**Bible Study: A fresh look at the Parables of Jesus Week 1**

 (NB We are using the *New Living Translation (NLT) of the Bible)*

***Notes:***

Parables are stories that Jesus told from observing the world around him. They are short and to the point and they carry a message about the Kingdom of God – if he was living today his parables would be about everyday things that we could immediately recognize.

There is an attached list of the 37 parables recorded in the first three Gospels – notice that there are no parables in John’s Gospel.

Only one parable is unique to Mark, 9 are unique to Matthew and 14 are unique to Luke – 8 parables are found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. For the purposes of our study we are going to look at the 8 parables that are found in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

The first is the Parable of the Sower and although I have printed off all three of the texts, the differences are small – can you spot the differences?

**Matthew 13:3-9**

**3**He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:

“Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. **4**As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. **5**Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. **6**But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn’t have deep roots, they died. **7**Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. **8**Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! **9**Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”

**Mark 4:3-9**

**3**“Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed. **4**As he scattered it across his field, some of the seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it. **5**Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. **6**But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn’t have deep roots, it died.**7**Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain. **8**Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!” **9**Then he said, “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”

**Luke 8:5-8**

**5**“A farmer went out to plant his seed. As he scattered it across his field, some seed fell on a footpath, where it was stepped on, and the birds ate it. **6**Other seed fell among rocks. It began to grow, but the plant soon wilted and died for lack of moisture. **7**Other seed fell among thorns that grew up with it and choked out the tender plants. **8**Still other seed fell on fertile soil. This seed grew and produced a crop that was a hundred times as much as had been planted!” When he had said this, he called out, “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”

***Jesus explains the meaning of the parable:***

**Matthew**

**18**“Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: **19**The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don’t understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts.**20**The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. **21**But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word. **22**The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God’s word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. **23**The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”

**Mark**

**3**Then Jesus said to them, “If you can’t understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables? **14**The farmer plants seed by taking God’s word to others. **15**The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message, only to have Satan come at once and take it away. **16**The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. **17**But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word.**18**The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God’s word, **19**but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced. **20**And the seed that fell on good soil represents those who hear and accept God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”

**Luke**

**11**“This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is God’s word. **12**The seeds that fell on the footpath represent those who hear the message, only to have the devil come and take it away from their hearts and prevent them from believing and being saved. **13**The seeds on the rocky soil represent those who hear the message and receive it with joy. But since they don’t have deep roots, they believe for a while, then they fall away when they face temptation. **14**The seeds that fell among the thorns represent those who hear the message, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. And so they never grow into maturity. **15**And the seeds that fell on the good soil represent honest, good-hearted people who hear God’s word, cling to it, and patiently produce a huge harvest.

***Questions:***

What are the differences in the passages – are they significant?

How does Jesus describe the reaction of people to the message of the Kingdom of God?

How does this relate to human nature as we understand it?

What does this passage say to you?