

God's Message – The Parable of the Reckless Farmer

A Bible Discussion by Robert Jackson

This Discussion looks at a very familiar Parable, and one that is an obvious target for an outreach Bible Discussion. It should be simple to lead, but hopefully it will give people a new perspective on a well-known passage. The point of the discussion is that God's message is for everyone; God wants to plant His seed across the whole world.

Introduction

Opening question: When was the last time you were on a farm? [Nothing too profound; hopefully it will generate some interesting anecdotes.]

Part One

Open your Bibles to Matthew 13. Today we will be studying the Parable of the Sower. Have **Matthew 13:1–9** read out.

Summarise v1–2. Large crowds gather around Jesus to hear his message.

v3a: What is a parable? [This is the perfect first question! You might get some blank stares, but hopefully some people will attempt a good answer. A Parable is not a metaphor or a historical event. It is a story, which may be pure fantasy, but which makes a point that applies to our lives, or to our understanding of God. In other words, *it is a story which makes a moral or theological point.*]

v3b. Who do we think this farmer represents? [God. Establishing this early is a good idea; it's pretty obvious anyway.]

v4: What comes of the first seed and why? [The birds eat it because it falls on the path – that is, the road. It doesn't even get to the soil; it's not even planted at all.]

v5–7: What comes of the 2nd and 3rd seeds? [One falls in shallow soil and dies; the other in bad soil and is choked by weeds.]

v8: What makes the 4th seed different? [It is in good soil.]

Were any of the seeds any different to start with? [No, all the seeds were the same – the soil was different.]

In an agricultural society, a farmer's seed is his livelihood – his source of food, produce and income. It was essential that a farmer never waste any seed, and that he tend to his soil. To waste seed would threaten the harvest – his entire income, the livelihood of his family. It would be like throwing money in the fire. *Why is this farmer so reckless and wasteful with his seed?* [This is, of course, the crucial question. Don't have any hesitation asking it – it's *exactly* the kind of question that Matthew wants us to ask! If anyone gets it right, great, but if no one gets it, just register people's ideas, and then move on.]

Part Two (Optional)

(The Discussion will flow fine with this Part left out, but it does offer some great insight about Parables, and fits in well to the discussion as a whole.)

Have v10–17 read out. In this passage, Jesus explains why He spoke in parables.

v10: What were the disciples so confused about? [Why Jesus was just telling stories all the time.]

v11: Who is “them”? [The religious people of the day.]

v13: Is this fair? What does Jesus mean here? [This should generate some discussion. There is no definitive answer, but the vibe is pretty clear. A parable is just a story. That’s it! No challenges, no commands, no names, no condemnations – just a story. However, it makes a powerful point, usually about God and how we need to respond to God. If someone is hard–hearted, they can easily side-step a parable and say “It’s just a story” – *though hearing, they will not understand*. However, to those who take the time to listen, parables can have profound meaning. Jesus wants to shame the wise and exalt the humble... There is a lot to come out here. Ask lots of leading questions, and *read out v14–15 at an appropriate time* so show how proud the religious people of the day were.]

v16–17: What could Jesus be referring to here? What’s so important? [His message! That’s the key point. Jesus’ message was powerful, profound and important! Jesus was always very serious about the significance of His message.]

Part Three

Have v18–23 read out. Here, Jesus explains the meaning of the Parable he told earlier.

v18: Jesus Himself calls it the Parable of the Sower. What might that tell us? [There is no correct answer. My opinion: The parable is not about the seed or the soil – it is about the Farmer, God.]

Reread v19 slowly and carefully. So, what does the soil represent in the Parable? [People – make sure this is clearly established.]

What does the seed represent? [The Message – that is, God’s message which He sows in our hearts, through the Bible. You may need to convince people of this. Note that the Message (the seed) is always the same – it is people (the soil) who are different... Cautionary note: This Parable has *exactly three* points of reference with God and His creation: The Sower (God), the Seed (the Bible) and the Soil (people). It is important that we don’t press any other details of the Parable for interesting “insights”. Does the sun in v6 represent Jesus, the Light of the World (John 8:12), whose light exposes the darkness in people’s hearts (John 3:20)? *No!* See chapter 8 of “How to Read the Bible for All It’s Worth” for more details on this.]

What kind of person does the first soil represent? [People who never come to grips with God’s message.]

How can we be like this today? [This should give an opportunity for people with a non–religious background to share. Are you one of them?]

v20–21: The second soil shows people who accept the message but don't hold onto it. How can this happen today? [Let people share.]

v22: The third soil is deceived by the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth. How can money and worry affect our relationship with God? [I'm sure everyone will have something to say on this topic!]

v23: What makes this last soil different? [1. These are the only people who truly "understand" the Message, that is, who have a deep conviction about it. 2. They are the people who produce a crop... Make sure *both* of these come out, not just the second one.]

We're now in a position to better answer a question that was asked earlier: Why is the Sower so wasteful with His seed? [The answer should now be obvious: God's message is for everyone. He has "food for all", and wants every kind of person to have the opportunity to hear His message.]

Conclusion

There's a lot we can learn from this parable about different kinds of people and how we need to respond to God's Message. However, ultimately, this is a parable about God. It is a story which shows us God's incredible heart to love people, regardless of the cost. Perhaps we should call it "The Parable of the Reckless Farmer", because God is reckless with His message – He just wants to share it with everyone, regardless of who you are or where you're from, He wants to plant the seed in your heart. The only question is how we will respond to the message that God holds out to us.