

“What’s in a Story?”

Matthew 13v1-23

Scripture Ref: Is 6:9;

- 1. Storytelling has existed since the beginning of time. People have used stories to pass on ancestry, traditions, and significant historical events.**
 - a. Story’s have been used to communicate thoughts, ideas, and moral and social codes. In ancient times stories were carved, scratched, painted, printed, or inked onto wood or bamboo, ivory, bones, pottery, clay tablets, skins (parchment), bark cloth; basically any material available.**
 - b. Stories have been written on paper, illustrated on canvass, and in modern times recorded on audio and video medium, and stored electronically in digital form.**
- 2. I have to admit I like listening to stories about people and things**
 - a. Sometimes on the public radio they will have a segment about some person, just a regular person, telling about their life, their children, their marriage, their job.**
 - b. Totally trivial stuff – nothing that would change the world or even enhance my life**
 - c. But for some reason I like getting a little glimpse into someone’s life.**
- 3. Jesus often used a type of story called a parable. The word "parable" comes from the Greek word parabolē, which describes a fictive illustration in the form of a brief narrative, by which spiritual and moral matters might be conveyed.**
 - a. A parable might be a way for a father to communicate some life truth to a child**
 - b. Or a teacher may use a parable to help a student understand the ramifications of some decision.**
 - c. We might recognize some of them, for instance: The boy who cried wolf.**
 - d. The Parable of the Sower is a great example.**

The Parable of the Sower

13:1 On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. 2 And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. 3 Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. 5 Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. 6 But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. 7 And some

fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. 8 But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

- 4. So all these people are gathered around Jesus, and instead of preaching a theologically deep sermon, He tells them a parable.**
 - a. Jesus uses this parable to paint a word picture in our mind of a man sowing seeds in his field, throwing them all around.**
 - b. The seeds fall into different areas, land on different soil, and each soil type produces a different result for the planted seeds.**
 - c. In telling this parable, Jesus communicates a powerful message about God, about His word, about our lives, and about our ministry to others.**

The Purpose of Parables

10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

11 He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12 For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 13 Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

(Is 6:9) 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.'

- 5. What? Is God saying to Isaiah "go tell these people about me, but they aren't going to hear or see, or even understand". WHY would God do that?**
 - a. Well here is the thing – God does not force Himself on anyone. Being God, He could come in a blaze of glory and fire and totally overwhelm everyone on the planet...**
 - b. And probably 99.9% of the people would acknowledge that "yes, God is real, and I guess I better worship and obey Him."**
 - c. But, that would be almost forced – many would obey out of fear, or simply because they would believe they had no other choice.**
- 6. No, God doesn't operate that way – He created man in His image, with a FREE WILL. We can choose to acknowledge God, or we can choose to reject Him.**

- a. And a choice made under duress or pressure is not a choice at all.
 - b. Like the guy who gets the girl pregnant in rural Kentucky – the dad and brothers of the girl will show up at the house with two things: a preacher and a shotgun,
 - c. and one of two things are going to happen, and the likely scenario is a “shotgun wedding!”
 - d. God doesn’t do “shotgun salvations” – He reveals Himself, and He allows us to choose.
 - e. ...”but” you say, what does that have to do with Jesus talking in parables?”
7. Jesus said *“Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given”*
- a. In other words, there are some that hear, but don’t listen.
 - b. Isaiah said *For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed*
 - c. And this prophecy was being fulfilled right before their eyes – the promised Messiah was sanding before the religious leaders and yet they couldn’t see Him
 - d. The Messiah was speaking directly to them, but they couldn’t hear Him.

16 But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; 17 for assuredly, 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.

8. In other words – instead of a sermon with deep theology, Jesus spoke in very simple terms, using simple parables, something that simply...made sense!
- a. He was “putting the cookies on the bottom shelf” so that the everyday man could hear and see and understand.
 - b. The people didn’t need a seminary degree to get the finer points of His message.
9. The religious leaders knew the writings of the prophets, there were studied and memorized
- a. And yet here was Jesus, the fulfillment of all that the prophets declared
 - b. Just think of what Abraham would have given to have seen the Messiah!
 - c. Isaiah would have loved to see his prophecies fulfilled!
 - d. These men would have been so blessed, so honored, to see and hear the Messiah!
 - e. And yet the religious leaders were just not interested.

10. Jesus had too humble of beginnings

- a. He wasn't eloquent enough – not educated enough
- b. He just didn't seem to fit the bill.

