

Core
Christianity

LEADER'S EDITION



The Parables of King Jesus

Chuck Tedrick

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The Parables of King Jesus: Leader's Edition

by Chuck Tedrick

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Why *This* Study?

Introduction: Why This Study?

To begin, we would like to thank you—students, congregants, church leaders, elders, pastors, and churches—for supporting and using this Bible study. We hope it enriches your Christian life, challenges your heart, and builds up your faith to the glory of God.

Why the Parables?

Jesus's parables are familiar and popular, but they are sometimes misinterpreted or misapplied, treated as timeless stories with moral lessons. But Jesus isn't simply relaying information or providing instruction, he's ushering in his kingdom. In this Bible study, we'll discover that the parables are not merely *describing* something but *doing* something through the words and works of Jesus.

All of our studies are designed with several things in mind:

1. TO ADVANCE THE GOSPEL

The Pew Research Center reports a rapidly changing religious landscape in the U.S., with the percentage of those identifying as atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular” up nine percent in just the last 10 years.¹ Almost 60 percent of our youth leave their churches as young adults, and this number is growing.

Despite this unsettling news, the core message of Christianity—the gospel—is still capable of renewing our lives and the church.

Rather than worrying or acting out of fear and self-preservation, the best hope for Christians, the church, and people who feel pressure to abandon their faith is the historic Christian faith, the gospel announcement of what God has done through Jesus Christ for the world.

2. TO SPEAK TO HONEST QUESTIONS

Many in our evangelical, Baptist, Reformed, Lutheran, and Anglican churches have honest questions about faith and life that they may be afraid to ask. We shaped this study to address the concerns of long-time Christians, new Christians, Christians with wavering faith, and skeptics alike.

3. TO ENGAGE THE DRAMA OF SCRIPTURE, TEACH THE DOCTRINE OF HISTORIC CHRISTIANITY, MOVE US TO DOXOLOGY (WORSHIP), AND ENABLE HEALTHY DISCIPLESHIP

Our studies are written to show how doctrine naturally arises out of the Bible's narrative of Jesus Christ and his saving work. We designed the reflection and discussion questions with a practical emphasis to help you engage the material in a prayerful way that should inspire worship and lead to a better understanding of how to live as a disciple of Christ.

¹ Pew Research Center, “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace: An update on America's changing religious landscape,” October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

4. TO BE USEFUL IN A VARIETY OF SETTINGS

We wrote this study thinking of Sunday school classes, Bible study groups, informal gatherings among friends, and individuals who want to learn more about the Christian faith. Each lesson includes a series of short sections containing a reading and a set of reflection questions. The leader's edition of this study has group discussion questions so that Christians can come together to share insights, ask questions, pray together, and be equipped to share what they're learning with friends and family.

We recommend you work through one lesson per week. If meeting with a group, we suggest reading the lesson and answering the questions on your own first.

Note To Leaders (LEADER'S EDITION ONLY)

Again, thank you for supporting and using this Bible study. Here are some tips for doing this study with a group:

- Encourage group members to get their own copies of the Bible study so they can read the lesson in advance and answer the reflection questions in preparation to share their thoughts with the group each week.
- Prepare in advance to lead the discussion. Your leader's edition has additional sections (highlighted with gray boxes) to help you lead your time together.
- Though it's common for discussion to stay at an intellectual level, the questions in this study are aimed at being practical. Help and encourage your group members to think about how the truth of God's word intersects with their daily lives by modeling your own personal reflection and application.
- Be patient with your discussion time. Leading a group discussion is hard! It takes practice, and it can take time for people to feel comfortable sharing. It can also be frustrating when people come unprepared, but your grace and patience will help people to continue showing up.
- Invite people to participate by asking for volunteers to read a passage of Scripture or a section of the study, or by closing in prayer at the end. Welcome their thoughts and reflections. Invite questions. The more people participate in the study, the more they will enjoy their time, and the more they will learn.
- Keep in mind that you don't have to follow the lesson exactly as it's written. The written materials are designed to aid you, not lock you into a certain mode. Feel free to change things to fit your group and level of experience in teaching.

Ultimately, remember that it's God who is at work in his word, and he is faithful!

“TO YOU IT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO KNOW
THE SECRETS OF THE KINGDOM OF
HEAVEN, BUT TO THEM IT HAS NOT BEEN
GIVEN . . . BLESSED ARE YOUR EYES,
FOR THEY SEE, AND YOUR EARS, FOR
THEY HEAR . . .”

