

## Lesson 1: Jesus Teaches in Parables

Text: Matthew 13:10-13, 31-35, 44-46



### "Growing In The Word": Lesson Text & Discussion

We are beginning a study of the parables of Jesus, but did you know that parables are not just found in the New Testament? Back in the Old Testament, Nathan the prophet came to King David and told him a story about a rich man who had many lambs but stole the one and only much-loved lamb from a poor man. Nathan was telling a story about something David could easily understand (a cruel theft) but that also had a very specific meaning for him. The purpose of Nathan's parable was to teach David a lesson – a lesson that he had sinned and needed to repent because he had stolen the wife of another man. (You can read the parable in II Samuel 12:1-9.)

Parables are not just entertaining stories; they have a specific purpose. A parable is an earthly story with a spiritual meaning. It makes a comparison between things we see and experience in this life with heavenly or spiritual things. They help us to understand certain things we don't know spiritually by comparing them to things we do know in everyday life.

Jesus was and still is the greatest teacher ever, and one of the ways he taught people was through the many parables we see recorded throughout the gospels. Some of them were long stories with lots of detail, and others were very short and simple. In this first lesson, we will look at four parables of Jesus that are only one or two verses long, yet still carry a lot of meaning.

**Read Matthew 13:10-11.** What question did the disciples ask Jesus in verse ten? (*"Why do You speak to them in parables?"*) Up to this point in Jesus' ministry, he had preached to the people, but he had not yet used the teaching tool of parables. In the beginning of Matthew 13, Jesus taught the parable of the soils (which we will study in a later lesson). It was after this parable that the disciples asked the question. Jesus answers them by talking about *"the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven."* When we think of a mystery, we usually think about a crime or something puzzling that needs to be solved, but when we see the word "mystery" in the Bible, it is not talking about something that can't be understood but about something that is secret, hidden, or has not yet been revealed. Parables were going to serve two purposes: 1) They would reveal the mysteries of the kingdom. 2) They would conceal the mysteries of the kingdom. How can that be? How can the same parable reveal something to one person but hide it from another? Jesus is going to explain that in the next two verses.

**Read Matthew 13:12-13.** Anyone who listened to the parables of Jesus could hear the words he spoke, but it was up to them if they were listening with a heart of faith. Sometimes we hear, but we do not listen. For example, picture in your mind a classroom full of children and a teacher standing up in the front of the room reading a long passage from a boring textbook. Now, picture a girl sitting in a desk near the window staring at a bird perched on a branch of the tree right outside the window. She becomes absorbed in watching this bird because it is a mama feeding her three little ones in their nest. She wonders what kind of insects the mama bird is feeding the little ones and what kind of birds they are. Her mind wanders deep into the world of nature for the next several minutes. Now, was the girl able to hear the sound of her teacher's voice all of that time? (Yes) Did the girl *listen* to what was actually being said? (No) The point is, the girl was not interested in what the teacher had to say, so although she heard the words of the teacher, she wasn't really listening and trying to understand them. So it was with the people Jesus spoke parables to. Some were greatly interested in what he was trying to teach them and gave him their full attention and believed him while others didn't like him, didn't believe in him, and didn't have any interest in being taught. It was all about their hearts.

**Read Matthew 13:31-32.** From verse 24 through verse 53, Jesus tells seven parables. One of the shorter ones is found in these two verses. Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed. Do you like mustard? Maybe you like to put lots of runny yellow mustard on your hot dogs or hamburgers. Did you know that mustard is made by grinding mustard seeds and mixing the ground mustard powder with water, vinegar and other seasonings? Mustard seeds are so tiny that it can take as many as 1,000 of them to make an 8 oz. bottle of mustard! In Bible times, there were some kinds of mustard that had extremely tiny seeds, and yet, they grew to be a tall shrub or tree around ten to twelve feet high. In this parable, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a tiny mustard seed. First of all, what is the kingdom of heaven? Think about a kingdom, maybe one you've learned about in school or seen in a movie. The kingdom has a king who rules over his subjects. If the subjects love their king, they obey him and live in his kingdom, where he rules and reigns. Christ Jesus is King, and he is the head of his church which is the kingdom. All those who love him and obey him will belong to his kingdom, the church, because they have submitted themselves (become subjects) to the rule and reign of Christ in their hearts. The mustard seed shows us several things about the kingdom of heaven: 1) The church grew great and spread throughout the world even though it came from a tiny beginning. When the church of Jesus Christ began in Acts 2, it started in one city, Jerusalem. Now, you can find the Lord's church all over the world! 2) The church grew because life was in the seed. The seed is the Word of God (Luke 8:11) and when it is planted (preached and taught), it will grow. A cool thing to try is to carefully cut open a large seed like a kidney bean. Do you know what you will find inside? A tiny plant ready to grow. Life is in a seed. 3) The church grew because the seed was planted. That kidney bean seed will never grow

if it is not planted in the soil and watered and given light. The church grows when seed (the Word of God) is planted in the hearts of people. In the parable, a man planted the mustard seed in his field in order for it to grow. 4) The church is a welcome refuge for those willing to come to it. When the mustard seed grew into a tree, what benefit was it to the birds? (They came and nested in its branches.) Jesus taught the people a lot about the kingdom of heaven from the example of one tiny little mustard seed!

