

Parables, part 1

Matthew 13:1-17

Matthew 13: 1-17 The Parable of the Sower

¹ That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear."

¹⁰ The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

¹¹ He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹² Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables:

"Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

¹⁵ For this people's heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts

and turn, and I would heal them."^[a]

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. ¹⁷ For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

Riddles <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yDmGnA8Hw0>

We are starting a new series on the Parables of Jesus. Jesus often spoke in riddles, using stories of common day things to communicate some of the greatest spiritual truths.

In this Parable we get a bit more than usual, we get an explanation as well as Jesus telling us why he teaches in parables.

Tonight we have a parable about a farmer sowing seeds. I'm sure you can imagine a man throwing seeds around in a field. But from the moment the seed leaves his hand it will face many obstacles before it can grow into a plant, birds, shallow soil, weeds – all these things can prevent that seed from growing. And so it is with life that we so often are confronted with obstacles.

Obstacles are the things in life that stop us from reaching our potential; that keep us from being the kind of person we want to be; that keep us from exploring the truth about the world we live in.

Most of the world's successful people faced huge obstacles. Thomas Edison – the inventor of the light bulb – hit a few obstacles in trying to figure out the light bulb. He created over 1000 failed proto types. Imagine that, after the first 500 I think I would pack it in. He said of all his attempts "I have not failed just found 1000 ways that didn't work.

Vincent Van Gogh, painted over 900 works of art in his lifetime. He only ever sold 1. While he lived he only saw 1 painting sold but he kept painting, he didn't let that obstacle stop him. Now after his death he is one of the most famous painters in history.

And Jesus tells this story about obstacle, what are the obstacles for faith?

Jesus says some seed falls on the path and is eaten by the crows. For some people they hear the Christian message and before they have even had a chance to think about it the thought is picked off, it's swept away from their mind never to be thought of again. I think that's so true, how much time does the average person spend thinking about faith or spirituality?

Lincoln famously had a series of debates with his opposition Douglas in 1858. They each presented their platform for 1.5 hours, then a 30 minute rebuttal. No one today would listen to 4 hours of policy debate today. We live in the sound bite era today, no more than 10 second please – explain your policy positions in one sentence please. These days the candidates speak for about 5 minutes on various topics then they move on. And they spend most of their time yelling at each other and accusing them of having small hands. And this is an obstacle for faith today, never really contemplating the Christian message – just not the time or interest in giving Jesus' story any investigation.

Jesus says: ⁵*Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.* ⁶*But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.*

Life is all too often filled with hardships that can destroy a person's faith.

I heard of a man that was a regular church goer who had twins, but they lost one at birth, very hard. 12 months later they lost the other to cot death. It took him a long time to come back to church, because he was hurting, angry. Life is filled with obstacles like these – hardships will always happen.

Jesus said ⁷*Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.*

This part of the parable hits the nail on the head for our society because our lives are more crowded than ever, we have so much available to us: sport, leisure, TV, books,

movies, relationships, friends, family, work, education. We are called the options generation, because our lives are so full of choice. The book *Paradox of Choice* is saying we that live in a society that values freedom and choice yet the choice becomes shackles around our feet.

This choice can have all sorts of side effects: analysis paralysis, so much choice we are paralysed to make a decision; lower levels of happiness, because when we chose, we are worried if it's right.

When I buy an electronic item, I can't look at catalogues for weeks afterwards because I know that the first thing I see will be a better deal. Choice leads to the fear of missed opportunities. People live in fear of missing out, on a show, or job, or deal. This is a huge obstacle to faith, people's lives are already so crowded, we're all so busy, with so much to do. There is no room left for faith.

Jesus says beware, there are the things that will prevent you from having a living faith. And what I want to take away from this parable is obstacles don't mean something can't be done. But obstacles mean we have to be more intentional about making something happen.

Every time the Australian census is taken the NONE religious group grows. Because we have become a society uninterested in faith, we have let the obstacles get the better of us.

The disciples hear this story about a farmer scattering seeds and they ask the obvious question: Why parables? Why be so cryptic, why not just make it plain and simple:

¹⁰ The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

Jesus give the strangest answer to this question about why parables:

¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand."¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

**Before reading on take some time to reflect on this question:
Why do you think Jesus talks in parables?**

Jesus says I tell these truths in parables so some will not understand – almost as a barrier to understanding, so things are not made to plain. Why would Jesus want this?

I believe it's so that those who want to know will seek the truth because the gospel is not about an intellectual proposition, it's not a mathematical equation. There are obstacles to understanding, but if you persevere they can be overcome because understanding the gospel is about a disposition of the heart.

Is your heart open or is it closed?

And in using parables Jesus is asking the listeners this very question: is your heart open? Do you really want to know about salvation? Are you really seeking grace? If you are you will search out these answers.

To understand a thing is more than just comprehending it. I have watched many WW2 documentaries, play many WW2 games but that does not mean I know that it was like to fight in WW2 - that's ridiculous. Or to say I understand love because I read a poem is foolish – to truly understand love I need to go much deeper than that, I need to dig deep to immerse myself in it, to make myself vulnerable or I will never really know love.

Jesus speaks in parables so people might realise that salvation is not just some simple concept to be understood – like $a+b=c$ – but it is much deeper than that, to truly understand it you need to go deeper.

I want to say to anyone here tonight who is unsure where they stand with Christ – Jesus speaks in parables so we might dig deeper.

Have you ever done this? Have you really tried to understand the gospel of Grace? To know in your heart what it means to be forgiven? What it means to place your trust and faith in a God that is unseen? In a God that moves in this world but in ways we don't fully understand?

Don't let any obstacle stop you.