

The parable, why parables are being used and an explanation of the first parable.

We must understand that the bible is a book of many literary genre or forms.

Therefore it is necessary for us to know what is meant by a parable as compared to an allegory or a proverb. A parable is a short simple story intended to illustrate a moral or religious lesson. A proverb is a short well-known saying that expresses an obvious truth and often offers advice. An allegory is a work or story or a truth in which the characters and events are to be understood as representing other things and symbolically expressing a deeper, often spiritual, moral, or political meaning.

John Bunyan's *Pilgrims' Progress* is an allegory. It is the story of the main character Christian and his progress on the way to the heavenly city. Paul writes in Galatians,

3:21 ¶ Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?  
22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman.<sup>23</sup> But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.<sup>24</sup> This is allegorically speaking, for these *women* are two covenants: one *proceeding* from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar.<sup>25</sup> Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.<sup>26</sup> But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.

Many throughout history have tried to interpret much or all of the Bible as allegory, always looking for a deeper, more spiritual meaning or a double meaning and this is a very poor and inaccurate way to approach the Scripture.

One other thing we should note before continuing is that even a parable may make use of other literary forms. When Jesus says, "the kingdom of heaven is like", He is using simile and then he proceeds with the parable itself. He is saying that the real truth of the parable is not the things mentioned in the parable but that they are similar to the things that he is teaching: they are like the kingdom of heaven.

"1 He began to teach again by the sea. And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land. 2 And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching, 3 "Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 "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. 6 "And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. 7 "Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. 8 "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." 9 And He was saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." 10 As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables. 11 And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, 12 so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN." 13 And He \*said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables? 14 "The sower sows the word. 15 "These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. 16 "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; 17 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. 18 "And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, 19 but 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. 20 "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.'" Mark 4:1-20, NAS95.

In the Gospel of Matthew, this is the first time since the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus is addressing a large public, open-air gathering. He has been preaching in the synagogues and in homes dividing His teaching between public instruction and private instruction of the disciples. As He comes out of the house He comes to the shore but because of the crowd is forced to go into a boat and sits down in the assumed position of the teacher and the crowd is standing as He begins to teach them.

The scenario is also found here in Mark.

He begins to teach them in a series of parables in Matthew. This is not the first time He has done so. The first parable He taught was at the end of the Sermon on the Mount as we have already studied. But now He is teaching in a series of parables.

Mark says he was teaching them in parables and in vs 33" With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; and Mark does not record all of them. "

All of the information in this parable would be easily recognized by the crowd, which includes His disciples. Now we must remember that the Sermon on the Mount was primarily directed to the disciples although a large crowd was gathered. Now the parables are addressed primarily to the large crowd but the disciples are meant to understand what the crowd cannot understand.

To hear this parable as it is given gives us no clue as to what it should mean or how to interpret it. We had a clue in the parable at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said, "those who hear my words are like." The key to understanding the builders parable was to relate to hearing and doing what Christ taught and that is was a serious endeavor to be a disciple of Christ.

In this parable we are given no clues to frame the parable in for interpretation.

Jesus says, "he who has ears to hear, let Him hear." This is significant. It has the full force of meaning that those who have ears to hear will hear. There will be those who can hear and those who cannot hear. This points very clearly to the idea that only those who are the elect of God can have any understanding of these parables.

The parables are also being used as a judgement against those who will not hear. We will see this more clearly when we look at the quote from Isaiah in verses 12.

At this moment even the disciples do not understand what Jesus is teaching in the parable. We must remember that everything for the disciples since they have been following Jesus is an ongoing learning process that leads to their full conversion on Pentecost. Jesus is preparing them with what they will need to do the work of being the church and preparing those who will be the apostles for instructing the church. He is teaching them how to understand and teach with parables. Jesus is not the only one who ever taught in Parables. But history proves no one was ever more effective in the use of parables than Jesus.

**10 As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, *began* asking Him *about* the parables.<sup>11</sup> And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables,<sup>12</sup> so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN."**

(Just a note here. In the Matthew passage there is a longer quote from Isaiah. See our message on Matthew 12 on the website.)

