

PARABLES OF JESUS



making sense of the story..

PARABLES OF JESUS

1. write down a list of as many of the parables of Jesus that you can think of.
2. In your own words describe what a parable is. Can you think of any modern parables?
3. Why do you think Jesus so often taught in parables?
4. Read Matt 13:10-17 and Mark 4:9-13. When asked by his disciples why he spoke in parables, Jesus responded in a way that was kind of confusing. What do you think Jesus was saying in these passages?
5. One of the lines of Jesus response says 'they may be ever hearing but never understanding, otherwise they might turn and be forgiven'. It almost sounds like he doesn't want people to understand what he is saying. Do you think this is what he meant? Why or why not?
6. Jesus spoke in parables often. In fact, about half of his teaching in the gospels is recorded in parables. Short stories or illustrations taken from everyday life to make a spiritual point. Sometimes they can be really confusing. Often Jesus spoke in a parable to answer someone's question. It seems that Jesus spoke in parables so that what he was saying would be clear to those who were truly seeking but would not be so obvious to the casual observer. Gods truth is life transforming and life giving, and God does not want to hide it- in fact he sent his one and only son into the world so that we might know his truth. However, God also promises that those who are truly seeking will find, and those who are genuinely looking for him will see him. In the parables, Jesus invites us into a journey of discovery of Gods truth about life, himself and his kingdom (living as children of God). If you are willing, some of the most life changing truths you will ever discover can be found in the confusing stories of Jesus.
7. TIPS FOR UNDERSTANDING PARABLES:
 - Parables are stories, whether the events are true or not doesn't matter
 - parables are often grouped in 3 or more stories, each story in a section helps us understand what Jesus is saying and the point he is trying to make
 - Jesus often answers questions with a parable. In those cases, read the question he is asked and then look for the answer in the parable
 - generally parables are told to make only one main point. Not every piece of the story has a deeper meaning, only the main point. We should try not to read into each detail too much but focus on the last point of the story.
 - Jesus often uses real life examples from everyday life. We can get a better understanding of the parable if we understand what everyday event he is using and what it was like in that time.

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THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS

1. Write down three things you think God looks for in the lives of Christians who he is pleased with.
2. Read the parable of the 'Sheep and Goats' Matt 25:31-46. What stands out to you as you read this parable?
3. What is the difference between the sheep and the goats? What is the king looking for in their behaviour and actions?
4. What do you think He means when he says 'whatever you did (not do) for one of the least of these, you did (not do) for me'? What point do you think he is trying to make to the people listening?
5. Read Micah 6:6-8, Amos 5:21-24 (OT). How do you think these passages relate to this parable?
6. Do you think that these have any challenge to those of us today who call themselves Christians? How does what Jesus is calling for in the 'sheep and goats' differ from what we 'pretend' Christianity looks like today?
7. God is a God who is deeply passionate about people. John 3.16 puts it that 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son...' Gods concern for the lost, hurt and broken people of this world is echoed in the life of Jesus. He said to his disciples 'I have come to seek and save that which was lost.' He often accused the snooty religious people of being shallow, proud and off course when it came to the heart of God. Jesus sought out those people who society had forgotten and he reached out compassionately with the love of God. What do you think Jesus would say to our church about 'playing religion' if he walked into our church today?
8. Where do you see injustice in your own world that you can interact with and be the hand and heart of Jesus to people? How could we as a group do something?

Jesus is not so interested in us 'playing' religion. In fact to pretend to be his follower, but to live a completely self absorbed and selfish life where all we do is be seen doing the right things is evil in his eyes. Jesus reached out with the heart and compassion and mercy of God into the lives of the lost, hurting and broken around him. And he asks those who would follow him to do the same. Our world desperately needs to know the heart of God for them and he invites us to be the expression of it. Will you be that this week?

