

# WEEK 32 DAY 1

## What Is a Parable?

Have you experienced reading a story to a child about which the child has many questions afterward, causing you to explain the events more fully? Often, understanding only comes when the child can relate the events being described to his or her own experiences. Since a story reference may have more than one application, this is the perfect opportunity to introduce a parable.

Parables were common in Jesus' day to illustrate an important lesson or teaching. In fact, Jesus' most important teaching device was the parable, which used vivid and memorable circumstances from everyday life to teach profound moral or spiritual truths. Some have explained a parable as "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."

A parable that uses real people and real-life circumstances may resemble a more current device called a fable. Fables use impersonated animals who behave like people in human situations. Both are techniques incorporated to teach a valuable lesson.

The Greek word *parabole* means "to cast or come alongside" and can refer to various figures of speech. However, in the Gospels, the parable was an expanded metaphor in story form with a profound conclusion. In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus' parable of the prideful Pharisee and the repentant tax collector concludes that God knows the genuine intention of a person and requires a heart of true humility and repentance as opposed to an outward show of religiosity and arrogance.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus uses as many as 28 parables while teaching. As students of God's Word, it's necessary to interpret them in the specific context of Jesus' ministry and how He explained the Jewish law and most importantly, the kingdom of God. Interestingly enough, Jesus made sure His disciples understood the meaning of the parables: "When he was alone with his disciples, he explained everything" (Mark 4:34b).

Jesus' parables will never contradict the rest of the Bible. The parables illustrate God's doctrine, and the illuminated teachings of Jesus, which are taught elsewhere in the Bible. We must always compare Scripture with Scripture. Let's read the Bible as students seeking the truth of God with our spiritual ears attuned to the Holy Spirit's instruction.

## **Why Did Jesus Teach Using Parables?**

Speaking in parables was one way Jesus sought to gain the attention of the crowds. People loved stories depicting events and characters to which they could easily relate. However, if crowds came to Jesus looking to apply their own meaning or affirm their own message, their ears heard empty, meaningless stories.

The three synoptic Gospel writers recorded an early parable in Luke 8:4-8, Mark 4:2-9, and Matthew 13:3-8. Jesus ended this parable by saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

This passage suggests that a person can have ears and not listen. The Lord calls people to listen, discern, understand, and obey His words, not merely register the sound of the words.

Over and over, we are reminded to come to God's Word fully focused and ready to put its' teaching into obedient action. We are to listen up and pay close attention.

Jesus spoke with great authority and could readily convey spiritual truths. The crowds grew as His ministry and teaching continued, and people were consistently amazed by what He said. In another parable in Luke 6:46-49, Jesus clearly stated that a person who indeed hears and obeys His words will build his life on a strong, secure rock, but whoever does not will build on an unstable foundation that ends in ruin.

Jesus' close disciples asked Him why He spoke in parables, to which Jesus replied: "The secrets of the kingdom of God have been given to you. But to the others, everything is said in parables so that they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding" (Luke 8:10). This is difficult for us to accept. However, only the Almighty Lord knows the hearts of man and whether they are rebellious or are turned toward Him to glorify God. So, Jesus used parables to reveal and conceal His kingdom message. To those responsive to His message, the parables illuminate the meaning of the kingdom. But to those who, because of their hard-heartedness, reject the message, the parables hide the truth. Almighty God then used the rejection of Christ to accomplish His sovereign purpose and humanity's salvation through the sacrificial death of Jesus.

Jesus taught, "If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear. Consider carefully what you hear. Those who have discernment will be given more, and those who have nothing will have taken away from them, even the little they have" (Mark 4:23-25).

## WEEK 32 DAY 2

Today's Reading: Luke 12:1-5

### Repent or Perish

Have you ever played the game of comparison, looking at those around you and comparing outfits, incomes, kids or homes? We might not show it, but perhaps we play this game quietly in our minds. The Galileans, not so much. They were a bit more vocal about their comparisons.

In Luke 13:2, we read, "Do you think these Galileans were worse sinners than all the others because they suffered in this way?" You see, it was a cultural belief at that time that when disaster or sudden death struck, it was an indicator of displeasure from God over certain sins. Some of us still hold this belief today. We think that the pain, death and suffering we experience is in direct correlation with our sin, which is opposed to the biblical truth that all men are separated from God, stemming from the curse of humanity's brokenness (Genesis 3:17-19).

Jesus had something to say about that belief, so much so that we see Him repeat Himself word for word in this short narrative. "I tell you, no; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5). The sin that we commit does not dictate our punishment, but rather our lack of repentance to God. Judgment is guaranteed for all who do not repent, as we are all sinners.

- In what ways do you compare your sins to others?
- Spend time in self-reflection and take note of your belief about pain and disaster.

## **PRAYER:**

God, I know I have fallen and sinned against You.  
Forgive me, Lord, as I repent from my sins.

**Bonus Reading: John 9:1-5**

## WEEK 32 DAY 3

Today's Reading: Luke 13:6-8

### Barren Fig Tree

Young fig trees take three to five years to establish and bear fruit. And even then, an immature tree may produce fruit that never fully ripens. Meanwhile, many of us muse to ourselves how Amazon Prime shipping should be faster! However, as with many of Jesus' parables, the fig tree represented something more eternal.

