

WEEKLY DEVOTIONS AT GLENKIRK



# The DEVO



SEPTEMBER 17 - 21, 2018

# MONDAY

## Matthew 13:1-23; Psalm 119:33-36

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This week we consider one of Jesus' first fully-developed parables. Our emphasis will be upon the sower and the hard ground "along the path" where the "seed" couldn't take root before being "snatched away." Jesus often used parables for public, larger group teaching, a method that perplexed many, including His disciples: "Why do you speak to them in parables?" (Matthew 13:10)

A way to consider parables is as "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning"—to meet people where they are while orienting them eternally. "[Jesus'] parables were teaching aids and can be thought of as extended analogies or inspired comparisons." (GotQuestions.org) "A parable [creates] revelation by illustration ... designed to communicate truth in everyday terms." (Allen Ross) "[Parables have] a double advantage upon their hearers: first, upon their memory, we being very apt to remember stories. Second, upon their minds, to put them upon studying the meaning of what they heard so delivered." (David Guzik)

Some might characterize parables as particularly "user-friendly"—but were they? The disciples' question in verse 10 suggests otherwise, as does Jesus' related response in verse 13. "The parables, Jesus said, are hidden to those who do not pay attention, who do not listen, but [who are] open to those who do. ... Each parable is like a mystery novel with certain clues given to guide us to the meaning." (Ray Stedman)

“[Jesus’ parables] *reveal* truth to him who desires truth; they *conceal* truth from him who does not wish to see the truth.” (Guzik)

Jesus loved His hearers, even the unbelievers (Matthew 5:44). But what’s loving in teaching that compels one either to wrestle with comprehending or shallowly miss the point entirely? For believers, making things “too easy” fosters spiritual laziness; having to work a bit promotes maturity. As well, “the parables of Jesus were ... [also] a way of presenting God’s message so ... the hardened would merely hear a story without heaping up additional condemnation for rejecting God’s Word. ... Parables are an example of God’s mercy towards the hardened.” (Guzik)

Jesus’ parables provided an engaging “spiritual workout” for believers while giving a merciful truth opportunity for unbelievers. Jesus Christ used them to teach on God’s kingdom without “casting pearls before swine.” (Matthew 7:6)

## QUESTION

What were some of the practical reasons for Jesus teaching via parables? Why were the parables like mini “mystery novels”—what was the purpose behind this?

## PRAYER

Pray for our country and its leaders—for faithfulness and godliness—during the challenging times we face. Ask God to usher in revival in our own hearts, our community, and the US itself.

# TUESDAY

**Matthew 13:3-8; Luke 19:1-6; John 4:5-9**

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Why did Jesus utilize the seed-sower illustration in this parable? Ancient Israel was a farming society; thus, a planting story would be highly relatable. Israel had been scripturally characterized as an “olive tree” (i.e., Jeremiah 11:16) and a “vineyard” (i.e., Isaiah 5:7), so such illustrations would engage the ancient Jews. Many among Jesus’ hearers would rightly interpret this illustration (“He’s talking about us!”) and connect accordingly.

Here’s another explanation for why Jesus may have shared this as He did: “This was springtime and probably from where they stood ... they could look out on the hillside and see a sower going forth to sow ... [Jesus] often picked up that which was happening right around His hearers and used it as an illustration of the great truth He wanted to convey.” (Stedman)

Jesus later interpreted this parable privately among His disciples (Matthew 13:18-23), being committed to training them plainly apart from the crowd. The “seed” represents “the word of the kingdom,” God’s kingdom manifested in Christ Himself (Luke 17:21). The “birds” who snatch away the word are Satan and his minions. Jesus doesn’t identify the sower in this parable, but He’s our example here. Later the Holy Spirit was given to “sow” all around us, within us and through us as well (John 16:13).

The key lessons for us in witnessing are to meet people where they are and to be natural. The former’s achievable only by avoiding the lure of

living only in a “holy huddle” or “Christian bubble”—we must engage unbelievers routinely. Moreover, we’re to care deeply about the lost—sensitive to their problems and doubts—and ask loving questions while listening intently to understand where they are. And we can be natural only if sharing the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) is so much a part of our everyday life that it flows from us almost unconsciously. That happens only with practice and commitment until loving witnessing becomes second nature for us.

