

Lesson
11

“He Spake Many Things unto Them in Parables”

Matthew 13

Purpose To help class members develop “ears to hear” so they can understand how Jesus’ parables apply to them (Matthew 13:9).

Preparation

1. Read, ponder, and pray about the following scriptures:
 - a. Matthew 13:1–17. Jesus presents the parable of the sower and explains his use of parables.
 - b. Matthew 13:18–23. Jesus explains the parable of the sower.
 - c. Matthew 13:24–53. Jesus teaches about the kingdom of heaven on earth (the Church of Jesus Christ) through the parables of the wheat and the tares, the grain of mustard seed, the leaven, the treasure hid in the field, the pearl of great price, and the net cast into the sea.
2. Additional reading: Mark 4:1–34; Luke 8:4–18; 13:18–21; Doctrine and Covenants 86:1–7; Bible Dictionary, “Gospels, Harmony of,” 689; “Parables,” 740–41; and “Kingdom of Heaven or Kingdom of God,” 721.
3. Suggestion for teaching: Elder Boyd K. Packer said: “No teaching aid surpasses, and few equal, the chalkboard. . . . You can use it to focus the eyes of your students while the main lesson is presented audibly. As you talk, you can put just enough on the board to focus their attention and give them the idea, but never so much that the visual aid itself distracts them and becomes more interesting than your lesson” (*Teach Ye Diligently* [1975], 224–25; see also *Teaching—No Greater Call*, 151–53).

**Suggested Lesson
Development**

Attention Activity As appropriate, use the following activity or one of your own to begin the lesson.

Invite class members to imagine they are riding in a bus. As the journey progresses, they look through the windows of the bus and observe the scenery.

- After traveling together in the same bus, will you have observed the same things as the other passengers? Why or why not?

Point out that people in the same situation do not always observe the same things. Likewise, not all the people who heard Jesus teach in parables understood how the parables applied to them. This lesson will discuss how we can understand and apply Jesus’ parables.

Scripture Discussion As you discuss the following parables, ensure that class members know what the different persons, objects, and actions represent. This will help them understand the parables and apply them in their lives.

1. Jesus presents the parable of the sower and explains his use of parables.

Read and discuss Matthew 13:1–17.

- When the multitudes gathered on the seashore, Jesus “spake many things unto them in parables” (Matthew 13:3). What is a parable? (A symbolic story that teaches gospel truths by comparing them to earthly things.) What did Jesus say was his purpose in teaching with parables? (To simultaneously teach his message to his disciples and conceal it from unbelievers. See Matthew 13:10–13; note the Joseph Smith Translation of Matthew 13:12 in footnote 12a.)

Ask a class member to read aloud the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3–8).

Invite the other class members to read along, remembering that the objects and actions in the parable represent gospel truths.

- What keeps the seeds that fall on the wayside from sprouting? (See Matthew 13:4. Write on the chalkboard *Seeds on wayside—eaten by birds.*)
- Why do the seeds in the stony soil wither away? (See Matthew 13:5–6; Luke 8:6. Write on the chalkboard *Seeds in stony places—have no root.*)
- What happens when some seeds fall among thorns? (See Matthew 13:7. Write on the chalkboard *Seeds among thorns—choked by thorns.*)
- What happens to the seeds that fall in the good soil? (See Matthew 13:8. Write on the chalkboard *Seeds in good soil—bring forth fruit.*)

Leave the words you have written on the chalkboard, and explain that in a few minutes you will discuss the truths they represent.

- How might people react when they hear this parable without any explanation of its meaning? (Some people might become frustrated because they do not understand it. Others might understand it but think it does not apply to them. Others might ponder it and ask questions until they understand it and know how to apply it in their lives.)
- What invitation did Jesus extend after he presented the parable of the sower? (See Matthew 13:9.) What do you think the word *hear* means in this invitation? What does it mean to see but see not and to hear but hear not? (See Matthew 13:13–15.)

The Prophet Joseph Smith said: “The multitude . . . received not His saying . . . because they were not willing to see with their eyes, and hear with their ears; not because they could not, and were not privileged to see and hear, but because their hearts were full of iniquity and abominations. . . .The very reason why the multitude . . . did not receive an explanation upon His parables, was because of unbelief” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 96–97).

2. Jesus explains the parable of the sower.

Read Matthew 13:18–23, and discuss the meaning of the objects and actions in the parable of the sower.

