

Series: ***The Parables of Jesus***

Why Do You Speak To Them In Parables?

Matthew 13:10-17 (ESV)

10 Then the disciples came and said to him, Why do you speak to them in parables?

11 And he answered them, *“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.*

12 *For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.*

13 *This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.*

14 *Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:*

*“You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive.*

15 *For this people's heart has grown dull,
and with their ears they can barely hear,
and their eyes they have closed,
lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them.’*

16 *But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.*

17 *Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.*

Why A Series On The Parables?

Last week we finished our series on the Marks of a True Christian. We covered fourteen marks. There are many more marks that we could have covered, but we did not. We did not speak about,

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|-------------|----------------|
| • Patience | • Self-control |
| • Joy | • Virtue |
| • Suffering | • Godliness |
| • Kindness | • Faith |

Yet as we elders prayed we sensed that the Lord was moving us to turn the page. As we contemplated what that might look like, we sensed a desire to demonstrate the relevance of the gospel in direct connection to our everyday lives. We spent 16 weeks learning about some of the qualities and characteristics that mark a True Christian. How about we spend a little time looking at how those qualities are manifested in daily life? This led us to consider the parables of Jesus.

A Season In the Parables

We are convinced that the Lord is leading us into spending a season of time with some of the parables. The parables Jesus told are remarkably vivid and have as their subject matter experiences that are common to our daily lives. Through the parables, Jesus then uses those experiences to reveal things about His kingdom of God that we would not otherwise know.

There's A Parable For That...

- Have you ever been mugged or stranded and no one offered help? There's a parable for that.
- Have you ever hired someone to build or remodel a room for you only to realize later that poor materials were used? There's a parable about that.
- Have you ever met someone who had so much money yet so little sense? There's a parable about that.
- Have you ever been invited to a very important dinner and then find out your too busy to go? There's a parable about that.
- Have you ever had an account representative help you reduce your bill? There's a parable about that.
- Ever have a tenant trash your rental property? Ever been that tenant?
- Have you ever been responsible for investing money? There's a parable about that.
- Have you ever had memorable interview with tax collector? There's a parable about that.
- Have you ever tried to help someone prepare for an important event or interview but along the way you realized that no matter what you did this person was just not going to be ready?
- Have you ever had to deal with an unlawful law enforcement officer or an unjust judge?
- Who hasn't lost something precious and torn the house up looking for it?
- Have you ever loaned someone money? There's a parable about that.
- Have you ever found something interesting while digging a whole? There's a parable about that.
- Have you ever gotten angry because you did not get the year-end bonus you expected? Or have you ever expected a raise you didn't get? There's a parable about that.
- Ever had a friend come to you at an inconvenient time and ask to borrow something?
- Ever get offended that you weren't invited to the wedding or the reception?
- Ever had someone break into your home at night? There's a parable about that.
- Ever have an employee steal money from you? There's a parable about that.
- Have you ever been fishing? There's a parable about that.

- Ever planted a seed? There's a parable about that.
- Ever have a pear tree or an apple tree in your yard that never bore fruit? There's a parable about that.

Common experiences of daily life are the stuff the parables are made of and yet Jesus used them to teach about God's kingdom, to transform lives, to warn the hard-hearted, and to save the lost. The parables of Jesus are powerful tools to train us as His disciples and to focus the attention of our hearts on the kingdom of God through the daily events of our lives.

I am praying that God would use these days in this sermon series to do a great and good work within us. When we come humbly to God's word, there is great potential for God to do mighty things.

Last week in *The London Times* Ruth Gledhill¹ wrote, "Sermons, history shows, can be among the most revolutionary forms of human speech. From John Calvin to Billy Graham, preaching has had the power to topple princes, to set nation against nation, to inspire campaigners to change the world and impel people to begin life anew."

If there is any prince in your life higher than the Prince of Peace, then may the Lord be pleased to use the parables to topple him. If the kingdom of darkness holds more influence in our hearts than the kingdom of light, then may the Lord be pleased to use these sermons on the parables to turn the tide. If there is any aspect of your life that needs to be changed, then may the Lord use these sermons in the parables to inspire you to change. Pray with me that the Lord would use these sermons in this series to lead people to new life through faith in Jesus Christ.

