

Lesson 10

Proper 10

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

In Jesus' day, a teacher would sit to do his formal teaching. His students gathered around him, either seated or standing. This custom was definitely followed in the synagogues, but Jesus evidently usually sat as He taught also in the countryside. In this instance, because the size of the crowd required that He be some distance from them, Jesus arranged for an unusual chair from which to teach.

Our English word *parable* comes directly from the Greek *parabole*. It carried the meaning of placing two things side by side. Jesus told stories that His hearers could understand and relate to—placing them “side by side” with a truth about life in the kingdom of God. A simple definition has been suggested: “A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.”

This is an effective way of teaching, as every preacher or teacher knows. According to Jesus, He used parables to serve two purposes: to deepen the understanding and interest of those who listened in faith and to hide the truth from those who would not believe. (See Matthew 13:10–17.)

The lesson of a parable turns on its point of comparison. It is important to look for that point. It is a mistake to give some symbolic meanings to every detail of the story. He didn't always explain His parables, but here Jesus did explain His parable of the sower. With His help, we easily analyze the parable and get the point.

142. What is the point of comparison on which the spiritual lesson turns? Select an adjective to describe each of the kinds of people pictured by the four kinds of soil.

143. With which of the kinds of soil do you relate in your life experience? What does each kind of soil teach you for your life as a Christian?

144. The traditional title of this parable is the parable of the sower, taken from the text of Matthew itself. As Jesus explained the parable, what title might more appropriately focus on the point it makes?

145. What encouragement does this parable bring to sowers of the Word?

“He who has ears, let him hear” places awesome responsibility on those who hear the Word. Franzmann says in *Follow Me*, “Man has the fatal freedom of shutting himself up against the word which God speaks to him, the very word which he hears and understands” (p. 123). All preachers know that the effectiveness of their sermons lies only 10 percent in their tongues and 90 percent in the ears of their hearers.

146. How can you approach Bible study or the lessons and sermons in church in ways that will make you a more effective hearer?

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 55:10–13

These familiar words are part of what Horace Hummel, in *The Word Becoming Flesh*, calls “an invitation to ‘every one who thirsts’ to a free Messianic banquet” (p. 225). Then he adds parenthetically: “Yet in the afterglow of chap. 53 we do not forget that it was very costly to the Giver.” The Giver, the Servant of the Lord, invited the thirsty to “come to the waters” to “buy wine and milk without money and without price” (v. 1). He promised renewal of the “everlasting covenant, My steadfast, sure love for David” (v. 3). He urged, “Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near; . . . for He will abundantly pardon” (vv. 6–7). He reminded that the Lord’s ways and thoughts are as high above man’s “as the heavens are higher than the earth” (v. 9).

147. In this pericope, the Lord spoke through the Servant to point to the effective agent by which He will accomplish His purpose in the world. What is that agent? What simile is used to illustrate its effectiveness?

148. What is the double purpose for which God sends His Word into the world? (See Romans 3:19–20; 1:16–17; 10:14–17.)

149. What assurance do we gain as we hear the Lord say about His Word: “It shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it”? What is the picture that awaits those who will “go out in joy and be led forth in peace”? What will be the end result of the fulfillment of this prophecy?

150. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 8:12–17

Romans 8 is Paul’s great description of the Holy Spirit as God at work—making the redemption accomplished by Jesus fully effective *in us*. The continuing activity of the Spirit is seen in the Greek *agontai*, “being led,” in a grammatical form that describes a continuing, durative process.

151. How does the Holy Spirit assert His leading in our lives? (See Romans 1:16–17; 1 Corinthians 1:18, 23–25.)

152. What will be the continuing result of the Spirit’s leading? How is the spirit of slavery different from the Spirit of adoption as sons?

153. Of what is Paul reminding us by telling us that by the Spirit we cry, “Abba! Father!”? How does the Spirit bear witness with our spirit that we are God’s children?

“Provided we suffer with Him” is immediately softened, and our reception of its message is encouraged, by Paul’s pointing to the glory that Jesus Christ is given now and will be given forever—a glory that those who are His will fully enjoy with Him in heaven.

154. How may we “suffer with Him” as His disciples? How may we also “be glorified with Him”?

Note that Paul continued in verse 18 with this reminder for his readers: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

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Blessed Lord, since You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

142. Help your group understand the idea of a point of comparison. Someone has suggested that a parable and its meaning are like two circles that are side by side and touch each other only at the point of comparison, the point of the lesson. As Jesus explained His parable, the point of comparison is the four kinds of soil in their reception of the seed and four kinds of hearers in their reception of the Word of God. Other adjectives may be suggested, but these fit the kinds of hearers: *indifferent, shallow, indecisive, responsive*.

