

Mk. 4:1-2a, 10-12, 33-34 "Seeing Is Not Believing"

For the Children: When I was in high-school, I learned the "runic" alphabet – an ancient European alphabet used to carve messages in wood and stone. I taught some friends the letters, so we could send messages to each other that no one else would understand. It was very annoying to those who couldn't read it. Jesus told parables for a similar reason. To confuse those who didn't believe in Him. But He explained the parables to the disciples who did believe in Him. The Lord does not hide from those who truly seek Him, but He confuses the minds of those who hate Him. **Questions:** How were parables used in the OT? What were the parables mainly about? Why did Jesus speak in parables so much?

Introduction:

First Point: The OT Background to Parables

- 1) An Aspect of Wisdom: Prov. 1:6 refers to Wisdom in terms of proverbs, figures and riddles. The first 2 words imply that a comparison is made between the truth and some aspect of life. Sometimes these comparisons are in the form of riddles or puzzles, which have to be worked at to derive the meaning – with the Lord's help. The wise man will make that effort and receive that help. Jesus' NT parables provide similar comparisons and riddles. For He is the Wisdom-made-flesh who imparts Wisdom to men
- 2) An Aspect of Judgement: Because there is a puzzling element in parables, they also conceal the truth from those who cannot be bothered to search the Scriptures or seek God's help. As in Is. 6:9f, the Lord often veils the truth, even to members of the covenant, if they harden their hearts against Him. Such people may hear outwardly, but not inwardly, because they lack the gift of faith. Seeing is not necessarily believing!
- 3) A Messianic Prophecy: Ps. 78:2 with Mt. 13:35 indicates that the Messiah would speak in parables. When Jesus began speaking in parables, He was showing that He was the Messiah

Second Point: Jesus' Use of Parables

- 1) To the Unbelieving Crowds: When the disciples asked why Jesus was speaking in parables, rather than more openly (v. 10, with Mt. 13:10), the Lord explained that this was because it was not given to the crowd to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. Their lack of believe resulted in the partial veiling of the truth in parables – which characterized Jesus' preaching to the crowds from then on (vss. 2a, 11 and 34). This shows that God has no universal saving purpose – He veils from some what He could uncover
- 2) To the Disciples: Those so chosen – His disciples - received the *uncovering* of the truth by Jesus' explanation of the parables. Then the parables helped the disciples to be "given" (v. 11) "everything" they needed to know about the mystery of God's Kingdom (v. 34). Note the contrast: "everything in parables" (v. 11) versus "explaining everything privately" (v. 34). This shows God's grace
- 3) So Far as They Were Able to Hear: There is also grace in the Lord Jesus' limiting of the number of parables. The truth was being veiled, but it might still remain in the minds of those who heard it, to bring about their repentance later on. Time was given for that repentance in this "Day of Grace"

Third Point: The Reflection of God's Kingdom in Parables

- 1) Given The Mystery of the Kingdom: The disciples were given to understand the mystery of the Kingdom of God as conveyed in the parables. The coming of the Kingdom was the main thrust of Jesus' preaching (Mk. 1:15, Mt. 4:17, 23). The parables also had the sowing, growing and consummating of God's Kingdom as their main theme (Mt. 13:19, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47; Mk. 4:26, 30)
- 2) The Present and Future Kingdom: The Kingdom had broken in to this world by the coming of the King. But Christ was also to come again to consummate His Kingdom. That meant that there could be rejection and opposition at this time. The hostilities would only end when He came again. The parables reflect this by their veiling of the truth to those who rejected the Christ – but with time still left for repentance. We should therefore not be dismayed to see many having the truth veiled today

Conclusion: