

Glen Park Gospel Church  
**Tuesday Evening Bible Study Group Notes**

Rev Chris Trinham

Stories Jesus Told

No 1

## Some Rules for Interpreting the Stories Jesus Told

Example Parable: Matthew 13:1-23

Key Verse: *He who has ears to hear, let him hear.* v9

Jesus constantly told stories: *'Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; He did not say anything to them without using a parable.'* Matthew 13:34. His purpose in story telling was to keep from the bystander the instruction that was intended only for His disciples. *'He told them, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you but not to them."* Matthew 13:11. If we are followers of Jesus and we want to understand His teaching, then we need to correctly discern the meaning that He intended his stories to have.

Because it is easy to read other meanings into these stories, there are some rules that have come out of experience and good common sense which help us make a correct interpretation. We are using the Parable of the Sower and His Field as our main example.

### Rules

1. Context. Carefully note the topic Jesus was addressing when He told His story.  
Jesus told this story to explain to the spiritually enlightened the application of His teaching. Unless the story and application are tied together, the impact of His message may be lost.  
In Matthew 13:1-23. The discussion, explanation and the parable must be kept bound together.
2. Identify the persons to whom it was told. 1. The disciples, 2. The Jewish leaders, 3. The crowd generally. To whom was our example given, and to whom was the explanation made. We may apply the parable differently depending on whether we are considering the followers of Jesus or the unenlightened bystander. The scribes are not mentioned.
3. To understand a parable correctly learn as much as possible about the culture and history of the day.  
In our example, the sower is a man with a seed bag walking and broadcasting freehand. He did not have a tractor and seed drill which regulates the amount and location of the seed planted. There is a certain randomness with his method which applies also to Gospel telling.
4. Parables teach something about the coming Kingdom of God. See vv 10&11.
5. Each parable has one main point. Concentrate on that point.  
In our example parable, the message is

that only those who are spiritually prepared can receive the Gospel message with profit. Paul deals with this concept in 1 Corinthians 2:14 and the surrounding verses. We must understand its implications.

6. Some parables tell other things about the main concept.

Our example parable also teaches that there are four responses that men make to the Gospel message. And only four. Therefore we can prepare our strategies

7. In a parable, earthly items (symbols) represent spiritual realities.

The birds eating the seed is evil in the heart v19, the rocky ground, someone without depth v20, thorny ground is a heart full of worry or wealth v22, and the good soil, one spiritually prepared v23.

8. Symbols in one parable may stand for something quite different in another parable, and cannot be transferred or intermixed.

The parable of the Tares and the Wheat (Matthew 13:24-30) also is about

sowing and a sower, and Jesus identified Himself there as the sower. See v37. It speaks about a conflict between himself and Satan and the involvement of men in that conflict. We cannot say that because Jesus is the sower in this parable, that he is the sower in the parable of the sower and the seeds. To do so would be to limit its application to Jesus alone. This is clearly not the case.

9. Symbols may possibly mean the same thing in another parable, but this is coincidental.

Jesus may also be a sower in our example parable, but He did not make this application. There are many others who are sowers.

10. Parables may have elements which are necessary to fill out the story, but have no symbolic meaning.

The stones in the rocky ground are only there to indicate the depth of soil and they do not represent life forces. (Eg The rock of a slow intellect, the rock of poor education, the rock of a busy schedule, etc)

The purpose of the parable is to prepare God's servants to participate in His coming Kingdom. The purpose of these rules is to help us understand those secrets correctly and use them well. It is easy for us to misread the meaning of a parable and through it make a mistake in our service to God. These rules exist only to help us in this objective. There is much, much more to learn about parables, in fact it takes a life-time.

Bible quotations in this study are from the NIV, unless otherwise acknowledged.

*Welcome*

**Glen Park Gospel Church**

Lower Road, Eltham North

**Sundays 10.30 am**

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