

Why Parables?

Matthew 13:1-17

A Sermon for Children

With Study Questions

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Why Parables?

Matthew 13:1-3; 10-17

On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. ² And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. ³ Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow....¹⁰ And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" ¹¹ He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. ¹³ Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: *'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive;* ¹⁵ *For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.'* ¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; ¹⁷ for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous *men* desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it* (Matthew 13:1-3; 10-17).

Introduction

On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. ² And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore (Matthew 15:1, 2)

My house is about a mile from the ocean. But at night, if the wind is right, I can still hear the waves or the ringing of the buoy way out past the breakers. Here we read of Jesus mobbed by a multitude of people. They didn't have microphones and there was no platform handy for Him to

stand on so He got into a boat and sat. One can imagine all the people standing on the shoreline waiting for Jesus to teach.

There is nothing more valuable in life than to pay attention to what Jesus taught. That is what pastors are called to do every Sunday. It's what Christians are to look for every day when they read their Bibles. We watch movies and memorize the characters or television show and know the theme songs by heart and half the dialogue – sometimes I'll listen to a radio station that plays old songs and am amazed how I still remember almost every word to a song I haven't thought of in years – but the words of Jesus are the ones that should be hidden in our hearts.

Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You (Psalm 119:11).

We use that little phrase “by heart” when we memorize something – when it becomes something we almost no longer need to make an effort to know – almost as if it is part of us, whether we realize it or not (like those old songs).

The lessons of Jesus, similar to the church service, are not to be thought of as a show where an audience is being entertained. The congregation is participating. I was speaking with a member of our church who also happens to be one of the best high school coaches in the country. He mentioned how he tells his team how to be active listener.

He said you get a ‘C’ for eye contact; you get a “B” if you have a response (like a nod) and you get an “A” if you actually follow through with what's been said. I'm guessing no eye contact at all is a “D” or an “F”.

Then He spoke many things to them in parables (Matthew 13:3).

What is a Parable?

What is a parable? A parable (*parabole*) comes from the two Greek words [para] which means ‘with’ or ‘by’ and β [ballo] meaning to cast or throw. It's the idea of throwing two things together thus making a parallel story. We might call it an analogy or an allegory of sorts.

Next week we'll look at a parable where Jesus will talk about a man planting seeds in the ground. In that story the seed is the word of God and the ground is our hearts.

It would be natural to think that parables, analogies or allegories are designed for clarity and perhaps, impact. And I wouldn't disagree. I think we must all acknowledge the clarity of Scripture. Yet I must admit that sometimes parables are very difficult to understand. Let's confess up front that if there is a communication problem, the problem lies not with Jesus, but with us.

But there is much more to a parable. What we're going to learn in a minute is that parables are designed, not only to reveal lessons but to hide them! But before we get to that I want to mention one more thing:

The lessons of Jesus, and I believe all lessons God give us, are very personal. People listening to Jesus began to perceive their place in His teaching.

Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them (Matthew 21:45).

A good teacher seeks to imitate the methods of Jesus and a good student seeks to determine when the message is aimed in their direction. What you'll find is that the general public will welcome all manner of instruction from virtually any source except the Scriptures. Why is that? Because we learn in the teaching of Jesus that God has a personal claim in our lives.

In the Indiana basketball movie *Hoosiers* a man, because he doesn't like the new basketball coach, tries to make a point by telling a little parable of his own:

Look mister there's two kinds of dumb: a guy who gets naked, runs out in the snow and barks at the moon and a guy who does the same thing in my living room. The first one don't matter, the second one you're kind of forced to deal with.

Every person who walks this planet is in God's living room. And at some level, we're all barking at the moon. It might be wise of us to

acknowledge whose house we're in, what He requires of us and what He provides for us. Someday, either in this life or the next, we'll realize these are the most precious treasures available to the human soul.

And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables" (Matthew 13:10)?

Why Parables?

Why did Jesus teach in parables? Interestingly, the parable we're not discussing this morning seemed to have, at least as a portion of its design, the purpose of extraction that very question. The disciples want to know why Jesus is speaking in parables.

Their question seems to imply that the parables are confusing to many of the listeners. It makes you wonder if there were people in the multitudes verbalizing their frustration. Perhaps the well-meaning apostles are seeking to help Jesus with His communication issues. Jesus gives His answer.

He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given (Matthew 13:11)

Parables Reveal and Hide

It would appear that the parables of Jesus are not merely instructional, they're illuminating. By illuminating I don't mean so much that they are revealing information to the listener (they certainly do that) as much as revealing information *about* the listener. Our response to the parables of Jesus tells us a great deal about ourselves.

Parables reveal things or hide things based upon some God-given attribute residing, or not residing, in the listener. The reason, according to Jesus, that some are not able to grasp and embrace His teaching is because it has not "**been given**" to them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. The reason others can is because it has "**been given**" to them.

It was important to Jesus for us to realize that if we know anything of the grace of God it is *by* the grace of God. The grace of God is not to be

thought of as a low hanging piece of fruit which we must merely grab. We need the grace of God to grab us. Peter wasn't blessed because he somehow concluded by his own wit, wisdom or goodness that Jesus was the Christ.

Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven (Matthew 16:16, 17).

Jesus teaches that some have "been given" and others have "not been given." And it is God who either gives or does not give. A lot of people don't like this doctrine. They think this teaching makes God too big for His britches. But the doctrine of the sovereignty of God may be the most important and hated article of faith in all of modern Christendom. But to keep us from pride, we need to know that if we embrace what Jesus teaches it is because of God's grace, not because we're better, smarter, wiser, more righteous or more humble than others.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God,* ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

Does this mean that people aren't responsible for their actions? Certainly not! People who reject Jesus and His teaching, according to Jesus, have hearts that have become "dull". The word Jesus uses *ἔπαχύνθη* means their hearts are insensitive, impervious to truth...literally fat or thick. It's like talking to somebody about something that is true and obvious and they just stick their hand out and deny what everybody else in the room knows.

People need to take responsibility for their own hearts. Numerous times the writer of Hebrews tells his readers "**Do not harden your hearts**" (Hebrews 3:8, 15; 4:7). Over the next weeks and as examine the parables, they will accomplish two things: They will reveal things to us about Jesus, but they will also reveal things to us about ourselves.

Questions for Study

1. What does it mean to know something by heart? Why is it valuable or dangerous (pages 2, 3)?
2. Are you a spectator or participant in church? Discuss how you can be a good and active listener (page 3).
3. What is a parable (pages 3, 4)?
4. Are parables always easy to understand (page 4)?
5. What are two functions of parables (page 4)?
6. What does it mean that God has a personal claim in our lives (pages 4, 5)?
7. Why did Jesus teach in parables (pages 5, 6)?
8. Why do some people understand and others not understand parables (page 6)?
9. Do people have a responsibility for their own hearts (page 6)?