This lesson comes from the Redeemer Himself, the Bible’s ultimate Author. As it is in His Word and we’re His people, you and I must conclude, “He’s talking to us!” Where and how are you meeting unbelievers where they are and sowing seeds?

## QUESTION

How would the elements of the parable of the sower resonate particularly among a 1st century Jewish audience? Who or what are the “sower,” the “seeds,” and the “birds” in this parable? What are two key principles for effective witnessing that we should glean from this teaching?

## PRAYER

Pray for the Pastor Nominating Committee, that God would protect its members and their families from spiritual warfare and give them discernment in finding Glenkirk’s next senior pastor. Pray also for Glenkirk’s current leaders and staff.

# WEDNESDAY

**Matthew 13:18-22; Acts 26:12-29**

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As “recovering humans,” our enemies remain our own flesh, the fallen world, and Satan himself. The first three “soil” types from the parable illustrate how such adversaries influence many. Consider the unreceptive “soil along the path” whose seeds become bird food.

“There are various kinds of soils, [Jesus] says, upon which the word can fall. The soil, of course, is the human heart. Wherever the word is sown ... [there are generally] four conditions of the human heart to which [it] speaks. ... This first kind of individual has a heart which is hard and narrow like a path beaten across a field ... hardened and narrowed by the traffic of human feet ... [It’s] not that they could not understand, but that they do not try. ... This is what we might call the materialistic heart ... that does not want to be bothered with thinking about anything beyond what you can see and hear and smell and touch and taste. This is the humanistic heart ...

“Here is a [person] who has been rendered momentarily thoughtful by the word of the kingdom. Something has challenged him for the moment to think about God, and about life. And for a moment he wonders, ‘Maybe there is something to this.’ He has received a passing impression—but it requires more thought, more self-evaluation—and

he does not want to be bothered. So, he shrugs it off ... [Then] the enemy comes ... and snatches away the thought ... So he goes on untroubled, thinking that the world remains the way he has conceived it to be. ...

“There are many like that; they have settled for a world bounded on the north by their work, on the south by their family, on the east by taxes, and on the west by death. That is the whole of life to them.” (Stedman)

Even believers can slip into seasons of preoccupied materialism, so be watchful. Regarding unbelievers, however, we’re not to judge their standing or what God has planned for them, but to care for them and faithfully share truth. The living God is a great Redeemer (Isaiah 47:4). Paul, the former anti-Christian terrorist who became an unrivaled church-developer, can attest to this!

## QUESTION

Who or what are the principal enemies we face, even as believers? How might we characterize the person whose heart is like the “hard soil along the path”?

## PRAYER

Pray for a heart of “good soil,” one surrendered to God’s leading and ways. Ask God to help you yield fruitfully within your personal ministry and “mission field.”

# THURSDAY

**Matthew 13:1-9; Matthew 23:29-39; Matthew 25:31-46**

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Matthew 13 conveys a shift in Jesus' teaching ministry. Prior to this, He used parables sparingly and generally spoke more directly to the Jews. From Matthew 13 onward, however, Jesus' public teaching emphasis was via parables. Why this dramatic shift in method? And why Jesus' seemingly harsh answer to His disciples' question, "Why parables?" with His answer, "... because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." (v. 13) Was Jesus intentionally pushing many away?

"In [Matthew 12:30-32]] Jesus warned the [Jews] of the danger they were in if they rejected Him, their Messiah. Now that their reaction has been officially recorded, Jesus began to teach the people with parables. ... It would be necessary to challenge people's faith concerning His mission and indeed His identity. He chose to use parables to begin to uncover the faith of true disciples, and to demonstrate judgment on those who refused to see and hear." (Ross)