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THE LOST STUFF

1. Have you ever been lost, what happened? OR have what was the most precious thing you have ever lost, what did you do to try and find it?
2. As a group read Luke 15:1-32- what initially stands out to you as you read.
3. What is the accusation that Jesus is responding to with these parables? Why do you think he would respond by telling these stories?
4. Who do you think Jesus is representing by the Shepherd, Widow and Father? Who is he representing with the lost coin, lost sheep and son? What about those that don't get lost?
5. Jesus uses an interesting conclusion to the first two stories- "there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over... righteous persons who do not need to repent." What do you think Jesus means by saying this? How do you think the Pharisees would have responded to this?
6. It's interesting that in the third story Jesus calls the son lost even though he chose to turn his back on his Father and his home. He ran away and he copped the consequences for his behaviour. Yet he was welcomed home. Why do you think this is significant? What do you think is happening with the older brother? Who does he represent?
7. What do these stories tell us about God's heart for people? What is God willing to do in order to find those that are 'lost'? What is God's response when someone who is 'lost' comes back to him (Lk 15:21-24)?
8. Read John 3:16-17 and Luke 19:9-10. What is God's purpose in Jesus? What cost is Jesus willing to bear in order to find and return those who are lost? how should we love people in response to this?
9. These parables give an incredible picture of God's immense love for people. He desperately loves all people. In fact when the 'righteous' pharisees accuse Jesus of hanging out with the wrong people Jesus responds saying that these are the people God loves and wants to share his love with. No one is outside of God's desire for relationship. Jesus shows the ultimate illustration of this truth when he goes to the cross, in order to 'seek and save that which was lost'. The truth of the gospel is that all of us have been lost to God. What is even more incredible is that, like the son, we chose to reject God. We asked for independence, to be let loose and we turned our back on our loving Father. And we will cop the consequences for our sinful behaviour- for those who choose to live apart from God there are serious consequences both here now and in eternity. However, God has not and does not give up on seeking those who are lost. Like a shepherd risking life in the perilous mountains, like a widow ripping apart and putting back together her whole house and like a Father whose arms are open with love and forgiveness for when his son returns- SO IS GOD'S HEART FOR US AND FOR ANY WHO HAVE STRAYED AWAY.
10. Who do you know who needs to know this truth about Jesus? As a group take time to pray for these people.

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FOUNDATIONS

1. What is one dream you have for your future? What do you need to do in order to make that happen (what steps would you have to take)?
2. Almost everything we do in life requires we build upon something we have previously done, or we have completed prerequisites in order to do the next thing. What happens if we are trying to achieve something but haven't done the previous work?
3. Read Matt 7:15-29
4. What do you think Jesus is speaking about in this parable (only the second half of the reading)?
5. In our society what sort of things do people place as the foundation for their life? What do people build their life upon?
6. Jesus links the section about fruit with the parable of the builders. He says 'Therefore...' which means they have something to do with each other. Why do you think the section about the fruit of our lives is linked with the parable of the builders? Do you think people can produce the right 'stuff' in their lives if they have not built upon the right foundation?
7. a) What makes one man wise and the other foolish? Why is it so important that we put Jesus' words into action in our life?

b) Read John 5:36-40; John 14:6-7; John 14:23-26; John 15:5-8 As you read each of these passages, stop and think- how does it relate to the wise and foolish builders? How do we do? How does it help us build the right foundation?
8. How do you think we can build on the right foundation? What do we need to do day to day? Week to week? Etc
9. Jesus is clear- in this life the only solid foundation we can build our life upon is Jesus. We can seek after all the things of the world but none can give us life to it's fullest. Jesus states that only he can give life, in John 10:10 he says 'I have come that they might have life, and have it to it's fullest'. Often we are fooled into thinking that money, or popularity, or power or the right career, or education, or Will give us the life that is full and exciting and all we hope for. The truth is that all these things are like sand, beautiful and soft to begin with but will simply fall away when life happens around us. They will never fulfil our life. But Jesus says if we put to practice his words we will be building on a solid rock foundation. How can we do this? How can we possibly remember everything Jesus said. Well, Jesus points to himself and says 'I am the way the truth and the life!' we build upon the rock by trusting I him and inviting him into our lives. He promises that he will be in our lives and his Holy Spirit will lead us as he desires us to live. He will never leave, or forsake. Nothing in life can separate us from the love of Jesus and his presence in our lives when we choose to trust him (Rom 8:28). So the question we need to ask ourselves everyday is simple- Will I build this day upon the greatness of Jesus and his love for me or will I build it upon the shallowness of the world around me? Everyday it is your choice- but it is the biggest choice you will face. Wise or foolish builder? Your choice!

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WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN GIVEN?

