

Parables of the Kingdom



*Matthew 13:24-43; Mark
4:26-34; Luke 13:18-21*

*Year A Proper 11 ; Year B
Proper 6*

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Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3	4
▲	Judas - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor	▲		▲	
▲	Andrew - the younger brother of Peter, one of the youngest disciples	▲		▲	
▲	Joanna - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus	▲		▲	
▲	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲		▲	
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples		▲		▲
▲	Mary Magdalene - a 'fallen woman' who became the first female disciple, the humblest member of the group due to her shame about her past		▲		▲
▲	Matthew - a former tax collector (i.e. a agent of the Roman occupation of his own people) who in his repentance from that past life is the most religiously fervent of the disciples		▲		▲
▲	Thomas - the skeptic, who really wants to believe because of his emotional bond with the others, but can't simply ignore his doubts		▲		▲
▲	Jesus			▲	

Scene 1

Andrew , James , Joanna , Judas

Judas *[in humorous game show announcer voice]* And now it's time for everybody's favorite parlor game: What's My Parable!

Andrew Did the rabbi preach in parables again?

Judas *[in humorous infomercial voice]* Not one, not two, but three!

Andrew Well, you seem to be in a better mood about them than you were yesterday.

Judas Nonsense, my fine fellow. I'm always in a good mood. "Judas the Carefree" they call me!

Andrew *[skeptically]* Uh...okay.

Joanna Today's parables were much easier. Almost everybody got them. Or at least had plausible interpretations to propose.

Judas And they were optimistic. They were about the growth of the Kingdom.

Andrew Wasn't yesterday's parable also optimistic? At least for the good ground where the seed grows.

Joanna The terrible thing about yesterday's parable wasn't so much the content - though you shouldn't forget the other kinds of ground where the seed doesn't take - as the horrible, cynical reason why he spoke in a parable in the first place.

James *[annoyed]* Okay, you shouldn't go calling the rabbi cynical just because you couldn't understand his parable.

Joanna I was fine with the parable, but did he tell you why he used it?

James *[pugnaciously]* He doesn't have to explain himself to *me*!

Andrew Hey, I want to know what he said. Come on, guys!

Judas He said he spoke in parables specifically so the crowd wouldn't understand.

Andrew No way!

James *[flatly]* That's impossible. There's no way he would say that.

Joanna We all heard it. Judas heard it. John was there, too.

James Well, you must have heard it wrong!

Judas *[moving to break up the developing argument]* In any case, I don't think it's something to worry too much about any more. I was upset at the time, but the whole thing just reminded me that the rabbi is, as I've said before, a force of nature. He's just not going to stick with a nice tame script every time. And I'm okay with that, as long as he's mostly on track, which he definitely was today.

Joanna Agreed. Today's parables were perfect: just mysterious enough to engage the crowd, but not so hard that they were left clueless.

Andrew Sounds great. What were they?

James Well, the first parable was about seeds again, only they all fall on good soil and grow into a big harvest, even though some bad seeds get mixed in, too, and have to be weeded out at the harvest. The second one was about a tiny mustard seed that grows into a huge tree. And the third one was about a lump of dough that rises because of the yeast in it.

Andrew Gee, they don't seem so hard at all. The Kingdom's going to grow big from small things, right?

Judas Without a doubt!

Scene 2

John , Mary , Matthew , Thomas

{John comes upon Mary crying.}

John Mary, what's wrong?

Mary I can't stop thinking about the rabbi's sermon today. It was so sad!

John You thought it was sad?

Mary Oh, I know it wasn't all bad, but still...

{Thomas and Matthew enter}

Matthew Is everything all right?

John We were just talking about today's sermon.

Thomas Ah! We were stuck on cleanup and missed it.

Matthew Mary, are you okay?

Mary I'm sorry. The sermon upset me.

Thomas But you love the rabbi's sermons more than anybody. What was it about?

Mary *[darkly]* It was about the ones who'll be condemned.

Thomas *[in a subdued voice]* Ah.

John That was what one of the parables was about, and it *was* very sad. It was about a farmer who plants seed in a field -

Matthew Seed again! Was it the parable he preached yesterday?

John No. This time, it wasn't different kinds of ground, but different kinds of seed. The farmer planted wheat, but an enemy of his stuck into his fields and planted weeds. And when he found out about it, he told his workers not to try pulling the weeds yet, but to let them grow together, and then they'd separate them at the harvest.

Thomas I know it's kind of beside the point, but is that what a real farmer would do? I don't know farming, but wouldn't you want to get the weeds out right away?

John I don't know. I just know fishing.

Matthew Don't look at me! I could tell you how to cultivate a retirement fund, but I used to kill my house plants.

Mary *[weakly]* They gather up the weeds and...and burn them! They throw them in the fire.

John It's like yesterday's parable in that respect. Some believe, and some never do.

Thomas I'm not sure I like this parable any better than Mary does. I didn't mind being called a path where the seeds might not take root, but I don't like being called a weed!

John I'm sure he didn't mean to include you in that category. After all, you're one of his followers. You're one of us!