Four Reasons For A Series In The Parables

- 1) So that we might know more of Jesus and His kingdom (Matt 13:11).
- 2) So that we might experience the realities of the kingdom of heaven in our daily lives.
- 3) So that our eyes might be opened to very practical and natural ways of sharing spiritual truths with those around us by using common human experiences.
- 4) So that He might save those who are lost.

Before we move into our text for the morning, let's get before us what a parable is.

What Is A Parable?

If you have ever heard anyone talk about parables you may have heard them defined as "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." This is true, but there is much more to it than that.

¹ Ruth Gledhill, "[To Some, Sermonizing is a Sin, but Christians Still Value the Preacher](#)," *The Times* [London], January 19, 2010.

“The word ‘parable’ comes from two Greek words *para* and *ballō*, which together mean, ‘to throw alongside.’”² It means to compare two things. It means taking one thing and laying it along side another thing for the sake of a comparison.

The dictionary definition is “a simple and brief story using events or facts of everyday life to illustrate a moral or spiritual truth as told by Jesus in the gospels.”

The Greek word *parabole* translates the Hebrew word *mashal*. In the Septuagint (or LXX the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) “in every instance except two (Eccl 1:17; Sirach 47:11) the term *parabole* was used to translate the term *mashal*.³ So to get the fullest understanding of the word parable, we should know how it was used in the Old Testament.

There is a wide range of meaning for the word *mashal* in the Old Testament. It mean a proverb (1 Sam 24:13; “Out of the wicked comes wickedness,” Ez 18:2-3), a taunt (Is 14:3-4; Hab 2:6), a riddle (Ez 17:2; Ps 49:4; Prov 1:6), an allegory (Ez 24:2-5; 2 Sam 12:1-4 Nathan to king David).

A Helpful Definition

If we look up the Greek word *parabole* as defined in a Greek dictionary, we find, “an illustration, a comparison, or an analogy, usually in story form, using common events of every day life to reveal a moral or spiritual truth.”⁴

The Context of the First Parable

As we turn to the text this morning, we first need to look at the context. Matthew chapter thirteen introduces us to the first parable in this gospel. The word ‘parable’ is mentioned for the first time in this gospel in verse three. The beginning of this chapter marks a significant change: it is the first time we find Jesus teaching in parables.

Teaching in parables is a different mode of operation for Jesus. Heretofore Jesus had been teaching using graphic illustrations (i.e. word pictures), teaching very plainly, and performing many miracles. In chapter twelve, however, something significant happens.

Pharisees Conspire to Destroy Him

On the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and healed a man with a withered hand. He faced the Pharisees and said, “*It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath*” (Matt 12:13). The Pharisees were infuriated and they “*went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him*” (Matt 12:14).

Jesus Healed Blind & Mute Man

Jesus then left the synagogue but the crowds followed Him. Jesus “*healed all*” who were sick (Matt 12:15). In the crowd was a demon-oppressed man who was both blind and mute⁵. Jesus completely healed the man so that “*he spoke and saw*” (Matt 12:22).

² *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*. Second edition (Victor Books).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) p. 16.

⁵ Recall that Jesus reminded his uncertain cousin that these exact signs were the prophesied pointers to Messiah (Matt 11:2-6; Is 29:18-19; 35:5).

Can This Be the Son of David?

The response of the crowds was utter amazement and they asked the question, “*Can this be the Son of David?*” (Matt 12:23). This was the right question to ask and it was the correct conclusion. However, the Pharisees did not come to the same conclusion. They arrived at a very different conclusion. They concluded that Jesus’ power to cast out demons comes from Satan himself.

His Power Comes From Beelzebul (i.e. Satan)

The crowds witnessed Jesus’ miracles and power and they wondered if He was sent from God. The Pharisees witnessed the same miracles and the same power and they concluded that He was sent from Satan.

Matt 12:24

But when the Pharisees heard it [“Can this be the Son of David?”], they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.”

Two Public Denials

Beelzebul⁶ is another name for Satan. *This was the second time they had done this.* Twice the Pharisees had witnessed Jesus freeing a mute man from demonic oppression, and twice they publically denied the presence of God and “suppressed the truth in unrighteousness”⁷ by attributing Jesus’ power to Satan (see Matt 9:32-34).

A Warning of Blasphemy

After hearing His power attributed to Satan for the second time, Jesus then warned the Pharisees that this kind of blasphemy, in the face of the clear, undeniable work of the Holy Spirit of God, is the kind of sin that “*will never be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come*” (Matt 12:32).