1. Have you ever trusted someone with something of yours (or been trusted with something) and it has turned out bad? What happened?
2. As a group read Matt 25:14-30, what initially stands out to you?
3. This parable follows on from the chapter before. Have a look back and see if you can figure what he is responding to?
4. Have a think about the characters in the story, who do you think they represent? What do the talents (talent at this time was a type of currency) represent?
5. Jesus is sharing about what will happen at the end of time- when He comes to judge the world. Jesus is pretty much describing himself as the Master who goes and comes back and that we are the servants given the talents to use and keep until he returns. What sort of things has God placed in our lives that we are responsible for and that we may have to give an account of when he judges us?
6. I always thought that the last servant got kind of hard done by. He didn't lose what he had been given yet he is still labelled a 'wicked and lazy servant' and he gets thrown outside. Why do you think he got treated like this? What does it say to us about the things God has given us responsibility over?
7. There is an underlying idea that not everyone is given the same. There is a weird line near the end where he says "For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have even what he has will be taken from him." What does this mean? How do we know if we are the ones with or the ones without?
8. Jesus fills this parable with a message that the servants were entrusted with talents and they were expected to multiply their talents. The master said they were faithful if they multiplied what they were given, but the one who gave back what he was given was said to be wicked. How does God expect us to multiply what he has given us? The servants 'put the money to work'. How can we put to work the things we have been given?
9. Think about the situation you are in, the society, family, peer group. What do you think God may be asking you to 'multiply'? how can you do that in your day? Week?
10. Although the talents in this story could represent many things, and everything God has placed in our life we are responsible to be a steward of, the greatest thing that JESUS is pointing to is the truth of a relationship with God through Jesus' death and resurrection. If we have received Jesus in our life then we need to pass that on. It is not for us alone but for all people.
Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:1

In a very real way, each of us who have accepted Jesus as our lord and saviour and have been given a relationship with God, we are responsible for telling those around us. We were never meant to discover that God loves us and keep it to ourselves. We are responsible for passing it into the lives of the people around us, for multiplying this message of life. Why does the master take it so serious when he only gets back what he gave? Because this means that this servant selfishly took this message and hid it from all around him. He was held responsible for those who never had a chance to hear. We need to make sure that we take up the responsibility God has given us and pass it on. Who in your life needs to know the gift God has given you in Jesus?

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ALL THE SMALL THINGS

1. One of Jesus' main themes when he teaches and preaches in the gospels is 'The Kingdom of God' or 'Kingdom of Heaven'. What do you think the kingdom of heaven means?
2. All the Jews were waiting for God to send the Messiah, in their thinking he was the one God would send to free Israel from the rule of the Romans and to set up a new kingdom where the Israelites were again a powerful people. The Messiah to them was a warrior-king. However Jesus preached a totally different idea of the kingdom. Jesus uses a number of shorter parables to show the nature of Gods Kingdom. Read each and for each one think about what the main image of the kingdom means, how is it different to what people thought in Jesus day, what does it mean for us today?
 - Matthew 13:31-33

 - Matthew 13: 44-46

 - Mark 4:26-29
3. As Jesus went about preaching the Kingdom of God people wanted to know how they could get into it. Some people thought that simply being born a Jew would give you access, others thoughts it was by strictly observing the law. Read Mark 12:28-34, why do you think Jesus tells this man that he is 'not far from the kingdom of God'? According to this statement, how do people get into the kingdom of heaven?
4. People were waiting for a great warrior king who would conquer the Romans and become a mighty king. However Jesus saw the kingdom as something completely different. Read Luke 17:20-21, what does Jesus say about the kingdom here? Why is this important for us understanding the parables?
5. If according to Jesus the kingdom is something that is within us, how does that relate to some of the short parables you read earlier?
6. Jesus saw that the kingdom of God was anywhere that God was in control and invited to rule. Obviously God is the creator and ruler of everything, however people have rejected his rule, which caused sin in the world. God, out of his love gave people free will to choose whom they will serve, so he withholds his sovereignty allowing people to choose their own way. Jesus is clear that there will come a day when he comes in power and might and brings about the judgement of every person and begins the final Kingdom of God. However, the Kingdom of God is already here anywhere people choose to submit to Him as Lord and Saviour. And that means that people can today see the results of this kingdom in action. How do you think people see the kingdom of God in our lives? (think about the images in the parables)
7. How do you think we can better live out the kingdom of God in our world? What would be the result of living this?