143. Each of us may relate to one kind of soil more than to another, but we surely have to see ourselves in each one of them at times in our lives. Sometimes we can be rather hardened and resistant to the Word; often we are lazy about putting down deep roots of understanding; frequently we have trouble breaking with those things that misdirect our lives and compete with God's call in Christ; and by grace we may see that the seed of the Word has produced its fruit in us in a Christian life and in Christian service. Each kind of soil in which the seed does not realize its purpose is a warning against the attitudes in life that it portrays. The good soil, producing various amounts of fruit, encourages us to bear fruit and to recognize that Christians are different in their "productivity" for the Lord. Producing thirty times what was sown does not make us less loved or less valued by the Lord than those who produce one hundred times what was sown, but we should strive, in the power of the Spirit, to be as productive as we can be, to our Lord's glory and to our benefit and that of our neighbor.

144. Some suggest, on the basis of Jesus' explanation and the point of comparison, that the parable should be called the parable of four kinds of soil.

145. Earthly sowers of the Word sow as God leads. Those who resist the Word bear the guilt and consequences of rejecting it. So even though every seed does not prosper, we keep sowing nonetheless, confident in God's promises about His Word and in His love for all people in Christ.

146. We may become more effective hearers of the Word by resolving to give it the time and energy it deserves—and by approaching it prayerfully. After all, it is the Holy Spirit who opens the ears of our hearts to hear and believe the Good News of Jesus. (See 1 Corinthians 2:6–16.)

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 55:10–13

Help your group understand Hummel's comment about the cost of the banquet to the Giver by asking, "What does chapter 53 of Isaiah describe?"

147. This pericope points to God's Word as the effective agent in accomplishing His purpose in the world. The simile that illustrates the effectiveness of the Word is the rain and the snow that water the earth and

effectively make it productive of the vegetation that supports life. All scholars recognize a division of Isaiah into two sections, the first being chapters 1–39, and the second, chapters 40–66. While critical scholarship sees the second section of Isaiah as a later addition, there is sufficient evidence of the unity of Isaiah—in similarity of language and concepts in both sections—to conclude that both are the product of Isaiah’s prophetic pen. In the New Testament, Jesus quoted from both sections as “the prophet Isaiah,” which confirms this conclusion and removes all doubt to the contrary.

148. God’s Word is effective in leading people to the truth—both the truth of their sin and guilt and the resultant consequences and the truth of God’s forgiving love fully expressed in the life, death, and rising of Jesus Christ and in His continuing power and presence in the Holy Spirit.

149. When the Lord says His Word will accomplish what He desires and achieve His purpose for it, we are encouraged to take it seriously as it speaks to us about life with Him and gives us assurance as we use it in the mission to which He has sent us as His Church. The Word *will* do its job; all we need to do is use it faithfully—for ourselves and others. For the exiles, the picture was of their Holy Land, rejoicing at their return—an agricultural version of the peaceable kingdom. We see its ultimate fulfillment in the eternal messianic kingdom. The result of the fulfillment of this prophecy will be “it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

150. This lesson’s assurance that God’s Word will do what He sends it to do corresponds to the Holy Gospel’s good soil, which receives the seed and produces a crop of faith and love.

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 8:12–17

151. The Holy Spirit uses the Good News of Jesus to lead us to faith and discipleship. “Jesus Christ died for your sins and rose again” is given dynamic, life-renewing power through the Spirit to make Jesus personally meaningful to us. The Spirit does not just directly “zap” people “magically.” He leads to Jesus Christ through the Word. That’s why we call the Word and the Sacraments the Means of Grace.

152. The continuing result of the Spirit’s leading is that we continue to be “children of God.” The New Testament uses “sons” and not the more general “children” because “sons” carried the weight of “one who is an heir to receive an inheritance.” We today would say “sons and daughters.” The “spirit of slavery” is one of fear or, at best, obligation; the “Spirit of adoption as sons” is freedom and love, with service willingly given by one who knows he belongs and the inheritance will be his by right of sonship.

153. “Abba” is the diminutive, endearing term used by children of Jesus’ day as they approached their dear fathers. The fact that our spirits can cry out “Abba! Father!” is itself continual evidence to us that the Spirit is at work in us and that we are in fact God’s sons and daughters through faith in Jesus. Luther’s Small Catechism urges, “Ask Him as dear children ask their dear father” (Lord’s Prayer, Introduction). The Spirit bears witness with our spirits through the Good News. It may be as we are reading or hearing the Word—or it may be His bringing to mind assurances and guidance from previous reading or hearing. He leads our spirits to testify about Jesus to others too. (See Matthew 10:32–33.)

154. Our suffering with Jesus speaks specifically to our being disciples of Jesus who are ready to take up our own crosses and follow Him. Taking up our crosses implies our readiness to leave other things behind, but it especially calls for a focus that makes Jesus and His Gospel the central concern in our lives—for ourselves and for others. He’s with us to guide and bless us also in other sufferings that are because we live in an imperfect world—illnesses, accidents, losses, frustrations, disappointments, and so on—but “suffer with Him” is much more specific than that. (See 2 Corinthians 4:5–11.) We may “be glorified with Him” as we glory in our redemption and live day by day as children of God, brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus, and as we look forward to sharing the glory of His exaltation in heaven. (See Philippians 3:20–21.)