The Jews expected the Messiah to launch a military/political campaign liberating them from Rome; they didn't see the true kingdom's arrival in Jesus, that He came to liberate their hearts. "All of the parables deal with this present form of the kingdom, which Jesus explained to the disciples, but did not explain to the crowds expecting some dramatic deliverance. ... The disciples followed Jesus by faith. They did not



understand everything but asked. The crowds did not, on the whole, follow by faith, but demanded a compelling sign.” (Ross)

The LORD’s patient longsuffering has limits (Genesis 6:3)—at some point He gives unbelievers over to the consequences of their rebellion (Romans 1:24). A related Old Testament story is when God’s glory exited the temple in Ezekiel 18:18-19, signaling both His judgment and His forsaking of Israel for a season. Jesus’ cleansing of the temple the week of His crucifixion (Matthew 21:12) was another clear “Enough!” message from God.

The inability of the unfaithful to discern the parables’ messages revealed the judgment they’d brought upon themselves. “Jesus didn’t use parables to blind people, but because they were blind.” (Guzik) Do you know spiritually blind people unwittingly marching toward eternal separation from God. How can you lovingly help them see?

## QUESTION

In shifting to public teaching via parables, was Jesus consciously excluding some in His audience? Why did Jesus shift toward a parable-based teaching approach among the crowds? What misperception about the Messiah and His mission contributed to “spiritual blindness” among the Jews?

## PRAYER

Pray for those who you fear are marching toward damnation and who seemingly don’t know Jesus Christ. Ask God for the opportunities and faithfulness to serve these in the name of Christ.

# FRIDAY

## Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Matthew 25:14-30

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I'm always amazed at how God works as I pen a devotional. (I use the verb "pen" intentionally, hoping that what's received expresses God's will beyond my limitations.) This week's subject, the parable of the sower and the soil along the path, seemed so simple that I worried about occupying five 350-word devos. However, in working through this, I see God also teaching on a multi-layered topic: how He calls the lost.

The four "soils" depict the types of hearts that the Spirit encounters in wooing the lost: the stony and unreceptive, the shallow and conflicted, the distracted and worldly, and the receptive and open. In characterizing these hearts and any related dynamic, God illustrates that while He's unwilling that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9), we're created with free will that He will not violate. The good news: such free will is a basis for an intimate relationship with God. The bad news: ungodly choices can harden us to the point where God's pursuit ends.

God won't "force" anyone to understand; He desires meaningful relationship, so He wants us to strive to comprehend and draw close to Him. "Because He could have spoken so powerfully that people would have been forced to concede to the logic of His argument and

[be] converted against their will, Jesus chose to speak in a way that would not manipulate people or force them into a decision. ... Why would Jesus teach in such a way that truth would be concealed? Simply because ... He honors man's free choice." (Jon Courson)

A person sincerely seeking God and trying to relate to Him will be blessed with more understanding. Otherwise, God may allow you to stray and to lose even the opportunities you've been given. "If we want to hear more from God, we must obey what we have already heard." (Guzik)

Our faithful, joyful mission? As "sowers," we're responsible and privileged to proclaim the message of the kingdom, the Gospel. Not all will receive the Gospel message, but that's God's business, not ours—we are to scatter seed. Our business is to grasp and live out the Gospel well so that we can share it clearly and meaningfully, knowing that God gives the increase.

## QUESTION

What characterizes the four types of "soils" Jesus teaches about in the parable of the sower? What does the parable teaching method have to do with free will? How does the "parable of the talents" (Matthew 25:14-30) relate to the parable of the sower?

## PRAYER

Ask God to increase your appetite for knowing and sharing the Gospel. Pray that He would bring you the circumstances, courage, and readiness to share the Good News of God's kingdom with others whom He is calling.

## Sources:

- GotQuestions.org quote can be found at [www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org)
- Allen Ross's quotes are from <https://bible.org/seriespage/20-parable-sower-and-seed-matthew-131-23>
- David Guzik's quotes are from <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/matthew-13/>
- Ray Stedman's quotes can be found at [www.raystedman.org/new-testament/matthew/the-case-of-the-lavish-farmer](http://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/matthew/the-case-of-the-lavish-farmer)
- Jon Courson's quote is from *Jon Courson's APPLICATION COMMENTARY* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, © Jon Courson 2003).

