

PARABLES: The Greatest Stories Ever Told

Parable of the Sower

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Discussion Notes

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OPENING

Stories have a way of sticking with us, and Jesus knew that. He would often tell stories to help the people understand who God is, who Jesus is, and who we are. He used stories to help us understand the Kingdom of God and what God values most. Jesus used fascinating stories to illustrate spiritual truths. These were stories that challenged cultural norms, shook up the religious elite, and baffled people from all walks of life. They are called parables and we are looking at the greatest stories ever told.

SCRIPTURE¹

Matthew 13:3b-8 “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.”

Matthew 13:19-23 “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.”

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.”

OBSERVATION

In this parable, Jesus was speaking to people who lived in an agrarian economy where farming and herding were common, everyday occupations. They understood very well that, to produce a healthy crop, seed had to be sown carefully and with little waste, so good soil was the preferred environment. They knew that hard, shallow, and thorny soil would cause the seed to die and be useless to the farm's productivity.

APPLICATION

The underlying spiritual story is for those who have spiritual ears to hear. Jesus is saying that this parable is about the receptivity of our hearts and the life He wants for us.

The hard-hearted people suffered from the constant application of outside pressure. The path, being walked upon, became compacted and the seed's root couldn't penetrate it. Satan tells us to be tough and some of us have been trampled on emotionally, psychologically, and physically and our hearts have been hardened. The Jesus life can't take root in a hard heart.

Question: What has happened in your life that would cause you to develop a toughness that resists the Word of God?

¹ All scripture listed is NIV unless otherwise indicated

The shallow-hearted people begin to grow, but the seed's roots can't go deep. When persecution begins or we realize that work is involved in following Jesus, we fall away and forget the truth we learned at the beginning. The Jesus life won't go deep in a shallow heart.

Question: If your heart is shallow and causes you to spend little time in Bible study, for example, what time commitment are you willing to make to grow closer to God through His Word?

The hearts that are distracted owing to thorns of worry, deceitfulness of wealth and other life issues, have signs of:

- Ingratitude;
- Irritability;
- A loss of compassion;
- A chronic sense that there's never enough time;

Dallas Willard says, "Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day."

Question: What distractions are preventing you from being fully involved in your life with Jesus?

Distractions cause us:

- To be more present to fear than to God;
- To be more present to tasks than to people;

The Jesus life will be choked out by a distracted heart.

Question: What, specifically, are you willing to do to control the distractions you have identified?

Question: How would you feel if a distracted heart is also defined as a self-involved heart?

Hard hearts, shallow hearts, distracted hearts cannot bear abundant fruit. However, people with these types of hearts can find healing so that others can see the fruit of Jesus in their lives. In Ezekiel 36:26, we learn that Jesus will give us a new heart and a new spirit in place of hearts of stone.

- We need to ask God to give us a new heart of flesh;
- We need to risk believing that He will do it;
- We need to respond to the opportunities He gives us to practice;

God expects us to participate. We participate by working hard in our marriages, on our parenting skills, on our careers and on our obedience. We need to practice being fully present to God and to others.

Question: What benefits can you expect to enjoy by working hard on your marriage, parenting, careers, and most importantly, on your obedience to God?

Question: The Crossing's website is available to tell you about all of the small groups available during each week to help you learn more about the Bible and to find fellowship with other Christians. When, exactly, are you planning to look for the one that will enrich your life?

Good soil is loam that is soft and rich in nutrients and roots grow deep in it. Good soil produces abundant fruit just as open hearts glorify God.

Question: If you can honestly say that your heart is not of "good soil" today, what attempts at forgiveness are you making to change this situation?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we ask You to soften our hearts, to help us to respond to Your voice in obedience and to control the distractions in our lives. We want to set our eyes and our hope on You alone so that we can produce abundant fruit for Your kingdom. In Jesus' name. Amen.