

Teaching with Stories

Mark 4:1-10, 14-20; Matthew 13:24-30; 36-50

by Gary Cutter

Notes from the Greek definitions
and agricultural understanding

The Parable of the Sower — Mark 4:1-10, 14-20 (also in Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23)

- Mark 4:1 – “gathered” can also mean were drawn together. The crowd of people were drawn to Jesus evidently by his previous teachings.
- Definitions of parable include
 - (1) a comparison of one thing with another; likeness, similitude;
 - (2) an example by which doctrine or precept is illustrated;
 - (3) a narrative, fictitious but agreeable to the laws and usages of human life, by which either the duties of men or things of God, particularly the nature and history of God’s kingdom are figuratively portrayed; (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning).
- Mark 4:3 – He began the parable by telling the crowd to “Listen,” meaning
 - (1) to attend to, consider what is or has been said;
 - (2) to understand, perceive the sense of what is said;
 - (3) to get by hearing, learn;
 - (4) to comprehend, understand. He wanted the crowd to really pay attention and understand what he is saying. (Dr. Charles Stanley uses this style in his messages on the TV “In Touch” program).
- “A sower” is a person who scatters seed. This is in contrast to “planting” seed. Planting seed such as farmers do with corn in the US involves precisely placing a seed into the ground and covering it methodically in rows. To sow seed such as wheat involves scattering the seed by tossing it by hand allowing the seed to fall randomly. Generally this is then followed by mixing the seed into the soil with tillage device, such as a rake.
- Mark 4:6 – “the seedling was scorched” – meaning to burn with heat or to be tortured with intense heat. The sun was torturous to the young seedling due to its heat. The seedling could not absorb enough water because of lack of roots, causing the seedling to have withered or dry up or waste away. Basically the seedling died.

- Mark 4:7 – “the thorns” were prickly plants; also known as brambles or briars. They choked the plants to where they would not produce grain. The plants did not die, but the thorns pressed around or thronged around the plant to cause it to be stunted and not complete their reproductive cycle successfully. “Thorns” is a generic term that includes Palestine Buckthorn. These thorny shrubs were widespread and well known in Palestine during Bible times and were planted as hedges along roads.
- Mark 4:8 – “good soil” – being excellent in its nature and characteristics and well adapted to its ends. This type of soil is the desired type that had the ability to support a successful crop all the way from its sprouting, growing and production of grain. Wheat was the most common cereal grain and likely the crop Jesus referred to. A single seed of wheat can eventually produce 30, 60 or even 100 seeds in a head in its multiplication process.
- Mark 4:9 – “Jesus said” – this could mean he taught with the following words. “He that has ears to hear” or possibly to be able to understand, “He had better listen” possibly meaning to consider what has been said.
- Mark 4:14 – “the word that is sown” can be described as
 - (1) the sayings of God;
 - (2) the moral precepts given by God;
 - (3) the doctrine or teaching. Matthew 13:19 indicates the word about the kingdom, which means of the royal power of Jesus as the triumphant Messiah or reign of the Messiah.
- Matthew 13:19 – “the evil one” or Satan comes and snatches what was sown in his heart. The “heart” denotes:
 - (1) the centre of all physical and spiritual life;
 - (2) the soul or mind, as it is the fountain and seat of the thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes and endeavors,
 - (3) the soul as far as it is affected and stirred in a bad way or good.
- Mark 4:17 – the seedlings have no root in themselves and “do not endure,” meaning to be only for a season, or temporary or enduring only for a while. The seedling does not complete its life with producing seed, but dies.
- “Trouble” means tribulation, oppression, affliction, distress or pressure.
- “Offend” also can mean (1) to entice to sin; (2) to cause to fall away; (3) to cause a person to begin to distrust or desert one who he ought to trust and obey (4) to put a stumbling block in the way upon which another may trip and fall.

The parable of the tares (Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43).