Matthew You may not believe in your head or your heart, but you're believing with your feet.

Thomas *[pursuing his point seriously]* Okay, it's all right for me, but what about the crowd? They aren't believing in him or following him yet. Are they just weeds? Is all we're doing in this life just waiting for the wheat and the weeds to grow, and then the harvest comes? It's a pretty grim picture of the world.

Mary *[in a low voice]* I almost hate him for making me see it.

John Don't cry, Mary. Think of the other two parables! They painted much brighter pictures.

Mary *[shocked]* They did not!

John Huh?

Mary They were even worse!

Scene 3

Andrew , James , Jesus , Joanna , Judas

{The first group of disciples chats with Jesus.}

James *[to Jesus]* Great job today!

Jesus Did you think so?

James Absolutely.

Jesus Even though I preached in parables again and didn't give the interpretations?

Joanna The interpretations were more within the reach of the crowd this time. It was a good balance.

Jesus I wasn't so sure myself, but I'm glad you think so.

Judas And the message of the parables as a whole was more positive.

Jesus Was it?

Andrew Okay, you're making me nervous now.

Jesus Sorry! Would you like me to be more definitive? Then hear the meaning of the first parable: The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, and the good seeds are the children of the kingdom. The bad seeds are the children of the evil one, and he is the enemy who sows them.

Joanna Excuse me, rabbi, but are you sure that's the best analogy to use?

James Of course it is! If the rabbi used it, it's the best!

Jesus Not necessarily. *[to Joanna]* What did you have in mind?

Joanna Well, the problem with "good seed" and "bad seed" is that it marks each person from birth. It suggests that you are what you are, and there's no way for a person to change.

Judas Maybe there isn't. It's an interesting thought. Maybe recruitment is not about persuading people over to our cause, but simply finding the ones who are already predisposed to it. Now that I think about it, preaching in difficult parables might not be such a bad idea in that case. It might be the most efficient method. Sort of like a secret

code word.

Andrew Now you're *all* making me nervous! I can tell you that if you had known me before I met the rabbi, you would have called me a bad seed. And I was! Peter can tell you all about the kind of person I was. But the rabbi's words persuaded me. I made a change in my life!

James What about the harvest? What is it? I thought it might be the war where we win our freedom, but it sounds like all the children of the Kingdom survive, while all the children of the Enemy are killed. Will the war really be that lopsided? Are we all guaranteed to live?

Jesus The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will cull out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers and throw them into a burning furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father!

Scene 4

John , Mary , Matthew , Thomas

{The other group of disciples continues their conversation.}

John Mary, what is it that bothers you so much about the other two parables?

Thomas What were they?

John A mustard seed grows into a giant tree, so big that all the birds of the air can come and roost in its branches. And a lump of bread dough rises from the yeast that's in it.

Thomas They seem pretty positive to me.

Mary *[desperately]* Don't you see? The birds are evil!

Thomas Wow. How do you figure?

Mary The kingdom grows, but it can't escape the birds. They grow side by side, like the wheat and the weeds.

Matthew She may be right. The birds represented the Evil One in yesterday's parable.

John I don't think it works that way. Parables are just analogies, or allegories. Just because you use something to represent evil in one

parable, it doesn't mean it's evil in itself, or that it has to be evil again in the next parable.

Thomas I thought the idea was that the kingdom gets so big, that all the people of the world can take shelter beneath its branches.

Matthew Mary's got it right: side by side. That's what the first parable was about, right? Good and evil growing side by side. So it is with the mustard seed: the tree and the birds. And with the dough! The wheat (the children of the kingdom again!) and the yeast ("beware of the leaven of the Pharisees!") growing side by side.

Mary And no hope for those who will be condemned. It's horrible!

John Not necessarily. I'm still not sure I agree with Matthew. There's nothing in the second parable to suggest the birds are evil. They don't perform any evil acts in the story, and they even rest in the shade of the tree, which evil wouldn't do. And as for the yeast, far from being a bad thing, it's the key ingredient that makes the bread even possible. If there were no yeast, the dough would just be garbage.

Matthew Not for Passover! Once again, the yeast is a symbol for sin. That's why we leave it out of the bread on that holiest of nights.

Thomas Is that the reason? I thought its absence represented haste. The people of the Exodus had to cook it fast because their deliverance was so near.

Matthew You're getting caught up in the insignificant details of the parables. It's the broader symbolism that matters.

John Symbols can be found anywhere, and make to signify anything. It's common sense and plain sight that matters.

Thomas I'm with John. The parables are just analogies that help us understand things. They aren't secret codes meant to be understood only by those with the hidden knowledge.

Matthew But that's exactly what the rabbi said they were, yesterday!

{A long silence as everybody recalls the unsettling revelations of the day before.}

John *[suddenly sober]* That's right. He said he used them so that people would *not* understand.

Mary *[sadly]* I thought I knew him, but ever since that night, he's been a stranger to me.

Thomas *[fearfully]* John? Who is he? *What* is he?

John *[desolately]* I suddenly have no idea.

*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
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