**Read Matthew 13:33.** Now, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to leaven. What is leaven? Leaven is any kind of substance that is added to dough to make it rise. Usually it is yeast, but it can also be something like baking powder. I like to make homemade pizza (I've even shared my recipe with you in the Activities section!), and when I do, I add yeast to the dough. I only use a little bit, about one spoonful, to make a whole pizza. Once the yeast is dissolved in water and mixed in the dough, you can't see it anymore, but you can definitely see what it does! If I spread the dough out in my pizza pan and leave it in a warm place for awhile, the dough will rise. Why? Because of the influence of the yeast, the leaven. In this parable, who hid leaven in the dough? (A woman) Notice that the leaven doesn't get in the dough by accident or by magic; someone has to put it there. Can the church grow if no one is "hiding the leaven"? (No!) How much of the meal (dough) was affected by the leaven? (All of it) The leaven itself can't be seen, it works slowly and quietly, but it affects all of the dough, and we see what it does. If we hear the Word of God preached and allow it to work in our life, it will influence everything we do, not just part of what we do, and others should see that influence in our lives. The kingdom of heaven should act like leaven and have an influence not only in our lives but in the world.

**Read Matthew 13:34-35.** According to verse 35, why did Jesus speak to the people in parables? (It fulfilled a prophecy.) When Jesus spoke in parables, it fulfilled a prophecy that was made in the Old Testament which is quoted in this verse. Do you know which Old Testament verse is quoted? (Psalm 78:2)

**Read Matthew 13:44.** In Bible times, if you had a large amount of money or some valuable possessions like jewelry or something made of gold, etc., it was hard to find a place to keep them safe. You couldn't just go to the store and buy a safe to put them in. So, many people would bury their valuables on their land. Sometimes a landowner would die without revealing where his valuables were hidden, or he might have forgotten where he buried them. I once buried a yogurt cup with a quarter inside it in my backyard. I did this because my kids were studying about archaeology in our home school so we practiced making a grid for a dig in the backyard where I had previously buried several items. We never did find the quarter and probably never will. Years from now, someone may be digging in my backyard, and they are going to find some buried treasure! In this parable, a man accidentally finds some buried treasure. Where was it? (In a field) Can you imagine how exciting that was for him? He

immediately hides it again. Why do you think he did that? (To keep it safe) What did he do next? (He sold all that he had so he could buy the field.) He knew how valuable the treasure was so he did all he could to buy that field which would also mean he would own whatever was in it. It was so important to him to possess that treasure for his own that he was willing to give up everything else he owned in order to have it. So, how is the kingdom of heaven like hidden treasure? Is it valuable? Is it worth looking for? Is it important enough to sacrifice everything else in our lives? Yes!

**Read Matthew 13:45-46.** This parable may seem very similar to the one about hidden treasure – they both talk about something valuable that was found by someone willing to sacrifice everything for it. But there are some differences. First of all, what does Jesus compare the kingdom of heaven to in this parable? (A merchant seeking beautiful pearls) The kingdom is not compared to the valuable pearl but to the man who was looking for the pearl. Second, the man who found the hidden treasure found it by accident, but the man who found the pearl of great price was deliberately looking for such a treasure. As a pearl merchant, he was always searching for good, quality pearls. He would immediately recognize one that was of great value because he knew so much about pearls. What was he willing to do when he found such a valuable pearl? (He was willing to sell everything that he had in order to buy it.) Have you ever played “Hide and Seek?” To seek is to look carefully for something. What does **Matthew 6:33** tell us to seek? (The Kingdom of God) There are many people in the world who are searching – searching for something that matters, searching for something of real value, searching for truth. The kingdom of heaven is a true treasure to those seekers.

Review Questions: (Answers are provided in the Answer Key.)

1. What is the purpose of a parable?
2. What is an example of a parable found in the Old Testament?
3. What parable did Jesus teach in the beginning of Matthew 13?
4. When we see the word “mystery” in the Bible, what does it mean?
5. Why did some people understand the parables of Jesus while others did not?
6. In what city did the church of Jesus Christ begin?
7. Where in the Bible do we read about the beginning of the church?
8. What is inside a seed?

