

12 Parables about the Kingdom of God – with brief commentaries



Jesus preaching about the Kingdom of God from a boat along the shore of the Sea of Galilee

1. The Growing Seed – [Mark 4:26-29](#) – *And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”*

Thoughts: This parable is about how the Kingdom of God grows by divine grace and power in the hearts of men and women when the living seed of the Word of God is sown freely by faithful servants who are living and proclaiming the message of the Kingdom as they pass through life. As greater numbers hear, receive, believe, and grow in the Word, the citizenship of the Kingdom grows and with it God's sovereign reign in the midst of mankind. The Kingdom of God advances by the invisible power of God on the Earth as the Word of God is disseminated by faithful believers.

2. Parable of the Sower – [Matthew 13:3-9](#) – *“Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

Read Jesus' explanation in [Matthew 13:18-23](#) – *“Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”*

Thoughts: The message in this parable is a corollary to the one in The Growing Seed above. It describes how the condition of the human heart determines its receptivity to the message of the Kingdom carried in the seed of the Word of God. If people are tender and open to the Word, the seed will take root, grow, and bear a good harvest. If not, forces and influences that are antithetical to the advance of God's Kingdom will interfere with the process and consume or choke out the seed before it can grow. As a good gardener prepares the soil before planting, so the faithful servant of God will help prepare the hearts of his audience as part of the process of proclaiming the Word of the Kingdom.

3. The Tares (Weeds) – [Matthew 13:24-30](#) – *He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.””*

Read Jesus' explanation in [Matthew 13:36-43](#) – *Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*

Thoughts: In this parable Jesus shifts the use of the word “seed” from being the words and concepts being sown to the resulting fruit of these in the individual lives of human beings. He points out that “the sons of the kingdom” (the wheat) are not the only “seeds” being sown in the world. Others are “the sons of the evil one” (the weeds) who are opposed to the reality and message of the Kingdom of Heaven, either intentionally or unwittingly. They promote false notions about God, mankind, and how to live life. Some of their spiritual influence may be religious in nature, but a fair amount is political and philosophical. Some is well-intentioned but misguided while other is an active form of false propaganda. Ultimate justice is in God’s hands. Our task is to focus on spreading the good news of the Kingdom by overcoming darkness with light rather than by taking on the troubling task of trying to gather up and eliminate those who are disseminating it.

4. Parable of the Mustard Seed – [Matthew 13:31-32](#) – *He said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.”*

Thoughts: The growth of the Kingdom of God is spiritually organic. The seed of the Word of God seems to be small but is actually very powerful and capable of producing a huge living entity in the same way that a tiny mustard seed can grow into a huge bushy tree (up to 10-30 feet in diameter). Taken in context, other messages are implied in the parable. Not every seed will germinate and produce a huge tree like this. In fact, many of the plants will be small and some will even wither as described in the Parable of the Sower above. However, some seed will fall in especially fertile soil within a favorably diverse climate with not only sunshine and rain but times of dryness and wind and will grow into a safe and sturdy shelter for many. This parable envisions the growth of individual believers who redeem entire social networks and, gathered into multiple larger groups, are able to influence an entire society.

5. The Leaven – [Matthew 13:33](#) – *And again he said, “To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.”*

Thoughts: Unlike other parts of Scripture where leaven is used as an example of corruption entering into a pure life, this parable is a simple and positive example from kitchen cooking. Do you want a nourishing loaf of bread or a cake to rise and grow? Mix some living yeast powder into the matrix of flour and other ingredients, add moisture, and the growth of the yeast will raise up the entire lump into a delicious result. The Kingdom of God is the desired result. The leaven is the Word of God producing growth in believers who are mixed into the surrounding community. Just as God was able to use only 300 chosen, courageous, and obedient warriors armed only with lamps hidden under pitchers in Gideon's army to redeem the entire nation of Israel from its enemies, He can mix in a comparatively small number of sold-out believers into a receptive community and raise up the entire group.

6. The Hidden Treasure – [Matthew 13:44](#) – *“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”*

Thoughts: The field referred to in the parable represents a portion of the wide, broad world with all its details and complications. When a man discovers the priceless treasure of the truths of the Kingdom, he is willing to give up anything that has been precious to him, including his life itself, to apprehend and be apprehended by the King and dwell in His Kingdom.

7. The Pearl of Great Price – [Matthew 13:45-46](#) – *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”*

Thoughts: This parable mirrors the one about the Hidden Treasure noted above and highlights the priceless joy a person has and the willingness to sacrifice all when they discover and experience the precious reality of Christ and His Kingdom.

8. Drawing in the Net – [Matthew 13:47-50](#) – *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

Thoughts: This is a Kingdom parable that also speaks about the Final Judgment at the End of the Age. The “sea” is the world and the “fish” are its human inhabitants. The “net” is the proclaimed Good News of the Kingdom of God. Some have heard the message, repented, received the Lord's free gift of forgiveness and salvation, and are counted as righteous. Many others have ignored the Gospel message to their own peril, lived lives to please themselves and not God, and have failed to pass the only test that eternity offers: will you accept or reject God's free gift of eternal life in Christ?

