**Parables: Week 2 Handout**

The vast majority of Jesus’ parables seem to be centered around one thing: defining and explaining “The Kingdom of God”. So, what is this concept and where did it come from?

As with identifying parables, the answer turns out to be more complex and enigmatic than you might first expect. There seems to have been a shift in the wake of the Babylonian Exile to see God as not only being the God of Israel, but the God of All. Along with this concept of a truly universal God came a recognition of how often Israel was at the mercy of the greater powers of the day (Babylon, Persia, Greece, Jewish independence, then Rome) and so hopes began to rise of a day when God would take back control of history.

In conjunction with this, there was a growing view that a Messiah would help usher in this new age – a Son of Man figure from Daniel, from the line of David. But, as we see in Jesus’ parables (and his wider ministry), the Kingdom of God may not be what people expect. The Kingdom is spiritual before it is political. The Kingdom begins inward rather than being seen outward. God’s Kingdom is here, but also not yet. It is a mustard seed yet to come to fruition – we see glimpses of God’s future in our present, waiting for it to come in full.

**The Parable of the Sower – Mark 4:1-9**

Again Jesus began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on a path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” And he said, “If you have ears to hear, then hear!”

**Notes:**

**The Parable of the Talents – Matthew 25:14-30**

“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. At once the one who had received the five talents went off and traded with them and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

**Notes:**

**The Parable of the Lamp under a Bushel – Mark 4:21-25**

Jesus said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket or under the bed and not on the lampstand? For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. If you have ears to hear, then hear!” And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and it will be added to you. For to those who have, more will be given, and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.”

**Notes:**

**What do you find particularly challenging or confusing about any of these parables?**

**What intersections do you see between the world Jesus was speaking to and our context today?**