



Over the coming weeks we'll be looking at parables Jesus taught. It's estimated that one-third of Jesus' teaching was done in the format of a parable.

What is a parable? In Greek the word is *parabole* (para-bow-lay). It means to place beside, to cast alongside. Wiersbe's description says "a story that places one thing beside another for the purpose of teaching." The benefit in this teaching method is high memorability. Of the 46 parables Jesus taught, the first 10 focus on the fact that there's a **new** story being told, that it's not to be hidden, and it serves as a foundation for what's coming next. They are clear and memorable.

Another component to the use of a parable is what Jesus himself said—that he used parables to partially conceal the secret of the kingdom of God from people.

This might seem like a strange method of communicating with people. For instance, if my wife wants to give me insights into the secrets of her heart, can you imagine her saying, "My heart is like a turquoise ocean. Beautiful with varying shades of green and blue in the shallows and dark and mysterious in the depths. On one bank is a stream of fresh mountain water that flows into it. On the opposing bank is a creek of city run-off that flows into it. Which of these two is beneficial to the health and beauty of the turquoise ocean? Go and do likewise."

If my wife talked to me like this, I'd never understand what was going on! Just tell me what to do! I'm supposed to be like a stream of fresh mountain water, I get it. What does that mean? Am I supposed to clean something? Fix something? Take you on a date?

So while parables are memorable and a great teaching method on one hand, on the other hand they leave a lot of people out. Many are left confused. The parable we are looking at today, the parable of the sower from Luke 8, is the 11th parable. It falls into the category of partially concealing the truth from the listeners.

Why did Jesus, who came from heaven to preach the good news of salvation, conceal the truth in parables?

Let's immerse ourselves into our scene for today. Jesus has been traveling with his disciples through the area just north of the Sea of Galilee. If we were walking with the crowd, our quads would

burn as we walked up the hills, our feet would be caked with dirt and our hearts would have been exploding with excitement. Jesus is doing some of the wildest, most extreme miracles we could ever imagine.

Miracles

In Capernaum he healed a leper, healed the Centurion's daughter, healed a man possessed by a demon, healed Peter's mother-in-law, healed a paralyzed man, raised Jarius' daughter from the dead, restored the sight for two blind men, and healed a dumb demoniac. In Bethsaida he healed a blind man.

Can you envision it? Jesus' popularity is soaring! He is the darling of Northern Galilee. He's been healing in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies to show that he was the Messiah. He's been teaching in clear, simple parables (parables 1-10) with authority and powerful anointing.

Despite his popularity and power, he's not convinced everyone.

Frustration with Unbelief

The Pharisees judge Jesus and his disciples for picking heads of grain and eating them. The Pharisees are filled with murderous hatred because Jesus healed a man's crippled hand on the Sabbath. After Jesus fully restored a man who was a demon possessed blind mute, the Pharisees said he must get his power from Satan.

And it wasn't just the Pharisees. Too many regular people, like us, from these towns wanted to see more. They're like kids at a magic show saying, "show us more, show us more," missing the point of the miracles that Jesus was the anointed King of the universe, the long-awaited Messiah. In response to their unbelief and a continued shallow understanding of all the miracles and teachings he's shared with them, he says in Matthew 11:20–21 & 23: *"Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. 'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.... And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.'*"

When God reveals himself, he expects a response of complete unraveling, awe and wonder, brokenness and crying, being overwhelmed and repentance. This is an experience most of us in this room can relate to when we realized that Jesus is the Son of God.

Do you remember? Our days were filled with our plans, our goals, our values, our distractions, our addictions. And we were reaping the consequences of our actions. People describe it in different ways.

God revealed himself to us through a church service, a Gospel tract given to us by a friend, a conversation with a friend, a TV show, a website ... and we repented.

In Northern Galilee, too many people in Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum have experienced Jesus and not repented. In this exact situation, Jesus is outside Capernaum, along the edge of the lake. Such a large crowd gathers around him that he steps into a boat, floats out a bit, drops anchor and turns to teach the crowd that lines the shore.

“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.”

When he said this, he called out, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear” (verses 5–8).

Then he told some other parables, as recorded in Matthew 13. When the disciples had the opportunity to talk with Jesus they asked him, “Jesus, we didn’t really know what you were saying today. What did that parable of the farmer and seeds mean?”

He said, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that,

“though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.’

“This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who

hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop” (verses 10–15).

Jesus is providing three specific explanations for why people don’t respond in complete unraveling and more when Jesus reveals himself, when the Word of God is spread.