Matthew 13:11, 16

The
Purpose
of the
Parables

Prayer (LEADER'S EDITION ONLY)

Dear Heavenly Father, we marvel that you are a speaking God. We recognize that you created the universe through speech. Your word is powerful, effective, and life-giving. We know that it does not return void. How incredible to realize that you also create and populate the new heavens and new earth through your speech. We rejoice that we are called, reborn, justified, and sanctified by you through your word and Spirit. We ask that you give us ears to hear, hearts to believe, and minds to know you and your amazing grace in our salvation. We also ask that you give us hands and feet that are eager and willing to do your bidding as part of your new creation. In the name of Jesus, the Word made flesh, and through the power, presence, and person of the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Read Together: Matthew 13:1–23 (LEADER'S EDITION ONLY)

Opening Reflection Questions (LEADER'S EDITION ONLY)

1. What do you think of when you hear the word 'parable'?
2. Why did Jesus say he spoke in parables?
3. What are some of your favorite parables? Why?

Read: Matthew 13:10–17; 2 Samuel 12:1–15

Why Did Jesus Speak in Parables?

Suppose we were to conduct a person-on-the-street interview asking people why Jesus spoke in parables. They might respond by saying, “he was seeking to make things clear” or “he was folksy and relatable.” These responses are reasonable and expected, but Jesus answered this question in a way we may not expect.

One of the keys to understanding Jesus’s answer and faithfully interpreting the parables is recognizing that they’re delivered by the king and are about his kingdom. Jesus isn’t merely relaying information or providing instruction. He’s ushering in the kingdom of God. As he speaks, things happen. Some people are being hardened, and some people are being softened. Some are being judged, and others are being saved. Some are being warned, while others are being summoned. Jesus has come to seek and to save the lost, not simply to provide a way of salvation. The parables don’t just address this reality; they create this reality. The king and kingdom have come in the person of Jesus.

What Are Parables?

When exploring the parables, we do well to remember first and foremost that the speaker is the second person of the Holy Trinity in human flesh. Amazing! Second, keep focused on the reality; the parables tell us something about the king, his kingdom, and his people. They’re not lessons about economic principles, tips for living, civics lessons, or marital advice. The promised prophet, priest, and king has come and is bringing forth his eternal kingdom. If it were an old Western movie, we’d say there’s a new sheriff in town. Things will not go on as they have been. Now is a decisive turning point in human history and redemptive history.

Jesus makes this clear by noting that his speaking in parables is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 6:9–10). In other words, Jesus is giving the kingdom to his people, and he’s hardening the hearts of his enemies. The Lord of salvation and judgment is present and speaking. Blessed are your eyes and your ears, for they hear. Redemption is a gift of God, not a human achievement. A theme of Scripture is that “salvation belongs to the Lord” (Jon. 2:9, Ps. 3:8, Isa. 43:11, Eph. 1:3–14, and Rev. 7:10).

You Are the Man

Jesus isn’t the first person in the Scriptures to use parables to accomplish something significant. We read in 2 Samuel 12:1–15 an example from the Old Testament. Nathan, the prophet of the Lord, uses a parable to draw king David into the story, and to bring judgment or salvation.

As we explore the parables of Jesus together, it will serve us well to remember that parables are a “you are the man” type of speech. They’re not just telling us about something that did or will happen, but that something is happening right then and there. David, being convicted of his sin and called to repentance through Nathan’s parable, serves as a poignant example of this principle. Now a prophet greater than Nathan is on the scene. Jesus will judge and save, bring in or cast out, and soften and harden through his word and Spirit. He is the king of salvation and his kingdom.

Questions for Reflection

- 1 . How do our words and speech bring about specific outcomes in the world?
- 2 . Where are other places in Scripture in which we find God hardening some and softening others?
- 3 . What difference does it make to recognize the parables as being by the eternal king and about his everlasting kingdom?

Read Matthew 13:4–8

What Is the Parable of the Sower?

On the surface, this parable is a relatively straightforward story—a population dedicated primarily to and dependent upon agriculture would understand it. It's easy to imagine a farmer with a bag of seed slung over his shoulder walking around throwing kernels to the ground.

The parable notes the various soils upon which the seeds fell, coupled with the result or consequences:

- Some seed fell along a path where it was trampled and scavenged by birds.
- Some seed fell amongst the rocks and was devoid of any nourishment, and it was rootless.
- Some seed fell amongst the thorns, and it was quickly choked to death.

The incredible yield of the good soil may be surprising. The text notes, “other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty” (Matt 13:8). A 10x increase would be good. A 60x increase is outstanding. How could you describe a 100x increase other than exceptional?

This is no ordinary farmer or seed. The parable isn't about agriculture but about the kingdom. Did you notice and hear the king's summons? “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Matt. 13:9). Jesus doesn't simply want the crowd to listen with their ears; he calls some to faith and fruitfulness in his kingdom.

Jesus makes a distinction among his listeners. In response to the disciples' question, he says, "To *you* it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:11, emphasis added). The *you* here is plural and directed to the disciples. If Jesus were saying this in modern-day Texas, he would say, "to all y'all, it has been given." In the giving of the parable, Jesus is giving the kingdom.

