K.E.Y. Bible Study

The **K.E.Y. Bible Study** program at Dawson is a systematic Bible study that allows participants to become acquainted with the basic truths of the Bible over a five-year period. Each lesson is self-contained, so, you can join the study at any time during the five years.

Purpose: To help Christians:
Keep the Faith
Be **E**quipped to Serve
Become **Y**oked in Ministry

"Jesus Teaches Through Parables, Part I"
January 15, 2014
Matthew 13:1-32

Understanding the Nature of Parables

- It was not until years after Jesus ascended into the heavens that the gospel accounts became written documents. Following the pattern of most teaching rabbis, Jesus taught through oral presentation. It is difficult to remember essay style information, but stories, analogies, and parables are much easier to mentally retain. Parables were frequently used as learning and memory tools and still are in oral cultures. The three primary teaching aids first century speakers used were repetition, summary, and parables. Jesus used all three.
- While the word "parable" is used to describe a variety of literary devices (extended metaphors, similes, proverbs, maxims, riddles, etc.), generally the parables of Jesus are either stories or comparisons from everyday experiences told in a manner that invites the hearer to question or evaluate their basic values.
- While both Greeks and Jews used parables as teaching tools, they filled different purposes. Greeks enjoyed arguing, and Jews were more interested in reaching conclusions resulting in changed action. The parables of Jews were very simple and more practical, while Greek parables could be complex. Greeks used them as evidence to support their point. In the Jewish culture, parable often revealed the point.
- Parables generally have one central truth. Not every object, person, or action in a parable has symbolic meaning. If a parable has additional or secondary truths, the one telling the parable usually pointed out the secondary meanings as well.
- Six guidelines to follow when studying the parables of Jesus:
    - Read them aloud several times as they were first spoken as stories.
    - Look for the central truth.
    - Do not attempt to try to find meaning in every detail.
    - They are not historical stories; they are analogies.
    - If the central point is not obvious, study the context closely as the meaning can occur in the historical setting.

- They are calls to action and to change. Our response should never be limited to "that is interesting" but instead, "how shall I then live?"

Context

While most of the teachings of Jesus were directed to his disciples, this is the only one of the five major discourses in Matthew in which Jesus' words are directed to the crowds as well as the disciples. Therefore, Matthew includes two major digressions (Matthew 13:10-23 and 36-43) to explain to his disciples the significance of parables and to interpret two of them. The Scriptures says that Jesus taught many things by parables. We most likely do not have them all.

Who

- God, as revealed in His Son, Jesus.
- The crowds who were following Jesus - this would have included the curious, the critical, and the committed.
- The disciples (meaning the twelve Jesus had chosen). Do not forget that the twelve were chosen not simply volunteers. This makes us aware of God's call and God's sovereignty in the process.

When

These events occurred approximately fifteen months before the cross and resurrection. The closing verses of Matthew 12 describe an event on the specific day these parables were told. Some were concerned that Jesus was ignoring his family. This indicates they were carefully observing his actions as well as his words.

Where

The setting was on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was most likely in a public farming area.

What Occurs In These Parables?

Matthew 13:3-9: The Parable of the Soils

- Jesus described a farmer broadcasting or hand-sowing seeds on four common types of soil. Most of the fields were unfenced for several reasons. Paths ran through fields. Even though private ownership of land existed, property owners did not always have the right to exclude access. It is possible that while they were listening to Jesus, they were watching a man sow or scatter seed by hand.
- The four kinds of soil were:

  - hardened: generally associated with a walking path where nothing grew.
  - rocky: solid rock just beneath very shallow topsoil. This kind of soil did produce some flowers weeds and flowers that had a short life.
  - thorny: full of weeds and thorny, may be fertile but not productive.
  - good: identified as "good" not because of its composition but because of its productivity.
- "He who has ears, let him hear" is a verbal signal to alert the hearers to listen for a deeper meaning. Jesus was a master communicator; he helped the engaged hearer to understand.

Matthew 13:10

The disciples asked why Jesus used this method without using an interpretation. They had heard Jesus when he made them aware an important truth was coming. They were essentially saying, "we don't get the truth, and why are you speaking truth in ways we do not understand."

Matthew 13:11-15: Jesus Explained the Purpose of Parables in Relation to the Nature of the Kingdom of God

- Understanding spiritual truth is not the work of reason alone; it must include revelation. The following is best explanation of the passage I have read: "So, Jesus said that He spoke in parables because those outside the kingdom saw, but they really did not see; they heard, but they really did not hear; nor did they understand (v.13). In them Isaiah's prophecy was filled up like a cup to overflowing (vv.14-15) 'for this people's heart is waxed gross' or is calloused. This expresses a passive form. They themselves made their hearts so. 'They heard heavily with their ears' (literal meaning). Note 'their eyes have closed.' They closed their own eyes lest they should see. It was their doing, not God's. They did not wish to be converted or be healed. So Jesus could only recognize their self-made predicament and act accordingly. Therefore, He spoke in parables." (*An Exposition of The Gospel of Matthew*, Herschel Hobbs, Baker Book House, 1965, pages 163-164.)
- God progressively reveals truth to people who walk by faith in the light they receive. Parable present obvious truth to people of faith, but it is not evident to those who refuse to believe.

Note: Some dispensationalists have seen this as a pivotal point in the ministry of Jesus. They believe that Jesus was withdrew His message to Israel. This view has God changing His mind and His methods, which is one the flaws of dispensational theology.

Matthew 13:16-17

Jesus blessed the disciples for their faith and reminded them of how fortunate they were to receive teaching by faith. Understanding the truth is a wonderful gift from God.

Matthew 13:18-23: Jesus Explained the Parable of the Soils

- The soil on the path is symbolic of those with totally hardened hearts.
- The rocky soil is symbolic of those who have only a surface agreement rather than real faith. They have not considered the consequences of believing.
- The thorny soil represents those who allow the things of this world to crowd out faith. This was a common metaphor.
- The good soil described those who believed, acted on their belief, and produced. **This is the central truth**. Those who receive truth are the ones who are productive. This is a way of saying faith always results in actions. We are called not just to be hearers of the word but doers also. This parable can help us understand the book of James.

Matthew 13:24-30

Jesus told a second parable regarding a man who planted good seed. At night, the man's enemy sowed weeds in the same plot of ground. The man who planted the good seed would not let his servants pull us the weeds until harvest time. This parable helped the disciples understand why Jesus never punished His enemies. At the time of the harvest, the enemies would be taken care of. In the early stages of growth it is very difficult to differentiate between a tare and the grain, as they looked similar. But by the time of harvest, it was easy to determine the difference. Sometimes it difficult to tell the difference between those who are Christians and those who may not be; eventually, time will tell. Jesus explained more about this parable later.

Matthew 13:31-32

Jesus told a very brief third parable about the mustard seed. This was a common analogy. Mustard seeds were very small, and the mustard plant did occasionally grow to be the size of a small tree. Trees often symbolized kingdoms or empires in both parables and fables. Throughout the years, people have assumed that physical power and strength were indicators of spiritual power and strength. Jesus reminded his small group of followers that while they may feel small and insignificant, the kingdom of which they are a part would prevail over all other kingdoms.

KEY Truths Of These Parables

KNOW

The evidence that one has received the message of the kingdom is the production of spiritual fruit.

BE

Kingdom living is not about a series of isolated acts. It is the result of allowing the King to live within.

DO

Act out the kingdom every day. When we do, we can live confidently by faith knowing God's kingdom will prevail.