- In Matthew 13:25 “the enemy sowed weeds.” The definition of this word is a kind of darnel, which is a plant that resembles wheat except the grains are black. The scientific name for this is *Lolium temulentum* L. It is an annual rye grass that flourishes in wheat fields and is difficult to tell if from wheat until it heads. The darnel seeds are smaller than the wheat and can be separated by passing through a sieve.
- “The good seeds sown” was wheat, which was a very common crop in that area at that time.
- The seeds of the darnel were scattered into the same seed bed as the wheat. It probably was not visible due to size and color. Wheat was not planted in rows at that time, but scattered broadcast and plowed into the soil afterwards. It was very easy and quick for the enemy to sneak in after dark and scatter the darnel seeds.
- In verse 28, the word for “gather” also means to collect in order to carry off.
- In verse 29, the master said not to collect the darnel plants because the good wheat plants will also be uprooted. Both the darnel and the wheat are grass type of plants which have a fibrous thick root system. The roots of the wheat and darnel likely would be entangled in the soil. So pulling out the darnel will also cause the wheat to be pulled out or loosened from the soil before the crop is ready to harvest. This would cause even less seed yield of the good wheat. It usually gets dry as harvest time approaches, so the plant might die prematurely if the root has been disturbed.
- In verse 30, the master said to gather the darnel weeds first and tie them in bundles to be burned.
 - This was because the amount of wheat in the field was probably much greater than weeds. Therefore collecting the weeds first was far easier than trying to separate them later.
 - The darnel weeds would be burned in order to destroy the seeds they produced. This would also remove the darnel weed seeds from the field so they would not grow there the next season.
 - After the weeds were removed, then the remainder of the wheat could be harvested and handled normally.
- In verse 36, Jesus left the crowds; another definition would be to send away the crowds.

- The term “Son of man” was used by Christ himself, doubtless in order that he might intimate his Messiahship and also that he might designate himself as the head of the human family, the man, the one who both furnished the pattern of the perfect man and acted on behalf of all mankind. Christ seems to have preferred this to the other Messianic titles, because by its lowliness it was least suited to foster the expectation of an earthly Messiah in royal splendor. (NeXt Bible TM Learning Environment) (<http://dev.bible.org/interlinear>)
- In verse 39, the devil is Satan who is described as the prince of the demons, the author of evil, persecuting good men, estranging mankind from God and enticing them to sin, afflicting them with diseases by means of demons who take possession of their bodies at his bidding. (<http://dev.bible.org/interlinear>)
- The “end of the age” can be defined as the completion or consummation of a period of time. “The angels” are messengers or envoys who are sent from God.
- In verse 41, “the Son of man will send his angels.” Another definition will be to order his angels to go to a place appointed. These angels will gather everything which could mean things as well as people that causes sin or is a stumbling block, a snare or people that are drawn into sin.
- In verse 42, “gnashing of teeth” can also mean snarling, growling; in the sense of biting. The word also is used to denote extreme anguish and utter despair of men consigned to eternal punishment of hell.
- Another truth the parable of the tares teaches is that we are not to try to make a separation of the righteous and the wicked now, but this is entirely the Lord’s business to do it in his time.

The parable of the treasure in the field (Matthew 13:44)

- In verse 44, Definitions of the word used here for “treasure” include a receptacle in which valuables are kept. In ancient times before banks, it was common to hide valuables by burying them in the ground. The man who found the treasure did not own the field and was not a thief. Perhaps the treasure was too large to remove and carry off easily as a thief may do. Thus the man likely covered it up and sold all his possessions and purchased the field in order to own the treasure.
- This means that the kingdom of heaven is so valuable that one should be willing to give up all he has to gain it. This does not mean that you can purchase the kingdom of heaven, because the man did not purchase the treasure, but the field. The owner obviously did not realize the treasure was there.

The parable of the pearl of great value (Matthew 13:45)

- The word “pearl” mean very precious, very valuable, of great price.
- Again, this parable has the same meaning as the one about the treasure in the field. The man sold all he had in order to gain it. The kingdom of heaven is worth everything.

The parable of the net (Matthew 13:47-50)

- The word for “net” means a drag net or a very large fishing net that can catch a large number of fish without discrimination.
- The word for “bad” has these meanings: rotten, putrefied, of poor quality, unfit for use or worthless. This describes fish that are of no use or are undesirable.
- This parable teaches the same general truth as the parable of the tares. There will be a final separation of the righteous and wicked.

General Notes:

- Our word for parable comes from the Greek word which means “a placing beside”, therefore a comparison or an illustration. Jesus generally used these illustrative stories, drawn from human life and nature. There are about 30 of these recorded in three of the Gospels. There are none in John’s Gospel.

References:

- The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, Merrill C. Tenney, Editor.
- NeXt Bible TM Learning Environment; (<http://dev.bible.org/interlinear>)