

Parables - an introduction and the Parable of the Sower - Peter Burton

- Where have you seen God at work in your life this week? (Share any brief examples and encouragements).
- Was there anything from Sunday's message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?
- Was there anything else you particularly noticed?

Introducing parables

One third of the gospels record the parables Jesus told. What is their significance? Essentially, "Repent for the Kingdom of God is near" (Matt 3v2, Mk 1v15, Lk 10v9). This is the gospel. E Petersen says "*The Kingdom is what Jesus reveals.*" So many parables begin "The Kingdom of God is like..."

Greek: *Parabole* means to throw down/compare. Jesus takes what we know and asks us to compare that with the Kingdom. So, why use parables?

1. Stories are important. They illuminate the real world. "*Parables are not simply information about the kingdom, but are part of the means of bringing it to birth.*" NT Wright.
2. We tend not to be good listeners. But we do tend to remember stories.
3. Parables are puzzling. We can be left confused at the end - there is a surface level meaning and a deeper meaning (Cf. Disney movies which are usually not multi-layered). "*God's Kingdom is a radical mystery... Parables upset existing ideas and offer new ones*" Robert Farrar Capon

Becoming better listeners -The Parable of the Sower Mk 4v1-20 (Also Matt 13v1-23 and Luke 8v4-15)
 "Hear" x8. V12 quotes Isa 6-9-10. Unusually, Jesus tells the parable and then explains it to his Disciples. He is telling his own story, preaching the Kingdom, and showing different types of response.
 The Seed = Word (*Logos*) = Jesus = Gospel; Sower = Jesus.

1. The Sower is Generous - there is a careless spreading of the seed. There is abundance Cf Ps 19
2. The Seed is Powerful - Fruitful, 30x, 60x, 100x Cf Isa 55v10-11, Deut 8v3.
3. Four soil types:

V15 The Path - Hardened Heart

"I'm fine as I am." No receptivity. The enemy makes our hearts harder. Life circumstances create obstinacy.

V16-17 Rocky Soil - Shallow Heart

We want forgiveness, peace and joy but don't want self-control, death to self. This leads to confrontation.

V18-19 Thorny Soil - Cluttered Heart

Thorns compete for light, water and space. Our worries, anxieties, wealth edge out God. We are deceived.

V20 Good Soil - Receptive Heart

We hear the Word AND accept it. It becomes the dominant thing in our lives and we become fruitful.

Still got questions? Jesus wants us to grapple with the parable. Who wins? Soil or Seed? Look at the many Christians around us. Peter concluded by reading Heb 12v1-3.

For Reflection in Collective:

- Read Mk 4v15-20 and pray for one another. Let each person privately assess where they are on the "soil scale." Then prayer for each other: NB. Some may ask for forgiveness or for strength to overcome.
- Discuss: How can we improve our listening skills?
- What stops us from understanding Parables? How do we look for the multi-layers of meaning?
- Thinking about vv18-19, what are the "thorns" in our lives / society?
- Spend time meditating on Heb 12v1-3 Which word or phrase is particularly poignant?