

2. The Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:3-9, 18-23)

The Parable of the Sower teaches that the kingdom of heaven (God) is like a sower sowing in the field. In this regard, the Parable of the Sower fits perfectly the definition of a parable. Lesson one on the parables illustrated that a parable is a story true-to-life in all its details, and that it is a story that teaches a spiritual truth. In the parables of Jesus, the parables illuminated spiritual truths concerning the kingdom of heaven (God). Matthew uses the term *kingdom of heaven*, which is clearly synonymous with Luke's use of the term *kingdom of God* (See lesson one for details).

The figure to the right shows how parables illuminate spiritual truth. The spiritual truths in the parables of Jesus all illuminated the spiritual concept of the kingdom of heaven (God). Since humankind had never experienced the

kingdom of God, it would be impossible for them to understand the concept and characteristics of that heavenly kingdom. Through the ages, the spiritual truths of the kingdom of God were unavailable to man. Man could not even conceptualize such things. Jesus took everyday truths from the real experience of humankind and used them to illuminate the spiritual truths of the kingdom. Paul and Peter spoke of the necessity for this illumination by Jesus. Paul wrote in 1 Cor 2:7-10:

7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 However, as it is written:

"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him" –

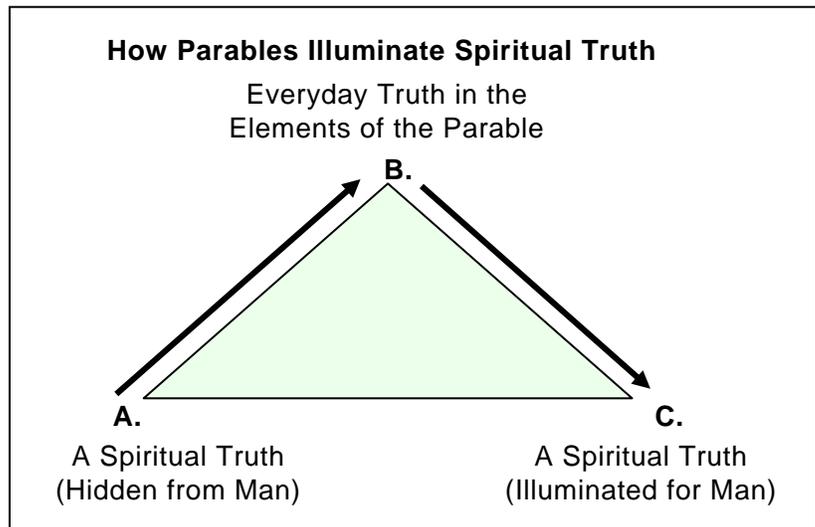
10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

According to Peter in 1 Peter 1:10-12, not even the Old Testament writers knew and understood the grace that was to come:

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, 11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Jesus Tells the Parable of the Sower

Matt 13:1-9: 1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. 2 Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they



withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9 He who has ears, let him hear."

The actor in this parable is the farmer and his action is sowing his seed in order to have a crop. The seed itself falls on different soil:

- Some seed fell on soil along the path and the birds ate the seed up,
- Other seed fell on rocky places where there was little soil. The plants scorched in the sun and withered.
- Other seed fell among the thorns, which choked the plants.
- Still other seed fell on good soil where it produced a crop.

The story of this parable is so simple and true that even a child could understand it in its plain, everyday meaning. An explanation by the Lord of the meaning of the parable follows in chapter 13:18-23. This explanation by the Lord is just as clear as the story itself. He leaves no doubt as to his teaching. He illuminates the truth about his kingdom.

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Sower

Matt 13:18-23: 18 "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20 The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. 22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. 23 But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

The farmer is the one who spreads the message of the kingdom. Once he has sown his seed, the outcome is out of his hands. As Paul wrote, "God made it grow."

The seed in the parable is the word [original: *logos*] of the kingdom. The word *seed* is often used to mean the word of God. Paul used this analogy in 1 Cor 3:6-9:

6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

According to John in 1 John 3:9-10, God's seed (his word) keeps us from sinning:

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. 10 This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

Peter describes the word of God as imperishable seed in 1 Peter 1:23-24, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God."

The four kinds of soil are the different kinds of people and their hearts on whom the word of the kingdom falls:

- The seed sown along the path: This man hears the word and does not understand it. The evil one snatches it away.
- The seed sown upon the rocky places: This man hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

- The seed that fell among the thorns: This man hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.
- The seed that fell on good soil: This man hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what he sowed.

Conclusion

The parable of the sower is perhaps one of the most powerful examples of teaching that we have. In one brief story, the Lord conveyed the work of those in the kingdom was to sow the word. He conveyed the relationship of this sown word to the growth of the kingdom. He showed how the devil, earthly cares, worries, and lack of perseverance steal the word from the hearts of the hearers. He concludes with the most powerful lesson: we must hear the word, understand it, and produce a crop in our lives. This idea—the word of God is the powerful means used in building the kingdom—finds restatement repeatedly in the work of the apostles. Paul declared in Rom 1:16, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” He re-asserted that the word (message) of the cross was the power of God in 1 Cor 1:18, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Peter concluded that this word (seed) was imperishable, living, and enduring in 1 Peter 1:22-24, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”

Study Questions

1. How do parables illuminate spiritual truth? _____

2. Who planted the seed in Corinth? _____
3. Who watered? _____
4. Who added the increase? _____
5. How did Peter describe the word of God? _____
6. What are the four kinds of hearts upon which the seed might fall? _____

7. How does God’s seed (word) keep us from sinning? _____
8. What is the primary work of one who hears and understands the word? _____
