

Middle/High School Sunday School Lessons by

rfour.org

Year 1: Session 5 – Kingdom of God Parables

Class 13: Matthew 13: 13-15, 44-46 – Stories of people buying things

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Explore why Jesus used parables and what he probably hoped to accomplish by telling them
- Highlight what Jesus is saying about the value of the Kingdom of God

Materials needed

- Video clip from “Ice Age II” (can be seen on rfour.org)
- Electronics that show the video clip
- About 5 pennies, about 5 nickels, about 5 dimes, about 5 quarters and 2 boxes (the boxes should close at the top, be easy to open, and no one should be able to see into them if they are closed; dollar store is a good place to buy boxes, by the way)
- Both boxes should have a \$1 bill in them. Note: You will **not** get the dollar bills back.

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- For the opening question for today’s class, I [the teacher] will ask the question, and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we’ll go around the circle.
- When it’s your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- *Here’s this week’s question:* What is something that you own that you would never want to let go of or lose?

INTRO to ACTIVITY

- We’re starting a new session today – the next three stories we’re going to talk about are stories where Jesus tells stories about the Kingdom of God.
- These stories that Jesus tells – we usually refer to them as “parables.”
- To help us think about the parables that Jesus tells in today’s scripture story, we’re going to do the following activity.
- This is an upfront activity, meaning that not everyone will get to participate “up front.”
- And, the people who participate “upfront” will be participating in an essential part of the lesson.
- That’s sort of a warning, ok?

- However, whether we are upfront or not -- we all get to give encouragement and advice.

EXPLAIN & DO ACTIVITY

- So we need a volunteer – who would like to go first? (Pick volunteer)
- I'm going to give you this penny. [Pause]. You're welcome. [Smile – it's a joke!]
- Now, would you by any chance like to buy this nickel [show nickel] from me for that penny? [If they say yes, exchange coins. If they say no, thank the student for participating and ask for another volunteer and start from the beginning]
- Now, would you by any chance like to buy this dime [show dime] from me for that nickel? [If they say yes, exchange coins. If they say no, thank the student for participating and ask for another volunteer and start from the beginning]
- Now, would you by any chance like to buy this quarter [show quarter] from me for that dime? [If they say yes, exchange coins. If they say no, thank the student for participating and ask for another volunteer and start from the beginning]
- Now, would you by any chance like to buy this box [show box w/ one dollar in it] from me for that quarter? [If they ask what is inside of the box, say, "I can't tell you, you'll have to buy it to find out."]
- At this point, if the rest of the class has not chimed in with their two cents (another joke!), encourage them to do so at this point by sharing reasons for and against why the volunteer should / should not exchange the quarter for the box.
- If the volunteer says yes, exchange the box for the quarter. If they say no, thank the student for participating and ask for another volunteer and start from the beginning.
- Before you open the box, can you explain your reasons to the class for choosing to buy the box for 25 cents?
- Thank you for sharing – you may, if you wish, open the box and see what your quarter purchased you. [Student opens box and finds a \$1 bill. Success!]
- OK, who would like to go next? [expect both great amounts of enthusiasm and/or skepticism at this point]
- Repeat the whole activity – everything should be exactly the same.

ASK

- Person who did it a second time -- why did you buy the box? (Because last time there was a dollar in it)
- But you couldn't see inside of it – why did you think the 2nd box was like the 1st box? (because I thought you were a nice teacher and not a mean teacher...)

TELL

- That's the perfect answer! You thought that I would be consistent – so, even though you couldn't see what was inside, you were going to trust who I was and what I did and hopefully come out a dollar richer rather than with just an empty box.
- And because you trusted me, you exchanged a known thing for an unknown thing and it turned out that the unknown thing was better than the known thing.
- Because the rest of you saw/heard that first story (in person, no less), you then based your actions on what you saw/heard.
- In a lot of ways, this is what a parable is.

- Jesus tells parables to help us think about situations or moments with God – a parable is just like the first person who went through the process of buying the box – an unknown experience that then became known.
- So, if we trust Jesus, if we think he is consistent in his actions and words, then we can trust that what he's saying in the parables as a better way to experience the kingdom of God / what God offers in our lives

TRANSITION to Scripture story

- We're going to read two short passages today.
- The first passage will be of Jesus talking about why he tells parables
- The second passage will be of Jesus actually telling a parable

READ Matthew 13:13-15 (Jesus tells his disciples why he tells parables to the crowd)

(recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse, including teachers)

13 The reason I speak to them in parables is that "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.' 14 With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: "You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. 15 For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn— and I would heal them.'

READ Matthew 13:44-46 (the parable of the field and the parable of the pearl)

(recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse, including teachers)

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; 46 on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it..