11. How sad – but the same thing happens so often today – the simple message of the gospel, that Jesus saves, is open to all – but not all are interested, as the explanation of the parable shows us.

The Parable of the Sower Explained

18 "Therefore hear the parable of the sower: 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.

12. The first thing we learn about this parable is that the seed represents the word of God – the truth of the gospel message – being spread and planted all over into the ears and hearts of people.

- a. The wayside is the path – the well-trodden path that people use – this path is hard packed, there is no loose soil
- b. And so when the word of God falls onto the hard soil – those who have hard hearts, there is no depth for it to grow in – and it is snatched away by the enemy

20 But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

13. The example is the stony places, where there is an inch or so of topsoil, but under that are the rocks.

- a. That person is the one who comes down the aisle, has a great emotional experience, prays the prayer... But it is a surface experience: it touches the emotion but not the heart.
- b. And as soon as the first problem arises, or the first friend questions their decision, they fall away.

22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

14. The third example is the person who hears, and responds, but their life is all choked up with the things of this world.

- a. They love money and success, and are too busy working to take time to spend in God's word or prayer

- b. They love fishing or surfing or hiking too much to go to church and fellowship with other Christians
- c. They love their parties too much to give up their worldly friends
- d. And soon enough, that little shoot has been choked out by all of these things.

15. And yet look at the seed that fell on the “good soil”...

23 But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

16. The point of the parable is that the seed that goes into the “good ground” is the person who hears the word, understands it, and it begins to grow...

- a. In other words – the person who RECEIVES the seed– the good soil.
- b. And let me make an observation – and observation that ties into what we have talked about for several weeks – the difference in the outcome is affected by the condition of the soil.
- c. What does the soil represent? The heart.

17. I am not talking about a “good heart” or “bad heart”, but rather the condition of the heart – like the condition of the soil.

- a. The heart can be conditioned by many things –
 - i. Our hearts can become hard because of sin that has happened to us –
 - a) The breakup of a family, abusive relationships, unloving parents,
 - ii. Our heart can become shallow from sin that we have done to others
 - a) In order to live in our own skin, we develop a shallow, uncaring perspective
 - iii. Our heart can become choked up with lust of the things of the world
- b. We can look at this and do one of two things – throw up our hands and say “that soil is bad” and walk away
- c. Or we can be like the wise farmer, and think “how can I prepare this soil for seed?”

18. A wise farmer will prepare the soil of his field before planting the first seed.

- a. He'll check the PH content, and add any minerals that might be needed to get it right
- b. He'll put some fertilizer down, so there is nutrition for the seed.

- c. He'll till up the earth, aerating the soil, pulling the rocks up to the surface, and then rake them off.
- d. All of these things are done before the first seed is planted, so that when it is planted, it will spring forth and bring a bountiful harvest.
- e. You always get more than you planted!

How do I apply this?

19. First I can look at my own heart – is it hard? Shallow? Choked up?

- a. Perhaps I need some prep – spend time in prayer and worship and allow the soil of my heart to be broken up, aerated, get those rocks broken up and raked off
- b. Perhaps I should get into the word of God, putting good nutrition into the soil
- c. Perhaps I should prioritize my desires for the things of the world, with my need for the things of God.

20. Second I can look at how I sow seeds around me – how am I spreading the seeds of the gospel?

- a. Am I being too timid? Disingenuous?
- b. Like the pilot who told the stewardess *“we’re still 2 hours out from Hawaii, but we only have 30 minutes of fuel, tell everyone to put on their floatation devices.”* The one stewardess didn’t want to alarm anyone, so she went out and told the people how great it would be to wear a floatation device, how cool they were, how comfortable they would be. A few people put them on, but after a little while they got tired of the discomfort, and took them off. Another older but wiser stewardess saw the situation and boldly took the intercom and told everyone *“we are going to crash land into the ocean in about 20 minutes, and you will be in the water for several hours before help arrives. If you want to live, put on your floatation device.”*
- c. I don’t mean we should be alarmist, but we should be straightforward with people about our faith, our belief, and the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

21. Finally – we should be aware, and prayerful, that the Holy Spirit prepares the heart of people for the gospel.

- a. We have to remember that God is sovereign, and that He will allow circumstances into the life of a person to bring them to a place of looking to Him.
- b. Difficult situations, hard places, trials and tribulations, will often bring a person to a place where their hard heart begins to soften

22. Maybe you are here today, and you have experienced some difficult things, and your looking for answers,

- a. And maybe the answer is that God has allowed these things into your life NOT to punish you, but to bring you to a place that you will look to Him for the answer!**

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