On That Same Day Jesus Began Speaking In Parables

Later **on that same day** (Matt 13:1) Jesus began speaking and teaching in parables and that would be His primary mode of preaching from that point onward. The Pharisees had been faced with the undeniable truth that “*kingdom of God had come upon*” them (Matt 12:28), but they refused to accept it and rejoice in it! Instead, they choose to oppose it! In their stubbornness, they continued to resist Jesus, rather than rest in Him. And it is in this context that Jesus began teaching in a new way. He began speaking in parables.

Matthew 13:3

And he told them many things in parables...

Matthew 13:34

All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable.

Indeed he did. Over one third of all the teachings of Jesus contained in the first three gospels are in the form of parables.⁸

⁶ Easton’s Bible Dictionary - Greek form Beel’zebul, the name given to Satan, and found only in the New Testament (Matt. 10:25; 12:24, 27; Mark 3:22). It is probably the same as Baalzebub (q.v.), the god of Ekron, meaning “the lord of flies,” or, as others think, “the lord of dung,” or “the dung-god.”

⁷ Romans 1:18.

⁸ Stein, p. 15.

Why Did Jesus Speak In Parables?

This shift in style of preaching & teaching did not go unnoticed. The disciples immediately noted the change and they asked Him why He was doing this. Jesus explains that there were mainly two reasons: to reveal truth and conceal truth.

Matthew 13:10

Then the disciples came and said to him, Why do you speak to them in parables?

This event is also recorded in the gospel of Mark (4:10-12⁹) and there Mark tells us that the twelve were not the only ones who came asked this question. They were joined by other followers of Jesus.

Mark 4:10

And when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parables.

Matthew 13:11

11 And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

1) To Reveal the Secrets of the Kingdom to His Disciples

So the first reason Jesus spoke in parables was to reveal the secrets of the kingdom of heaven to his disciples. The revealing of these secrets is not limited just to the twelve, but to all who are His disciples. We learn this from Mark 4:10 which tells us that there were **others there around Him with the twelve**. Jesus explained the parables to all of His followers who sought Him out to know the answer.

Jesus told His disciples “*to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven...*” This is very humbling. Knowing the secrets of the kingdom is not finally owing to our own innate powers of human reasoning, but to the unbelievable kindness of the grace of God.

Knowledge of the kingdom of heaven is a gift that is given to us by Jesus. It is not something we earn or deserve. It is something we are given. So if anyone in this room knows anything about the kingdom of God it is not because of the greatness of your intellectual ability, it is because of the great generosity of a gracious gift-giving God.

Remember what Jesus said back in **Matthew 11:27**:

“...no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.”

Those of us who are tempted to think we are not smart enough to ever understand God and His kingdom should praise God for these two verses. Knowing God and His kingdom is not dependant upon our ability to know, but upon Jesus will to reveal.

Those of us who take pride in all that we do know of God and His kingdom should examine our thoughts and repent of any spiritual arrogance. We know nothing of God and His kingdom expect what He has chosen to reveal to us. Lack of intelligence is no hindrance to knowing God while

⁹ See also Luke 8:9-10; cf John 12:37-40.

possession of intelligence is no advantage.

No one is so smart as to discover the truth about God and His kingdom on his or her own ability. So let us all stand together and praise that LORD for this great example that all those who came to Jesus seeking answers had the secrets of the kingdom revealed to them. Apart from Jesus there is no full and complete saving knowledge of God the Father.

The word here translated ‘secret’ can also be translated as ‘mystery’ and it refers to what is now revealed but had previously been concealed. This gets at the heart of dual purpose of the parables – revealing and concealing.

2) To Conceal the Secrets of the Kingdom

The second reason why Jesus spoke in parables was to conceal the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. Look at the last part of verse 11.

Matthew 13:11

11 And he answered them, *“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.*

Jesus says, “... *to them it has not been given* [to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven]. This is a hard saying. To whom does the ‘them’ refer? Jesus had been speaking to the crowds on the shore. We also noted this when we read Matthew 13:34.

Matthew 13:1-3

1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.

2 And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach.

3 And he told them many things in parables, saying: *A sower went out to sow.*

The ‘them’ refers to all in the crowds who kept on refusing to come to Jesus and believe in Him. The Pharisees had undeniable evidence right in front of their eyes and yet they refused to welcome Jesus and receive Him. The crowds had also witnessed incredible miracles that the world had never seen before and yet they too refused to believe in Him. They had heard His teaching and yet they refused to accept Him.