Mark tells us this was not said to just the 12 but those other followers that were with him and as we have already studied, some were supporting him and the twelve financially.

The first thing we must notice is the exclusivity concerning those who can understand the parables. It has been granted to the disciples. Only those who know Christ are granted this ability. Now it could be said that the parables are being used to conceal truth from some and to reveal truth to others and this obviously has merit based on what Jesus is saying. But it is also true that Jesus, rather than concealing truth is simply revealing it to those whom He has chosen.

Then Jesus gives us the first information that is needed to understand the parable. The parable concerns the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. These mysteries are meant to be revealed to those whom God has chosen to hear. The word mystery does not mean something that remains a mystery. It is a mystery that can be solved, it can be understood. Furthermore, those who will have understanding that is granted by God will be given more ability to understand, their knowledge of the kingdom of heaven will be abundant. But those who have not been granted this ability will lose any perceived understanding of the kingdom of heaven they may have, it will be taken away from them. This is a demonstration of the wisdom of a Sovereign God in the things concerning salvation and the knowledge of God. This has nothing to do with good works or intellect or human ability. It has to do with God and the election of His saints. This is a judgment against those who deny the Gospel. It is proof that when man is left to himself he cannot understand the things of God and of our Christ.

Jesus uses the prophet Isaiah to illustrate this.

**"12 so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN." Mark 4:12, NAS95.**

Jesus is saying that those who do not hear are a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. They will keep on hearing but they are really not listening and truly hearing and they are seeing but with no real perception concerning the truth of Christ. What they hear and see are meaningless because they are dull of heart. There is no true spirituality that has been born of God. There is no regeneration. This is a judicious hardening of the heart by God. First they don't hear or see nor do they really want to so God hardens

them even more. If they truly desired God, they would turn to Him and He would make them spiritually healed from their sin but rather the opposite has occurred as a judgement from God. This is made even clearer as we recall what Jesus said in vs 11:

"11 And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables," Mark 4:11, NAS95. Their eyes and ears are blessed. They have been granted to know the secrets of the kingdom of God. They are not like those who are dull of heart and who have been hardened by God. Those who are the genuine disciples of Christ are the blessed ones of the beatitudes and spiritual prosperity is evident in them because of the knowledge of the kingdom that Jesus' true disciples have.

The blessing that they are a part of is something that was desired by other godly men, from the Old Covenant era as Jesus taught in Matthew's account,

Mt. 12:17 "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*. Many Old Covenant prophets knew many different things about Jesus and the kingdom of God but they did not know as much as the disciples. The revelation of God was given from generation to generation with each new revelation adding to a fuller picture but the picture as a whole was given to none of them, as righteous and faithful as they were. It was not kept from them to hide it from them. It was not the time for the full revelation, as it says in Hebrews 1: 1,2

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

It is a testimony to the unique blessings of God's New Covenant people that the revelation of Christ is complete.

Jesus has presented a parable that the disciples and the other followers do not understand, and now He gives them the interpretation of the parable.

"14 "The sower sows the word. 15 "These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. 16 "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; 17 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. 18 "And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, 19 but 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. 20 "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." Mark 4:14-20, NAS95.

A parable has one essential truth that is drawn from the story. This parable could be called the parable of the soils. It is not the sower who is the main subject but the soils and whether or not they are able to receive the seed and produce a yield.

They are some things that do not need to be explained to Jesus disciples, they knew the terrain but we need some further information

The kind of seed here is not known but the procedure is the same for sowing in Palestine. The area where fields are planted usually have walkways or paths running through them or alongside of them. These areas become very hard from the lack of rain and the constant traffic. The sower does not build raised seed beds nor does he make neatly structured rows especially for wheat and other grain crops. The sower freely distributes his seeds by throwing from his hands from one side to the other across the front of his body. The seed falls rather indiscriminately. Normally the ground is ploughed after sowing not before.

Before Jesus tells them what the parable means, they and we already know that it has something to do with the secrets of the kingdom of God and that it has benefit for the members of the kingdom.

Jesus says the word of God is the seed. The seed falls onto various kinds of soil, four to exact. The soils represent the condition of the hearers who are listening to truths about the kingdom of God. There is nothing wrong with the seed, the Word of God and there is nothing wrong with the sower.