Christ was using the illustration of the fig tree as a representation of individuals and the nation of Israel as a whole. Several times in the Gospels, the fig tree was used as a symbol for Israel (e.g., Matthew 21:19, Mark 11:14). The parable we read today was no different. Jesus and John the Baptist had been preaching for three years, and Israel was not bearing the fruit of repentance. The vineyard keeper interceded and gave the tree one more year to bear fruit, continuing to care for the tree in new ways, digging and fertilizing, while holding on to the truth that the tree would be cut down if no fruit were produced.

Although direct, this parable paints a beautiful picture of Christ's intercession for us, pleading for more time for mankind to seek repentance. Still today God stands, offering patience and grace while holding the reality that the end is near. Our time is borrowed and not permanent, and God's patience will end, and all of those with no repentance and no fruit will be cut down. Christ has made a way for ripened fruit to occur; we must only repent and establish a relationship with Him.

- In what ways do you bear fruit of your repentance?
- Does picturing Christ as the vineyard keeper change your perspective of Him? If so, how?

## **PRAYER:**

God, thank You for Your patience and mercy. Thank You for sending Christ to intercede on my behalf. I repent, God, of my sins, and I turn to You.

**Bonus Reading: Isaiah 55:6-7**

## WEEK 26 DAY 4

Today's Reading: Luke 13:10-17

A long-admired heroine of old is Fanny Crosby. You may know her by some of the famous lyrics she penned to songs such as "Blessed Assurance," "To God Be the Glory" or "Praise Him, Praise Him." What you may not know is that at six months, Fanny lost her vision in a medical accident. Though she did not see the wonders of the world, anyone who has read her work can agree she was blessed with a special insight into the things of God.

Similarly to Miss Crosby, the woman in today's reading suffered for 18 years from a disabling spirit. Despite her pain, she faithfully came to the synagogue to worship God. I doubt this weekly service was easy or comfortable, being "bent over" without the ability to "straighten up" (v. 11). Still, instead of clinging to entitlement, she found humility in the Lord to fulfill the sacrifice asked of her. While she expectantly awaited the Lord's healing, this woman submitted to God's timing and faithfully followed Him for 18 years.

Likewise, as we wait for the promised defeat of our every sorrow and shame, we can come before the Lord and ask for humility. As we submit fully to what the Lord asks of us, we find peace, joy and community with other faithful followers of Christ.

As Miss Crosby put it:

Great things He hath taught us, great things He  
hath done,  
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;  
But purer, and higher, and greater will be  
Our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see.



- What requests have you truly given up to the Lord this year?
- In what areas do you need to ask for humility?

## **PRAYER:**

God, please grant me humility and remove any entitlement You see in my life.

**Bonus Reading: Matthew 12:1-8**

## **WEEK 32 DAY 5**

Today's Reading: Luke 11:37-54; 12;  
Matthew 23

This week we have explored the account of Jesus' calling out the Pharisees for their legalism and sin.

The rebuke of the Pharisees was one way Jesus showed them the log in their own eyes before they judged others (see Matthew 7:1-5).

Since the Pharisees were the religious rulers of that day, the people looked up to them. We read this week how the Pharisees led the people poorly, so Jesus spoke to the people directly. As we will read next week, Jesus taught the people how to act in order to follow God. Jesus began to point the people back to Himself and His Father, which brought peace, rather than looking to the Pharisees.

- What was your biggest takeaway from this week's reading?
- What are you looking forward to in next week's reading of Luke 12?

### **PRAYER:**

God, thank You for teaching me this week through Your Word. I pray that You continue to teach me from Your Word and lead me closer to You.

**Bonus Reading: Matthew 7:1-5**

## WEEK 32 DAY 5

### Today's Reading: Luke 13:18-21

"From tiny seeds grow mighty trees" is a theme in many elementary classrooms. Often, the best teachers use storytelling and relatable verbiage to teach new concepts. But Jesus was so much more than a great teacher. He was God incarnate. As He continued His journey to Jerusalem, Jesus used analogies from ordinary life in Israel to broach the subject of the kingdom of God.

He first compared His kingdom to a mustard seed, something familiar for the people in this region.

Given time and proper care, this tiny, virtually invisible seed could grow to 12 feet, big enough for birds to nest safely. Thus, the kingdom of God began with Jesus and His disciples, then spread through the Roman Empire and ultimately throughout the world. Though coming from such humble beginnings, He painted a picture for them that His kingdom would grow to massive proportions.

Serious bread bakers know the accurate ratio of yeast (leaven) to flour to bake the perfect loaf. You can't see it once kneaded in, but it gives the bread the potential to rise. Jesus used this imagery to illustrate how God's kingdom will spread and prevail over every otherworldly kingdom. Psalm 103:19 says, "The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules overall."

As Christians, we share the Gospel far and wide, allowing the Holy Spirit to make us more like Christ so that we can witness a transformed life. As seeds grow to harvest and yeast works its way through the dough, the kingdom of God will fill the whole earth.

- What parallels do you see in the mustard seed parable and King Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 4?
- What happened to the trees, birds and his kingdom?

## **PRAYER:**

Sovereign Lord, thank You for Your eternal, unshakeable kingdom that will be established on earth one day. Give me Your wisdom and lead me to those I can bring into Your kingdom.

**Bonus Reading: Matthew 13:31-33;  
Mark 4:30-32; Daniel 4; Matthew  
13:1-9; Mark 4:14-20**