The Kingdom Is a Gift

One of the things this parable highlights is that the kingdom is a gift, not an achievement. From first to last, salvation is of grace and not of merit. Our ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to believe are gifts from the king through his word and Spirit (Ezek. 36:22f, John 3:1–15, 1 Cor. 2:14). His disciples are blessed beyond measure. The text isn't saying that they will be blessed *if* they see these things and hear these things, but they see and hear these things *because* they are blessed.

Conversely, to others listening, the secrets of the kingdom were not given. Here we see the principle with which we began: The parables aren't *merely* describing something but *doing* something. King Jesus is calling his disciples to life and he is hardening his enemies. The secrets of the kingdom are public secrets: They have to do with Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, his person, words, works, and mission. He is the mystery revealed—the mystery of the ages revealed in the Son of God (Rom. 16:25–27, Eph. 3). The king and his kingdom have come. Some are gifted to hear and believe Jesus and are granted eternal life. Others do not see and hear, they do not believe and come because they remain hardened.

Questions for Reflection

1. What other passages in Scripture highlight the gift-nature of salvation?
2. How would you respond to a potential concern about Jesus's hardening hearts being unfair or unloving?
3. What other parables or similes of the kingdom (*the kingdom of God is like . . .*) overlap with themes in this parable, such as the gift of the kingdom, the growth of the kingdom, the hiddenness of the kingdom? (Hint: keep reading in Matthew 13).

Read Matthew 13:18–23

What Does the Parable of the Sower Mean?

Jesus explains this parable for the disciples and for us. The various soils represent responses to Jesus and the good news about him. As the parable was effective when spoken, so it's effective when being retold. Jesus's word and Spirit were bringing the kingdom then, and they are still bringing the kingdom now.

The seed along the path is snatched away by the evil one. Jesus's disciples must recognize an enemy who hates God, his Son, his word, his people, and his promises. If he could, Satan would take all the seed and prevent all from hearing and believing. But he can't. Greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). All of Christ's sheep will hear and come (John 10:27).

The seed amongst the rocks is like one who receives the word and receives it with joy but falls away. Jesus reveals that some will *profess* faith, but they will not *possess* faith. This will be clear in the Gospels as many are drawn to Jesus's miracles, but not to him. It's not a case of losing salvation, which is impossible. Rather, they don't really believe from the start. The text says they're rootless and fruitless. This is a superficial 'faith.' It's not saving faith in Jesus Christ. Note how hollow it appears; it's received with joy, but immediately falls away when tribulation or persecution comes on account of the word.

The seed among the thorns is choked out. This is the one who is distracted or preoccupied with the things of the world and not the things of the Lord. Jesus says it's unfruitful. Unfruitful is in stark contrast to what Jesus says about the seed in the good soil. The lack of fruit reveals the lack of roots. In other words, faithlessness.

Finally, and gloriously, what about the seed sown on the good soil? This is the one who hears and understands. This blessed one does not manifest minor or temporary fruit but abundance, a bumper crop of a hundredfold or sixtyfold or thirtyfold.

The Fruitfulness of the Sower

This parable reveals Jesus as the Sower and the seed as the word of God. We discover the gift-nature and radical fruitfulness of his kingdom. Jesus is the prophet of the Lord in the spirit of Nathan and Isaiah. These great prophets spoke a word *of* the Lord. Jesus is speaking *as* the Lord. His word never returns void and will accomplish everything he set out for it to accomplish (Isa. 55:1–1). Blessed are those who hear the savior and come to him for salvation.

What may look to some like a futile effort with so much seed falling on bad soil is overshadowed by the fruitfulness of the Sower (Jesus) and his seed (the gospel). Jesus's kingdom will be filled with a multitude of people from every nation, which cannot be counted (Rev. 7:9–12). The gates of hell will not prevail against the king, his word, or his bride (Matt. 16:18). This confidence in Jesus and his word gives the church of all ages her life and boldness in proclaiming Jesus Christ's gospel.

The apostle Peter heard this parable, and later penned these words reflecting on the efficacy of God's word: "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, *since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God*; for 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but *the word of the*

Lord remains forever. ' And this word is the good news that was preached to you" (1 Pet. 1:22–25, emphasis added).

Questions for Reflection

- 1 . Do you expect the gospel message to receive the same responses when you share the gospel with your neighbors or when the church preaches? Why or why not?

- 2 . What characters in the Gospels can you identify with various soils/responses? Consider Mary, Peter, Judas, Pilate, etc.

- 3 . How have you responded to the summons of King Jesus to "Come!"?

Questions for Discussion (LEADER'S EDITION ONLY)

- 1 . What's the difference between a profession of faith and possession of faith? Where else in Scripture do we hear this distinction?

- 2 . How does the evil one seek to snatch away the word today?

- 3 . What are some ways in which we get distracted from the truth about Jesus?

- 4 . On what basis can we have confidence that we belong to Jesus?

Notes