9. The Unforgiving Servant – [Matthew 18:21-34](#) – *Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”*

“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to

choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

"When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Thoughts: This analogy is technically not a parable but is listed here because of its similarity with other teachings about the Kingdom of God. The point of the analogy is very straightforward: the Kingdom of God is built on the forgiveness of sins. Choosing to be a hypocrite who accepts the forgiveness of God but doesn't reciprocate by forgiving others is incompatible with Kingdom living, a point also made in the Lord's Prayer.

10. The Workers in the Vineyard – [Matthew 20:1–16](#) – *"For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' So the last will be first, and the first last."*

Thoughts: We do not work or earn our way into the Kingdom of God. Entrance into the Kingdom is a free gift to all who ask with pure hearts, whether they come to faith early in life and are fruitful for a long time or at the very end when there is little if any time to bear fruit. The example of the thief who was being crucified beside Jesus but recognized who He was just before dying illustrates the point of this parable.

11. The Wicked Husbandmen – [Matthew 21:33-45](#) – *"Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him." When the chief priests*

and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

Thoughts: Here Jesus is talking about the issue God has been having with His people Israel and how they have treated His lordship and the messengers He has sent them over the years. Now He is sending them His very own Son, anticipating that they will treat Jesus shamefully the way they have treated the others. The prophesied result will be the rejection of Israel as the primary bearer of God's message of redemption to the world. Over the centuries since then, this parable has been used to justify a teaching called Replacement Theology or Supersessionism, which essentially teaches that the church has replaced Israel in God's plan. Adherents of replacement theology believe the Jews are no longer God's chosen people, and God does not have specific future plans for the nation of Israel. Among the different views of the relationship between the church and Israel are that the church has replaced Israel (replacement theology), the church is an expansion of Israel (covenant theology), or the church is completely different and distinct from Israel (dispensationalism or premillennialism). What do you think?

12. The Great Wedding Banquet – [Matthew 22:1–14](#) – *And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.”’ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.*

“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Thoughts: Jesus' observation “Many are called, but few are chosen” comes to mind. Entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven is by invitation. The RSVP is our acceptance of the King's free offer as demonstrated by our conviction, confession, repentance, and bearing the fruit of repentance by putting off the old garments of sin and replacing them with the “wedding garment” of His righteousness. The invitation goes out to hosts of people who put it aside, ignore it, or even actively resist it in the midst of their busy, distracted, self-centered lives. These unfortunate people are left to the consequences of their own choices (note some similarities here with the Parable of the Sower). Only those who fully accept the offer and present themselves at the gates clothed in His righteousness are entitled to enter in. Some of those entering in would have been scoffed at as unworthy by those who proudly resisted God's gracious call.

A full list of Jesus' Parables and where they are in the Bible:

Parable	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Alert servants		13:33-37		
Barren fig tree			13:6-9	
Bread of life				6:31-38
Budding fig tree	24:32-35	13:28-32	21:29-33	
Children in market	11:16-19		7:31-35	
Christian light	5:14-16	4:21-23	8:16-18	
Dinner guests			14:15-24	
Divided kingdom	12:24-30	3:22-27	11:14-23	
Feast invitations			14:12-14	
Friend at midnight			11:5-13	
Good Samaritan			10:25-37	
Good shepherd				10:1-18
Great physician	9:10-13	2:15-17	5:29-32	
Grooms attendants	9:14-15	2:18-20	5:33-35	
Growing seed		4:26-29		
Hidden treasure	13:44			
Householder	13:52			
Humbled guest			14:7-11	
King's war plans			14:31-33	
Laborers in vineyard	20:1-16			
Landowner	21:33-46	12:1-12	20:9-18	
Leaven	13:33		13:20-21	
Lost coin			15:8-10	
Lost sheep			15:4-7	
Marriage feast	22:1-14			
Mustard seed	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19	
Net of fish	13:47-50			
New cloth	9:16	2:21	5:36	
New wine	9:17	2:22	5:37-39	
Pearl of great price	13:45-46			
Pharisee and tax collector			18:9-14	
Prodigal son			15:11-32	
Rich man & Lazarus			16:19-31	
Rich fool			12:16-21	
Salt without taste	5:13	9:50	14:34-35	
Servant's duty			17:7-10	
Sheep and goats	25:31-46			
Sign of Jonah	12:38-42		11:29-32	
Tares in field (part 1)	13:24-30			
Tares in field (part 2)	13:36-43			
Ten Minas			19:11-27	
Ten talents	25:14-30			
Ten virgins	25:1-13			
The Sower (part 1)	13:3-9	4:3-20	8:4-15	
The Sower (part 2)	13:18-23			
Two debtors			7:41-43	
Two sons	21:28-32			
Unclean spirit	12:43-45		11:24-26	
Unjust judge			18:1-8	
Unjust steward			16:1-13	
Unmerciful servant	18:21-35			
Unprepared builder			14:28-30	
Vine and branches				15:1-17
Watching servants			12:35-40	
Wise builder	7:24-27		6:47-49	
Wise servant	24:45-51			
Wise steward			12:42-48	