



# MATTHEW



**Context**

**What are Parables?**

Parables are about the  
kingdom of God

Parables are subversive

Jesus' favorite speech form, the parable, was subversive. Parables sound absolutely ordinary: casual stories about soil and seeds, meals and coins and sheep, bandits and victims, farmers and merchants. And they are wholly secular: of his forty or so parables recorded in the Gospels, only one has its setting in church, and only a couple mention the name God. As people heard Jesus tell these stories, they saw at once that they weren't about God, so there was nothing in them threatening their own sovereignty. They relaxed their defenses. They walked away perplexed, wondering what they meant, the stories lodged in their imagination. And then, like a time bomb, they would explode in their unprotected hearts. An abyss opened up at their very feet. He was talking about God; they had been invaded!

Eugene Peterson

# Three kinds of parables

- Parables about the surprising nature of God's kingdom
- Parables about the upside-down value system of God's kingdom
- Parables of crisis

Parables reveal and conceal



For Jesus, the parables were not used to explain things to people's satisfaction, but to call into question all of their previous explanations and understandings... Far from being illustrations that illuminate what people haven't yet figured out, the parables are designed to pop every circuit breaker in the mind... Mention "messiah," and the disciples pictured an armed king on horseback; mention "forgiveness" and they start setting up rules about when it should run out. From Jesus' point of view, the sooner their misguided minds had the props knocked from under them, the better. After all their yammer about how God should or shouldn't run his own operation, getting them to just stand there with their eyes popped open and their mouths shut would be a giant step forward.

Robert Farrar Capon

Jesus' parables conceal his meaning even as they reveal it, and some say it was how he stayed out jail. He could have been arrested for talking heresy and treason, after all, but for talking about seeds and thorns, good soil and bad soil? Not likely. By speaking in parables, Jesus could get his message across without saying it directly, so that his followers nodded and smiled while his critics scratched their bewildered heads. He speaks in parables, he says, so that only certain kinds of listeners can hear him - those who listen less with their minds than with their hearts.

Barbara Brown Taylor

# The Parable of the Sower

# The Generosity of the Sower

The focus is not on us and our shortfalls but on the generosity of our maker, the prolific sower who does not obsess about the condition of the fields, who is not stingy with the seed but who casts it everywhere, on good soil and bad, who is not cautious or judgmental or even very practical, but who seems willing to keep reaching into his seed bag for all eternity, covering the whole creation with the fertile seed of his truth.

Barbara Brown Taylor

# The Power of the Seed

# The Receptivity of the Soil

Listening to Jesus' words is the key to life; our ears are the soil of our lives. Ears attentively devoted to the Word of Jesus are good soil; ears distracted, inattentive, casual, or diffused in concentration are the several unfruitful soils of the parable. The key attitude | life - spiritually and socially - is the attitude of active listening.

Dale Bruner



# The Hardened Listener

# The Shallow Listener

Superficiality is the curse of our age. The desperate need of the soul is not for intelligence, nor talent, nor yet excitement; just depth.

Richard Foster

When they became Christians, they thought they were entering Christ's kingdom, but really what was happening was they were trying to get Christ to enter their kingdom, and they were trying to get Christ really to fulfill their agenda. I'll put it this way: they wanted a blesser, not a Savior. They wanted a sugar daddy, not a King. They wanted help and relief, not salvation. They saw Jesus Christ as a service provider. As long as they had services provided, they had joy. As soon as he no longer was helping them meet their goals, they had it with him, which showed the things they really worshiped were the things they had lost in the heat.

Tim Keller

# The Cluttered Listener

It is not that we have anything against God, depth, and spirit, we would like these, it is just that we are habitually too preoccupied to have any of these show up on our radar screens. We are more busy than bad, more distracted than nonspiritual...Pathological busyness, distraction, and restlessness are major blocks today within our spiritual lives.urns to joy whatever he touches.

Ronald Rolheiser

# The Receptive Listener