9. How does the church grow?
10. How is the kingdom of heaven like leaven?
11. What verse in the Old Testament prophesied that Jesus would open his mouth in parables?
12. How is the kingdom of heaven like hidden treasure?
13. In the parable of the pearl of great price, what is the kingdom of heaven compared to?
14. What are two differences in the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price?
15. What does Matthew 6:33 tell us to seek?



### **"Putting Down Roots": Memory Work**

- Memorize Psalm 78:1-2
- Memorize Matthew 13:44



### **"Add A Leaf": Words To Know**

- Parable
- Leaven



### **"Harvest Fun": Games & Activities**

- Locate the Leaven - Leaven was very significant to the Jews, especially during the

Passover feast. As the Passover was celebrated down through the years by the Jews, the evening before the Passover feast began, the head of the family would lead his family through the house by candlelight, searching for leaven. No leaven of any kind was allowed to be in the house during the length of the Passover feast which was 7 days. Sometimes Jewish families would sell their leaven to their Gentile neighbors for the length of Passover, then buy it back when Passover was over. Leaven is any kind of agent, like yeast or baking powder, that causes bread to rise. The woman in the parable from this lesson used leaven in her baking - she "hid" it in three measures of meal. Hide a package of yeast in the house or write the word "leaven" on a small index card and hide it. Then search the house to locate the leaven. Take turns hiding it, or hide several and see who can find the most.

- **Homemade Pizza Dough** - In the parable of leaven, the woman hid leaven in some meal. She was baking something and the leaven was going to make her dough rise. You're going to "hide" the leavening agent of yeast in pizza dough and watch the effect it will have. Here are the ingredients you will need to gather to make the dough:
  - 1 pkg. of rapid rise yeast
  - 1 cup of warm water
  - 1 tsp. each of salt and sugar
  - 2 T. olive oil
  - 2  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 cups all-purpose flour

First, sprinkle the package of yeast over the warm water and gently stir. Set it aside for a few minutes. Add in the salt and sugar and stir until dissolved. Add in the olive oil and stir. Begin adding flour, about 2 cups at first and stir until well-mixed. Keep adding flour until the dough forms a ball when stirred and starts cleaning the side of the bowl. Lightly flour a surface to knead the dough and begin the kneading process. To knead dough, pull the top of the half of the dough over on the bottom half, pressing down with the base of the palms of your hands. Then

turn the dough a quarter turn counterclockwise and repeat. (It sounds more complicated than it is. It's actually fun to play with dough!) You only need to knead for a couple of minutes until the ball of dough is nice and smooth and elastic. Lightly spray a pizza pan with cooking spray, place the ball of dough in the middle then gently start pressing it out to fill the pan. \*Tip: Butter the tips of your fingers to keep the dough from sticking to them. Place the pan in a warm area or on top of your oven while it is preheating. After about 20-30 minutes, check your pizza pan. Did your dough rise? If your yeast was fresh and did its leavening work, it should have. Now you can top your dough with your favorite sauce and toppings. Bake at 450 degrees for about 18-20 minutes. When you eat your pizza, you won't see or taste the leaven (yeast), but your dough wouldn't have risen nicely without. Its influence is clearly seen.



### **"Digging Deeper": Research**

- Mustard seeds and trees - Find some images of mustard seeds and trees. Notice how tiny the seed is as compared to how large a shrub or tree it grows into. What are some different species of mustard? What kind of seeds does each species produce and what are the differences in their flavors? How large can a mustard tree grow to be and how long does it take to reach maturity (the point that it can be harvested)?
- Pearls - It is fascinating to learn how pearls are formed naturally! Research this process and try to answer the following questions: Where do pearls "grow?" How long does it take to form a pearl? What is the record for the largest natural pearl ever discovered? Learning about this process may help you see why the pearl merchant in the parable was willing to give up so much to possess something so valuable.



## "Food For Thought": Puzzles

- Which Parable? - We studied four short parables of Jesus in this lesson. Read the following clues, then choose the correct answer from the box, and write it on the line. Answers will be used more than once, and some clues have more than one answer. Answers are provided in the Answer Key.