ASK / TELL about first passage

- Verses 13-15 is a difficult passage to understand. Why would people hear but not listen? Why would people look but never perceive? Any thoughts? (wait for answers – thank them if they do share)
- So, to help us think about the actual passage, here are some (somewhat contemporary) phrases that we would use today that are similar to what is being said in this passage:
 - Ignorance is bliss
 - You can't teach old dogs new tricks
 - We've always done it that way before (so why do it differently now?).
 - And my (least) personal favorite: Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater (Rant: One of the silliest expressions ever. Is there even ONE documented case of a baby being thrown out with the bathwater? I guess it doesn't matter, because we still use the phrase. Probably because we've always done it that way! /end_rant)
- In other words, once humans have learned something a certain way, they *usually* don't want to learn something new about it – and they have lots of ways that they express this desire.
- For instance, who here goes on Google to find new and different ways to tie their shoelaces?
 - Well why not? Right! Because you already know how to tie your shoelaces! (there are, actually, [better ways](#) to tie your shoes, [but now we digress](#))
- In addition, sometimes people will hear things and look at things but never act on it because they don't trust the source.
- So the same thing goes for the people in the crowd who surround Jesus.

- Because Jesus understands this about people, he then tells stories to the people.
- One reason he tells stories is because stories are not arguments.
- Instead, stories are like candy to our brains. We eat stories up. We LOVE stories. Just like we love boxes that might have dollar bills inside of them.
- So Jesus is very clever, here. He uses stories as a way to talk to the crowd about God while avoiding the resistance people have to learning new things.
- But, if the people were to pay attention to what is *inside* of the stories that Jesus is telling – they might see that the story is not all candy/sugar. There is also some good stuff inside of those stories as well. Stuff about God that might cause the people to want to learn *more* about God.
 - Stuff that might make them go – “Wait a minute, there’s more for me to learn! Stuff about God that I *want* to learn.”
- So that’s why Jesus tells parables

ASK about second passage

- In the second passage, there’s two parables and they are pretty short.
- What does the man find in verse 44? (a field with treasure in it).
- And what does he then do? (Sells everything he has to buy the field with the treasure in it)
- When he buys the field, what will the man ALSO have? (the treasure, pretty nice, eh?)
- And what about the merchant – what does the merchant sell? (everything)
- And what does the merchant buy? (that one pearl)
- Do these stories seem at all similar to our opening activity? Why or why not? (Yes – because in both cases, the people both pay less to get something more valuable. No – because both people know what they are buying – no hidden dollars inside of boxes)

TELL about second passage

- So here’s one thing that I think Jesus is trying to convey with these two parables: One thing that I think he’s trying to get us to think about is how much we value our greatest possession.
- That thing you wouldn’t want to give away or lose from the opening question – would you sell everything else you have to keep it? Would you give away everything you own to reclaim it if you had lost it?
- But wouldn’t giving your whole life to that one possession might leave you in a little bit of trouble? Wouldn’t you get cold, for instance, since you gave away your winter coat? And how would you carry your books without your backpack?
- So, once Jesus gets us thinking along these lines of how our most cherished possession probably isn’t worth everything we own, I think we’re supposed to then ask something like the next question of, “Wait a minute...is this story telling me that the Kingdom of God is *better* than my best possession? Is this story saying that the Kingdom of God, if I give it my all, will actually *not* leave me in a bit of trouble? How could that be possible!? What could that possibly look like!?”
- If at this point, if those questions are causing us to be curious enough about God, about the Kingdom of God, and/or about Jesus, to the point where we might spend some time trying to listen to and understand what Jesus is talking about, then the parable did exactly what it was supposed to do!

TRANSITION TO MOVIE CLIP

- To help us think a little bit more about this desire/determination to seek after something that is a prized possession, we're going to watch the following clip from the movie, "Ice Age II"
- In the clip, there's a saber-toothed squirrel (which is probably not a real thing) named Scrat, who *really* likes acorns.
- Whenever there's an available acorn, he will do whatever it takes to get that acorn.
- Let's watch the video and see what he's willing to do to get just one acorn...

WATCH MOVIE CLIP

ASK/TELL

- So, what were some of the things Scrat was willing to do to get the acorn? (go underwater and then stay under the water, suffocate himself [by sucking the acorn into his nose], squeeze through a very small hole in the ice, cut through the ice with his teeth, fall off a cliff).
- After all his efforts, did Scrat get what he wanted? (nope, not at all)
- Judging by his efforts, how important do you think that acorn is to Scrat? (very super important; more important than his well-being; he puts his life at risk for it)
- So...do you think that Scrat will stop trying to get that acorn or do you think he will try again? (seems very likely that he'd try again if given the chance)
- What do you think, is Scrat better or worse off for giving his whole self to get this acorn treasure? (lots of possible perspectives here, it'll be interesting to hear what the students have to say, I think)
- We didn't talk about what exactly the Kingdom of God might be and why it might be so valuable – which is why we'll talk some about that in our next lesson.

CLOSING PRAYER