

Matthew 13:1-23

Aim of Lesson

To create in the children the desire to respond to the word of God.

Background study

Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

Investigate farming methods at the time of Jesus, and find pictures of the Galilean countryside and a man scattering seed.

Suggested outline of lesson

This lesson is one for which a visual aid can be used very profitably, in order to fix in the children’s minds the various kinds of terrain mentioned - good soil, stony ground, weed-choked ground and a pathway. It is up to you to choose the aid that appeals most - prepared illustrations, drawings or a model. The latter could take the form of a miniature garden, either prepared beforehand or assembled in class. You could consider growing or buying ready grown mustard and cress in a fibre pack. By cutting the fibre to three different thicknesses, the height of the cress can be varied and made to appear to be thirty, sixty or a hundred-fold.

Show the class some seeds and let the children handle them. Discuss with the children the fact that the seeds will remain dormant, or seemingly lifeless, until the conditions are right for growth. Talk about the need for soil, sunshine, air and water. Just as Jesus used a familiar scene to help understanding, so now reference can be made to places known to the children where plants grow, e.g. own garden, a nearby park, school garden, etc.

At this point, tell the children that Jesus told a story about some seeds. Describe the scene - the huge crowds thronging the shore, the calm lake, the boat anchored a little way from the shore so that the maximum number of people could see and hear Jesus. Perhaps, even as Jesus was speaking, a farmer was scattering his seed on prepared ground on the slopes above the lake. Describe and demonstrate how the sower would broadcast the seed from a basket or cloth slung round his neck. As he walked along he would swing his arm from side to side in an attempt to scatter the seed as evenly as possible. Explain that you are going to tell the story that Jesus told to the people that day. Narrate the story simply and clearly, making use of the visual aids.

Ask the children why they think Jesus told this story. Point out that the disciples were not sure of the reason and that Jesus had to explain it to them. Introduce the word “parable”, which the class may be meeting for the first time, and write it down so that the children can see it. Explain that a parable is a story of everyday life, but that it has a deeper meaning, which we can discover if we think about it. Encourage the searching mind and, as you expand the whole meaning of the parable, allow the children to contribute where they can.

In conclusion bring the children’s minds back to the scene where Jesus was standing in the boat, speaking to the people. Explain that at that moment Jesus was like the sower sowing his seed. His words were going out to all kinds of people in the crowd, just as the sower’s seed was landing on all kinds of ground. Jesus’ words made little impression upon some of the people; the interests or worries of others soon made them forget what he had said, but in a few people his words took root and grew.

Relevance to the children’s lives

We read the Bible and we come to Sunday School to hear what Jesus has to say about God’s word. We are the ground on which the seed fails. What sort of ground are we? Are we glad to hear God’s message? Do we remember what we learn? Does hearing it help us to grow in goodness? (You will have an opportunity here to ask the children to prove that they remember what they learn. Can they still recite any of their earlier memory verses?)

Worksheets

The S puzzle reads:

S
 S O
 S O W
 S E E D
 S O W E R
 S P R A N G
 S P A R R O W
 S U N S H I N E
 S I X T Y F O L D

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we thank you for the stories in the Bible. We want to learn and understand your words. Help us to grow in goodness. Amen.

Memory verse

“All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching ... that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).