Parable of the mustard seed

Parable of the leaven

Parable of the hidden treasure

Parable of the pearl of great price

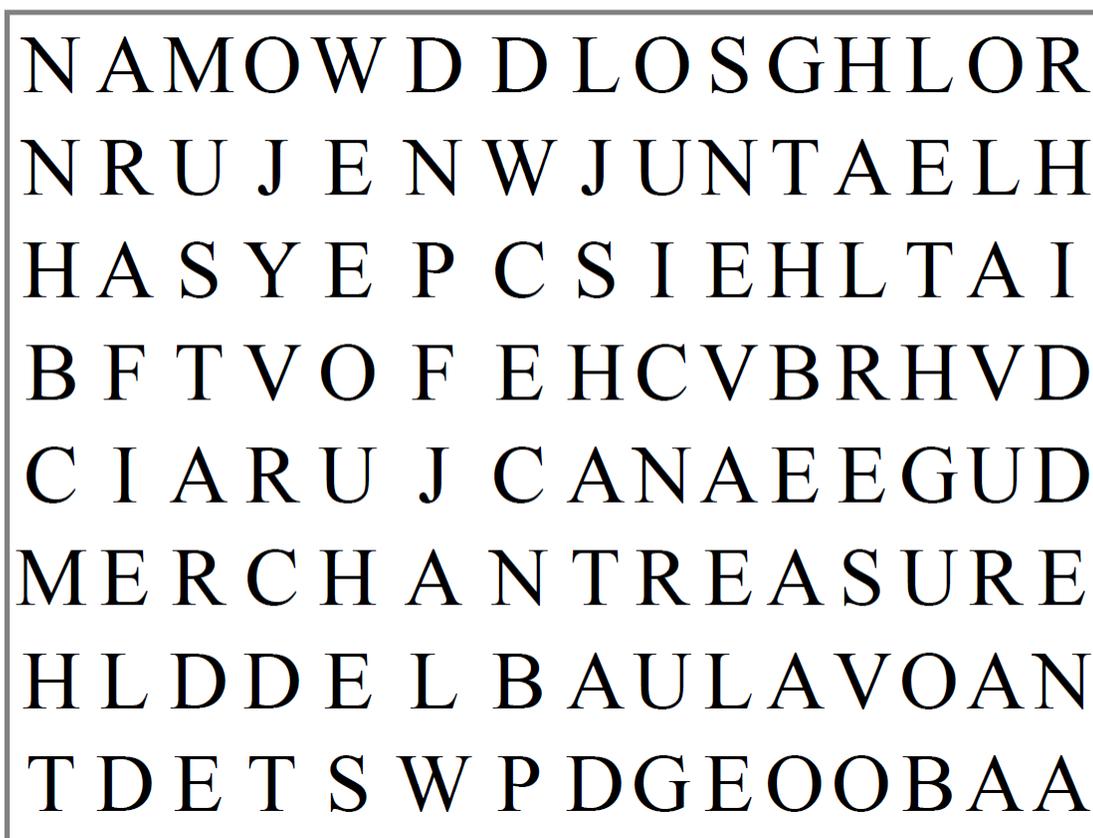
1. Which parable mentions a woman? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Which parable mentions someone buying something? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. In which parable does something go from small to large? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Which parable compares something to the kingdom of heaven? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Which parable mentions someone rejoicing? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Which parable mentions a field? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Which parable mentions something that is hidden? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Which parable mentions an object that surpassed all others? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Which parable mentions having to sell something before buying something else?

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10. Which parable has something that benefits birds? \_\_\_\_\_

- Word Search Puzzle - There were a couple of hidden items in the parables you studied. See if you can find all of the hidden words from this lesson. Answers are provided in the Answer Key.



parable

heaven

leaven

woman

pearl

merchant

treasure

field

hidden

mustard

tree

birds

teaching

Jesus

joy

bought

sold

valuable



## "Fruits Of Our Labor": Crafts

- Pearl in an Oyster - There are two options for this craft, one edible and one not. To make a simple "pearl in an oyster" craft, use small white paper plates (dessert size) and completely color one side pink. Fold the plate in half, pink side in, then glue a cotton ball in the middle of the creased pink side. To make an edible craft, bake plain sugar cookies or purchase Nilla wafers. Tint vanilla frosting light pink and spread on the bottom of one cookie. Position a second cookie on top, slightly tilted up to mimic an open shell. Position a small white gumball or white ball candy (like Sixlets found online or at party supply stores) in the frosting to represent the pearl.
- Treasure Box - One of the hidden items in the parables was treasure. Everyone has things that are special and valuable to them, and it is nice to have a pretty box to keep those treasures in. Purchase a plain wooden box from a craft store, then paint it and decorate it any way you would like.
- Illustrate a parable - Throughout this book, one of the craft ideas for each lesson will be to illustrate a parable from the lesson. This can be done by drawing, painting, chalk, or in rebus fashion (\*See rebus explanation.) There will be instructions in the last lesson as to how to assemble all of your illustrated parables into a book. For this lesson, choose one parable to illustrate or illustrate all of them if you'd like.

\*Rebus explanation - A rebus puzzle is a combination of pictures, letters, numbers and symbols which stand for words. For example, if you were illustrating the words "Be nice" in a rebus fashion, you could draw a picture of a bee - "e" for the word "be". Then you could write the letter "n", add a + sign, then draw a picture of an ice cube. (n + ice = nice). Get it?