Jesus offers you today versus what any other religion or philosophy offers. **Neither the religious leaders’ of Jesus’ day nor any religion today (except Christianity) offers a personal relationship with God. Judaism and Islam, the only other monotheistic religions, consider God unknowable in any personal fashion. Secondly, no other religion has a leader who has laid down His life on behalf of His people. No other religion or philosophy suggests that our personal worth is determined by our Creator’s immeasurable and sacrificial love for us. Third, only Jesus offers salvation by faith, freeing us from the burden of self-effort. Not only that, He also offers us fullness of life in the present. By contrast, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day (like all other religions today) burdened people with rules by which people supposedly earned salvation.**

Read Luke 10:25-37 – The Good Samaritan

- 10) Make a list of:
 - a) the positions held by the individuals who passed by the injured man. **A priest and a Levite (two of the most “religious” people in Israel)**
 - b) insights about the ethnicity of the man who helped, from 2 Kings 17:24-34 and John 4:9. **The man was a Samaritan. After the Assyrian captivity, the king of Assyria repopulated Israel with peoples from other subjugated nations. Some intermarried with the few Israelites remaining in the land. These people became known as “Samaritans.” Later, the king sent a priest of Israel to teach these people that how to worship the “local” God (Yahweh). They learned to worship Him but also continued worshipping their own gods. Thus, the Jews considered them religious and biological “half-breeds” and would not associate with them.**

- 11) How does this story clarify Jesus' teaching in Luke 10:27-28? *The story of the Good Samaritan powerfully communicates that God expects His followers to love our neighbors. However, Jesus uses the parable to expand our idea of *who* is counted as a "neighbor." It teaches that we are to love sinners, enemies, and difficult people, not just our family and friends. The parable also shows that those who consider this requirement a mere religious obligation are likely to find ways to excuse themselves from obeying it. Keeping the law of God in the way He expects *requires transformed thinking and hearts* (a Samaritan would never choose on his own to love a Jew).*
- 12) Name someone to whom you would be unlikely (for whatever reason) to show mercy in the next week. Specifically, how could you act as a "Good Samaritan" in his or her life? If needed, will you ask the Lord to give you His love for this person? **Personal sharing**

Read Luke 15:1-32 – The Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Lost Son

- 13) Jesus often told parables in threes. What is the simple, main point of all three of these parables (consider the context from 15:1-2)? *Heaven rejoices over the salvation of one sinner and the Pharisees should have also.*
- 14) Keeping the context in mind, who would the older brother represent in the Parable of the Lost (Prodigal) Son? *The older brother represented the Pharisees. They thought they had a relationship with the Father because of their work (verse 29). Indeed, they were privileged in their position as God's chosen people. They had the words of the Law and the Prophets. Jesus intentionally left unanswered the question of whether they would choose to join in the celebration and welcome others (including Gentiles and outcasts) into the Kingdom.*
- 15) Even if it's only privately, whom have you considered beyond hope of being saved? Write down at least two ways in which these parables should cause you to pray differently and think differently about this person. *These parables remind us of the joy God experiences in rescuing each sinner. Therefore, we can appeal to God's delight when praying for this person's salvation. The parables also remind us of the lost person's great value to the Father. Therefore, we can appeal to God on the basis of the individual's value. Luke 15:17 says the lost son "came to his senses." This change of mind is a description of regeneration, the work of the One who went out to seek and find him. We can pray God will bring about this change of thinking in lost people. In summary, the parables ought to cause us to see any sinner whom we have despised as a high priority to God and worthy of our intercessory prayer and concern. Personal sharing*