When the disciples and the others with them were confused by what He said, they went to Him and asked Him to explain. And He did. Jesus explained the parables to those who followed Him but He did not explain the parables to the crowds. Jesus goes on to explain in more detail.

Matthew 13:12-15

12 *For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.*

Those confused followers who went to Jesus seeking to understand the perplexing truth He had taught, had greater understanding granted to them and more of the truth was revealed to them

because they trusted Jesus and accepted His authority.

But those, like the Pharisees, who thought that they themselves were in full possession of the whole truth of the kingdom of God, would have even what they did know taken away from them. They refused to accept Jesus' authority. It appeared that they had knowledge, but in reality they had nothing.

Mathew 13:13-15

13 *This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.*

14 *Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:*

*“You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive.*

15 *For this people's heart has grown dull,
and with their ears they can barely hear,
and their eyes they have closed,
lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them.’*

The Parables Are a Means of Judgment

This makes it very clear that the parables serve in a judicial role. The use of parables was in part a judgment against a rebellious people. They were a stubborn, hard-hearted people who even though they saw, they refused to accept what they saw. And even though they heard, they refused to accept what they heard.

Isaiah Called to a Ministry of Hardening

Jesus here quotes **Isaiah 6:9-10**. This prophecy was given during a period of rebellion in the nation of Israel. God decreed that the prophet Isaiah would have **a ministry of hardening**. He would be God's messenger sent to a rebellious nation. The majority would reject him and his message with only a remnant remaining faithful. As Isaiah preached and people rejected the message, **a gradual irreversible hardening** came over their hearts. Jesus quoting this prophecy was saying that the same was true with those to whom He was sent.

This is still true today. This still happens when the gospel is preached. The majority rejects the gospel and grows harder against it, and yet there are always a few who believe it and are saved.

The crowds around Jesus had seen the miracles that Jesus had done and they had heard the message that He had preached and yet they refused to believe in Him. Since they had heard clearly the gospel of the kingdom and rejected it, Jesus would begin teaching in parables that would conceal the mysteries of the kingdom of God from those who continued in hard-hearted rebellion and yet simultaneously reveal the mysteries of the kingdom to those who would receive Him and follow Him.

At first when you read this passage it almost seems to be saying that Jesus is speaking in parables to intentionally keep some from hearing and seeing and perceiving and understanding so they would not turn and repent and be healed. But this is not the case. Jesus is not speaking in parables to keep

those who would otherwise repent from repenting. He is speaking in parables because they have already heard and rejected so many times that their hearts have grown dull (lit. 'fat' v.13:15).

They had heard the gospel so many times and yet refused to repent, that Jesus was now saying that there had come a time when they would no longer be able to repent! This is a sobering message. It is not a light thing to listen to the gospel and refused to accept it.

Their eyes they have closed, lest they should see and turn and repent. They had closed their eyes because they didn't want to turn and repent. They knew if they opened their eyes wide they would fully see the truth about Jesus and then they would have to turn and repent and of course, if they did that, then God would heal them. But they wanted none of it!

They wanted nothing of what God had to offer them. They didn't want to repent. They didn't want to turn to God! They didn't want God to heal them! They were perfectly content to live without Him. They had chosen to enjoy the secrets of this earthly kingdom rather than those of the kingdom of heaven.

Yet, this is not how it has to be. Jesus leaves us with some very sweet words.

Matthew 13:16-17

16 *But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.*

17 *Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.*

Oh what a blessing it is to understand the gospel. Jesus came as a humble Messiah, as a Messiah who would serve us by bring salvation to us rather than telling us how to go and get it. He came down to us rather than making us come up to Him.

He came as a silent lamb and not as a roaring lion as everyone expected. This is a mystery and so many people miss Him because of this. Do you know what a blessing is yours if it has been granted to you to know this mystery? Do you realize how blessed you are know who Jesus really is?

Don't be like the Pharisees. Don't reject the undeniable truth that Jesus is the Savior? Don't refuse to rest in Him. Don't refuse to believe in Him.

Don't think that you have nothing more to learn about Him from the parables? The parables will either be a means of Jesus revealing more of Himself and the kingdom to your or they will be a means of hardening and concealing Himself from you.

Which will it be?