With the hard-packed path

The devil swoops in and picks up the truths of Jesus, like a bird picking up a seed.

With the rocky ground

There’s an initial reaction of excitement about Jesus. But in verse 13 it tells us that “in the time of testing,” they give up. I think of a dear family that fits this description—a husband and wife who were actively involved in Bible studies, funding missionaries and attending church. Then a friend of theirs was diagnosed with cancer and after a hard battle and lots of prayer, their friend died. This was a time of testing for them. They gave up on Jesus. And while no one can know the condition of someone’s heart, I pray for these friends to return to Jesus.

With the thorny soil

There’s also an initial reaction of excitement about Jesus. But in verse 14 “they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures.” This person might say, “Going to church and a relationship with Jesus were an earlier phase of my life. I’m too busy for that now.”

It’s describing a person who’s got a positive perspective on Jesus and the church but they are so consumed with their worries and stresses, they are so consumed with the pursuit of their financial future, or so consumed with the activities that bring them pleasure—their hobbies, their vacations—that they choke out their relationship with Jesus.

Jesus also describes the person whose heart is soft and fertile. This person is described as the good soil. It says in verse 15 this person hears the word, retains the word and perseveres. Notice that this is good for the individual and good for others because their life is a hundred-fold blessing to others.

There are two categories of application from this parable: 1) personal reflections, and 2) action steps to take.

Personal Reflections to Ponder

If the Holy Spirit is telling you that you are one of the first three soils—the path, the rocky ground or the thorny areas—salvation is offered and possible through repentance.

Perseverance reveals a heart. The rocky ground sprouted a plant but the time of testing knocks it down. The thorny ground spouted a plant but the tests of worries, riches and pleasures of

life distract them. The good soil sprouted a plant and persevered through tests, worries, and the distractions of riches and life.

When you are being tested, turn to Jesus. When you are overwhelmed with worries, turn to Jesus. When you feel the lure and excitement of riches, turn to Jesus.

Two weeks ago someone in our church sent me an email at 1:33 in the morning. He was being tested and he was struggling with every last shred of his self-discipline to say “no” to his test. As he was turning to Jesus pleading for help and rescue, this guy emailed me to say, “I’m struggling, the pull is strong, I’m not a good person, I’m turning to Jesus but I’m afraid I don’t have the strength.” This is the way someone responds when their heart is “good soil.” Do you have people you can talk to, email or call when you need to turn to Jesus?

The good soil will produce a crop of more than 100 times what was planted. “You will do even greater things than me.” One seed of salvation becomes the multi-faceted array of godly character and the fruits of the Spirit. One seed of salvation becomes many more seeds of salvation in others as you spread the Word of God and some of it lands on good soil.

The nature of a heart is only revealed in hindsight. Notice that two of the three “bad” soils receive the seed of God’s word gladly. How do you know if your heart is the good soil? This parable can produce profound insecurity, can’t it? The description of the first three soils would match all of it at some point. We heard some part of the truth of Jesus but our heart was hard and the devil snatched the truth away. We were tested and we gave in during the time of testing. We were overwhelmed with worries of life and the good distractions of life. All of us will momentarily and situationally fit these descriptions. So how do we know if our heart is the good soil?

One word—repentance.

Action Steps to Take

Spread lots of seeds

Despite great seeds that are planted and a loving farmer, many people will not experience the Kingdom of heaven that Jesus offers through repentance. For the sake of the glory of God, we’ve got to spread tons of seeds in order to hit the good soil.

Three quarters of the people in this parable will not experience Jesus’ glorious kingdom. Half of them think they will; they won’t. Most will reject Jesus. Don’t take it personally because most people rejected Jesus too. The response of someone else is not your responsibility. Your responsibility is to spread the good seed of God’s truth with a loving heart and trust God to do the inner work on someone’s heart. This helps us sort out our self-doubts when people reject us and Jesus.

Many days I feel I need to be bolder and less concerned with how someone will react. Many times through the day I need to reorient my mind to thinking of the transcendent kingdom of God and less about the kingdom of Shawn.

Pray for hearts to be good soil

I read a haunting quote this week, “*When the King is rejected, the offer of the Kingdom is withdrawn*” -- Ken Gire. This is a tragic consequence. Could this have happened to people who live in San Carlos? In Redwood City? On your street? This is a mystery we’re not given an answer to. But we can see enough evidence to be greatly concerned, concerned that people we know are missing out on the amazing life Jesus could give them.

Remember what it says in Ezekiel 36:26. ***“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”***

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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