

SEEDS OF THE KINGDOM

One day, a crowd gathered around Jesus to hear him teach. People were packed in so tightly that Jesus got into a boat and pushed out onto the water so that everyone on the shore could see and hear him. As he often did, Jesus taught using parables—short stories from everyday life that convey powerful truths. Sitting in a boat, Jesus told the crowd this parable:

“A farmer went out to his field and scattered seeds everywhere he could. Some of the seeds fell on the road, and birds swooped down and ate them.

Other seeds fell in shallow soil with rocky ground underneath them. These seeds sprouted quickly, but the plants couldn’t take root in the rocks, so they withered in the hot sun.

Other seeds fell in soil full of weeds that choked the life out of the plants before they could grow large.

But some seeds fell on good soil. These seeds grew and grew. Eventually they produced a huge harvest of crops, a hundred times more than the tiny seeds from which they began.”

Most often, Jesus did not explain the meaning of his parables. But this time, Jesus gathered his closest followers and told them:

This parable is about God’s kingdom. The seeds represent the message of God’s kingdom.

People are like the soil: some hear the message but they just let it sit on the surface—they seem interested at first, but it is soon forgotten, and the kingdom never takes root in their life. Others allow the kingdom to be choked out of their lives by weeds of worry and greed. But some really listen. They allow the message to grow down deep into their lives. Eventually, the kingdom produces incredible fruit in their lives that blesses others.”

A GREAT FEAST

One day, the leader of the Pharisees invited Jesus over for dinner. (The Pharisees were religious leaders who emphasized the careful following of Jewish laws.) Jesus noticed that as the guests arrived, they all tried to sit in seats of honor closest to the head of the table. So Jesus said to them, *“If you exalt yourself, you’ll be humbled. But if you humble yourself, you’ll be honored.”*

Jesus turned to the host and said, *“When you host a dinner, don’t just invite your friends and family and rich neighbors. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, and the blind. Bless those who have nothing to give in return—then God will bless you.”*

Then a guest sitting at the table said to Jesus, *“What a blessing it will be to eat a banquet in God’s kingdom!”* Some of the Jews believed that one day after the messiah had come and delivered them from their enemies, they would celebrate with a great banquet.

Jesus replied to the man using this parable: *“A man prepared a great feast and sent out invitations to his friends. When the day of the banquet came, all of his invited guests made excuses for why they couldn’t attend. The host was furious. So he said to his servant, ‘Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and invite the poor, the crippled, and the blind.’ Right away, the servant did this, and people began to join the banquet. But the servant told the host, ‘There is still more room.’ So the host said, ‘Well then,*

look along the country roads and behind the hedges—invite anyone you can find, so that my house will be full! But be sure of this: no one that was originally invited will enjoy this great feast.’

THE LOST SON

Jesus continued to spend time with people whom society considered impure and immoral. When some of the Pharisees and religious leaders complained about the company Jesus kept, Jesus told them this parable: *“A man had two sons. The younger son came to his father one day and said, ‘I want my inheritance now, before you die.’*

Even though this was a deeply offensive request, the father still divided his wealth and gave his young son his inheritance early.

Right away the younger son took his inheritance, packed up his belongings, and moved far way.

Before long, he had wasted all of his money on wild living. He was so poor that he took any job he could find—even feeding pigs on a farm. (This was the last job a Jew would ever take because they’d be considered unclean and cast out of society.)

When the young man became so hungry that even the food in the pigs’ trough started to look good, he came to his senses and thought to himself: ‘My father’s servants eat better than this. I will return and beg my father to hire me as a servant.’

So the son began a long journey home. Far away, in the distance, the father saw his younger son walking toward their home. Filled with compassion, the father ran to his son and wrapped his arms around him, hugging and kissing him.

The son said, ‘Father, I don’t deserve this. I’ve disgraced you and I turned away from God. I should no longer be called your son.’ But his father called to his servants and said, ‘Quickly—bring my finest robe and put it on my son! Get him a ring and sandals!’ (This would let everyone know that the father had restored the son to a position of honor and authority.)

‘We must celebrate with a great feast,’ the father continued, ‘for my son was dead and has returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found!’

And so they had a huge, extravagant party to welcome the lost son home. As the older son returned from working in the field, he wondered why there was loud music and dancing going on in his house. When he discovered that the party was for his wayward brother, he was furious and refused to join in the celebration.

His father begged him to come into the house. But the older son said, ‘All these years I’ve worked hard for you and done whatever you asked. But you’ve never given me a feast with my friends. But when this son of yours comes back after wasting all of your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by giving him a meal of our best calf?’

The father replied, ‘My son, you are always with me. Everything I have is yours. We must be happy and celebrate this day. Your brother was dead and came back to life. He was lost, but now he is found!’