Seed

- In the parable of the sower, what does the seed represent? (See Matthew 13:19; Luke 8:11. Write on the chalkboard *Seed = word of God.*)

Wayside

- What does the wayside represent? (See Matthew 13:19.) Write on the chalkboard *Wayside = people who hear the word of God but do not understand it* (abbreviate the statement if desired).
- What are some things we might do that prevent us from understanding God's word? (See Mosiah 26:1–3 for one possible answer.) What must we do to be able to understand the word of God? (See Alma 32:27.) How does lack of understanding make it easier for Satan to take away the word from our hearts? (See Matthew 13:19.)

Stony Places

- What do the stony places represent? (See Matthew 13:20–21.) Write on the chalkboard *Stony places = people who hear and receive the word of God but do not allow it to take root in them* (abbreviate the statement if desired).
- Why do some people not allow the word of God to take root in them? (See Matthew 13:21; Mark 4:5.) How can we allow the word to establish deep roots in us? (See Alma 32:41–43.) How will this help us endure the heat of tribulation, persecution, and offense?

Thorny Places

- What do the thorny places represent? (See Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14.) Write on the chalkboard *Thorny places = people who hear the word of God but are distracted by the cares of the world* (abbreviate the statement if desired).
- What does it mean for a person to be unfruitful? What “thorns” cause people to be unfruitful? (See Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14.) How are these thorns evident in the world today? What can we do to prevent these thorns from choking the word of God in us?

Good Ground

- What does the good ground represent? (See Matthew 13:23.) Write on the chalkboard *Good ground = people who hear the word of God, understand it, and do works of righteousness* (abbreviate the statement if desired).
- What could be done to help the unproductive areas produce fruit? (The wayside could be plowed and fertilized, the stones could be removed, and the thorns could be uprooted.) How can this apply to our efforts to be more receptive to God's word?
- Why do you think the parable of the sower focuses more on the ground than on the sower or the seed?

3. Jesus uses parables to teach about the kingdom of heaven on earth (the Church of Jesus Christ).

Read and discuss selected verses from Matthew 13:24–53. Explain that in these verses the term “kingdom of heaven” refers to the Church of Jesus Christ, which is the kingdom of heaven on earth (Bible Dictionary, “Kingdom of Heaven or Kingdom of God,” 721).

- What is the meaning of the parable of the wheat and the tares? (See Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43; D&C 86:1–7. You may want to make a list on the chalkboard as you did with the parable of the sower. List who or what is represented by the sower, the field, the good seed, the tares, the enemy, the harvest, and the reapers.)
- In the parable of the wheat and the tares, why does the sower refuse to let his servants immediately gather the tares, or weeds? (See Matthew 13:27–30; see also D&C 86:5–7, which clarifies Matthew 13:30.)
- The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven are about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 98–100). What can we learn about the restored Church from the Savior’s comparing it to a mustard seed? (See Matthew 13:31–32.) To leaven? (See Matthew 13:33. Explain that *leaven* is an ingredient, such as yeast or baking powder, that causes bread to rise.) How have you seen the work of God increase as illustrated by these parables?
- What can we learn from the parables of the treasure and the pearl of great price? (See Matthew 13:44–46.) What sacrifices should we be willing to make to obtain the treasure of the gospel? What sacrifices have you or those you know made for the gospel? What blessings have resulted from those sacrifices?
- What does the net represent in the parable of the net cast into the sea? (See Matthew 13:47.) What does it mean to be gathered into the net? What is represented by the action of gathering the good into vessels and casting the bad away? (See Matthew 13:48–50. You may want to use Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:4 to explain that “the end of the world” in verse 49 refers to the destruction of the wicked.) What can we do to help us stay faithful in the Church and to help others do the same?

Conclusion

Point out that Jesus explained his parables to those who sought understanding. Testify that as we study Jesus’ parables with a sincere desire to understand, we will see how they apply in our day.

Additional Teaching Ideas

The following material supplements the suggested lesson outline. You may want to use one or both of these ideas as part of the lesson.

1. Video presentation

If the videocassette *The Savior: His Ministry* (53164) is available, you may want to show an excerpt from part 3, “The Mustard Seed.”

2. Object lessons

To help class members understand and remember the parables in the lesson, display some of the objects described in them. For example, you could show how yeast reacts when combined with water and sugar. You could bake one loaf of bread with yeast and one without yeast, and allow class members to see and taste the difference. You could also show some mustard seed (or ground pepper, which looks like black mustard seed). See *Teaching—No Greater Call*, pages 94–95, for suggestions on teaching with objects.