



Group Discussion Guide

For group meetings from November 22 afternoon through November 29 morning

Matthew 13:1-17

Just after his encounters with the religious leaders, Jesus was surrounded by so many people who wanted to see and hear him that he had to get into a boat and go out onto the water a short distance so he could more effectively teach them. This chapter records those teachings, which Jesus gave in parables ... stories that teach lessons.

The first parable was the “parable of the sower,” in which a farmer sowed seed and that seed fell on various types of soil. Jesus shared with the people the results of sowing the seed; what happened with the seed that fell on each different type of soil. He finished with a phrase he often said, “He who has ears, let him hear.”

His disciples then came to him and asked why he used parables in his teaching. Jesus shared with them the purpose of these stories. He told them their commitment to following him in faith had led to them receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. However, those who had chosen to reject him or treat him as just another teacher had not been given this ability. They would continue to receive truths about God and His ways, while the nation of Israel (in general) who did not receive these truths would also lose what connection they had with God through the Old Testament Law. Jesus quoted a prophecy from Isaiah 6:9-10 that described how Israel had chosen to remain closed to God’s plan of redemption through the Messiah. The religious leaders’ rejection in the previous chapter pointed to the nation’s rebellion against God; though certain individuals would accept Jesus, the nation as a whole had chosen to reject him.

Parables allowed Jesus to teach truths openly that would only be understood and applied by his closest followers. This might seem strange today, but it should be remembered that he only employed this method after it was clear that Israel had chosen to reject him.

Matthew 13:18-35

In verses 18-23, Jesus took time to explain the first parable he told in verses 3-9. He said the seed was “the word of the kingdom” and each of the soils were people who had heard the word. Each of the four soils reacted differently, representing four types of people: 1) those who did not understand, 2) those who received it but were too shallow to sustain growth, 3) those who received it but were overwhelmed by the cares of the world and 4) those who received it and truly understood its meaning.

The next two parables seem to be shared with the crowds. It is possible that Jesus took the time to explain the purpose of the parables and the meaning of the first parable to the disciples while the crowds looked on, or that he waited until after this discourse but Matthew inserted it

nearer to the first parable. The next parable he told focused on a crop of wheat that had weeds in it. This was not by accident, but rather through a malicious act from an enemy who sought to hurt the farmer who had planted the wheat. Jesus does not explain this parable, but the meaning has to do with the events at the day of judgment when the weeds (unbelievers) and wheat (believers) will be sorted and judged accordingly.

The parables of the mustard seed and leaven seemed to indicate the nature of how the Gospel started small but continued to spread. The mustard seed was known for its miniscule size, and yet it grew quickly and became large enough for birds to nest in its branches. In the same way, as the Gospel spread throughout the world, the church would grow large enough to be noticed by all. Although the leaven was only a small portion, it was enough permeate a large amount of flour (the “three measures” are said to be enough to make bread for 100 people). While leaven was often used a representation of evil (Matthew 16:6, Mark 8:15, Luke 12:1), here Jesus used it as a symbol of the Gospel. Matthew indicated again that Jesus’ use of parables was a fulfillment of prophecy, and quoted Psalm 78:2.

Matthew 13:36-58

The disciples were particularly interested in the parable of the wheat and weeds, and when they had the opportunity to approach Jesus apart from the crowds, they asked him about its meaning. Jesus explained how believers and unbelievers would be separated and judged on a day yet to come.

The next two parables are related to the value of the Gospel. A man who discovers a treasure hidden in a field values the treasure so much that he is willing to sell everything he has to buy the field, and thus the treasure contained in the field. A merchant who finds a pearl of great value also is willing to sell everything to purchase it.

In another parable related to the coming judgment, Jesus used fish as an example. Whereas two earlier parables used seed, soil, wheat and weeds, this one used fishermen and their catch of fish, which were sorted with the good going into containers and the bad being thrown away.

The final parable compares those teachers “trained for the kingdom” to the master of a house who brings out new and old treasures for others to see. Jesus had been doing this as he gave to his disciples truths they already were aware of and others that were new to them. He was training them to do the same.

Jesus then made his way to his hometown of Nazareth. It was there that he was raised, yet it was his familiarity that led many there to reject him. They could not see past what they knew of him and his family, and rather than accept his teachings and his ways, they chose to be offended by him. Jesus told the people that a prophet is often not honored by those in his hometown or his family. Therefore, Jesus chose not to display his power and authority in Nazareth. He knew the people had chosen not to believe he was the Messiah.

Discussion Questions

1. How have you seen the parable the of the sower play out in people that you have known over the years (with the understanding we cannot judge the heart of another; we can only see the outward appearance)?
2. While the parable of the sower is primarily meant to demonstrate the difference between believers and unbelievers, can you see some of each of the soils as representing your own heart at times? If so, how?
3. Why do you think Jesus purposefully taught in such a way that the meaning of his teaching would be hidden from those who “do not see ... do not hear ... do not understand” (v. 13)?
4. There are three parables in this chapter that refer to the coming judgment: the parable of the sower, the weeds and the net. How should the truth of the coming judgment move our hearts as believers?
5. The parables of the mustard seed, leaven, hidden treasure and pearl of great value all refer to the kingdom of heaven. What do these parables teach us about this kingdom? How do these parables help you better understand the kingdom?
6. What did Jesus mean by the final parable of the master of the house (vs. 51-52)? As we are “trained for the kingdom” and then teach others about that kingdom, should we prepare to be treated as Jesus was at Nazareth (vs. 53-58)? Why or why not?