When it falls where there is absolutely no understanding, when it falls on the hard packed path and just lays there, the birds, the evil one, comes and snatches it away. Birds are used as symbols of evil in other Scripture. The hearer has no ability for understanding the word of God. There is no opportunity for the word to enter in and change the heart of this non-hearer. In the hearers natural state there is no interest, no desire or even possibly any memory of the truth.

It is possible that Jesus has a living illustration here in view of the opposition of the Pharisees.

The second hearer has a joyful experience in hearing the word of God but the condition of that person is like rocky soil. No serious rooting of the word takes place. It is a shallow response for shallow reasons. Under the rocks is a harder surface and the roots cannot get as deep as needed. It is an experience and nothing more. We may know many who want to experience God but few are they who want to desire to know God. Again a living illustration here could be the crowds, at large.

There is external joy that provides an emotional experience that sounds like so much of what occurs at so called revival meetings today. Once the emotional high begins to fade and it can no longer be artificially recreated and once the real call to commitment and discipleship comes and the threats of persecution and suffering for Christ are made clear, the interest in the things of Christ vanishes.

The next kind of person is one who is very troubled and whose circumstances are compared to being thorns growing all around them. Possibly Judas. All the worries of the world, which can include the deceitfulness of becoming wealthy are overwhelming and very soon choke out any vestige of the Word that seems to have taken root. For these worries to overcome the word of the kingdom there cannot be any real abiding in the Word, there is no real appealing to the Word for help and hope. The Word was nothing but a temporary comfort that seemed to hold at bay some of these thorny things. But these thorny things for people are there because they are a product of the lust of the eye the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. Mark's account of this parable says

**Mk.4:19, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word. And Luke says Lu 8:14, And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.**

How many professing Christians do you know who are just like this. They are literally having any remnant of what seemed a true faith being choked out of them because these other things are more important. Careers, pleasures, money, and so on become a priority rather than glorifying Christ. Christianity becomes something to complain

about. It becomes a problem rather than a solution. Being a Christian gets in the way of the things that matter most.

Then Jesus says there is a person who responds to the word of the kingdom, it is a person who understands the word of the kingdom the person has been prepared to receive the word just like the good soil has what it needs for the seed to produce healthy roots and grow to produce a harvest.

The word of the kingdom is sown in many places and produces various harvests. There are places where the harvest seems to be spectacular at times and there are places where the harvest is not so overwhelming but is a harvest nonetheless. There are people who seem to grow at a never ending pace as believers and there are others whose growth is not so vibrant but produces a very recognizable harvest. This is how the kingdom of God spreads normally. Just like a harvest. Some years there is a bumper crop, some years only a few bushels but there is always a harvest. There is always evidence that the word of the kingdom has fallen on soil that was prepared for the seed. God's people will and must produce fruit wherever they are and no matter what the circumstances of their lives are because God himself has prepared the soil of the heart by regeneration and the word of the kingdom must be profitable to those whom God has chosen to hear and understand it.

At this time in Jesus ministry, He has chosen to teach in parables as a judgement against those who have not heard or seen the kingdom truth He has been preaching. How many times have you heard and seen the truth of the kingdom and it has meant nothing to you. If this is so, then cry out to God to be merciful and to give you ears to hear and eyes to see so that you may repent and believe.

All of us at one time were no better off than any of the three soils that rejected the seed. None of us were saved at birth. All of us who are truly saved had to have our hearts prepared by God so we would eventually receive the good word of the kingdom. We all had to hear the word and have faith and repentance given to us as gifts from God so that we could be converted by the grace of God. We all had to live in our sin



So, if you have those blessed eyes and blessed ears, then meditate on the fact and appreciate the truth that you are the blessed of God and attend your heart even more to the truths of God's word and to the things of the kingdom that have been reserved for you to know when others never will.

As we conclude let's review our key points from the parable.

1. Election and evangelism expect a harvest
2. There will be failure
3. Self evaluation is part of the news
4. People need to be prepared by God
5. The sower or the seed is not at fault. The method is not at fault (when done correctly)