

Introduction to Parables
Matthew 13:1-3, 10-17; Mark 4:1-2, 10-12; Luke 8:4, 9-10

Introduction

Man is many things, but one attribute that stands out is his pride. I am sure all of you ladies would agree that pride in men, also known as the “male ego,” can be a serious problem. But before you feel too superior, let me remind you that though it is usually manifested in different ways than males, females are also infused with pride. Let me also caution you ladies about feminist philosophy that now dominates much of our culture. One of the many things detrimental about it is its promotion of obnoxious and prideful behavior in women that used to be only more characteristic of men.

Pride is existent in all humans and exhibits itself in many different ways ranging from the simple boasting of children to its most dangerous form of acting as if autonomous from God. Within current American society there are two areas in which people tend to give superior trust and authority over God’s revelation. These become the driving force for sinful pride and resistance to God’s Word.

The first is more common among those of us who grew up in the “modern” age in which great emphasis was placed on the quest for and honoring of knowledge. Science took on a religious role in which scientists became the high priest of the worship of knowledge. This “religion” is still very strong and in some ways still dominant in our land. This is evidenced by many things including associating or labeling as “science” areas of study such as politics, sociology and psychology though they are actually based on philosophy. That is why universities put them into their humanities departments instead of their science departments.

Another evidence of this is the historical shift in our national response to various crises and disasters. It was at one time common for national and state government leaders to issue proclamations calling for the people to fast and pray as a crisis was faced. The last time that happened was September 2001 when President Bush proclaimed a *National Day of Prayer and Remembrance* following the terrorist attacks on 9/11. To be fair to him, President Bush also gave many unofficial personal requests for people to pray regarding various crises. However, for the most part it would seem that the *National Day of Prayer*, which was established by Congress in 1952 as a yearly event to be held on the first Thursday in May, has for many administrations become just a way for politicians to give lip service to their religious constituency once a year. It is rare that a politician will call their constituency to seek God and pray. Now the normal response to a crisis is to find scientists and experts in the particular fields needed to define the crisis, determine its causes and devise responses. As a nation, we give lip service to God while we seek out very expensive man-made solutions to problems that are beyond man’s control such as the politically correct crisis known as “global warming” or “climate change.”

This reliance on what is called “science” feeds man’s pride so that he believes that as a society he now has superior knowledge to what God has revealed in the Scriptures. Authority is yielded to those claiming the mantle of science or being the experts in a particular field of study so that what God has said is then discounted or rejected. An example of this is the AIDS crisis that began in the 1980’s.

While it is good for science to devise ways of combating any disease, the moral cause of the vast majority of cases was rejected as political pressure mounted to shield those immoral behaviors from the standard procedures designed to stem the spread of communicable diseases through identification, isolation and treatment of the infected individuals. AIDS became the first federally protected disease in the effort to console the feelings of the homosexual community. The result has been thousands and thousands of deaths that could have been avoided had there been strong efforts to eliminate the immoral

behaviors that God already declared to be abominations to Him that were and are a key component in the spread of the disease. The pride of men leads them to think they are wiser than God and can eliminate or at least alleviate the consequences of their immorality.

The second major driving force in American society fueling sinful pride and resistance to God's Word is the personal autonomy more common to the post-modern generation which has grown up on a philosophical diet in which moral absolutes are denied and truth is determined by the personal feelings of the moment. Such people pick and choose what they like from the Scriptures and interpret them however they desire while freely rejecting anything they do not like, and that can all change tomorrow if they feel differently. Holding two opposite and conflicting ideas to be true at the same is not a problem for them.

Both of these sources of pride are often mixed together to make the problem even worse. A person finds an expert that agrees with how they feel and so they are even more entrenched in their belief though it is contrary to God's word. And in these times, it is not difficult for someone to find some "expert" that will agree with what they want to believe.

Both of these sources of pride are now blended together in the normal experience in most American colleges. (Sometimes the mix becomes ludicrous such as the class David had in which they were taught that there were no right or wrong answers in the particular subject, yet they were tested and graded for right and wrong answers anyway). The philosophical foundations are post-modern while the application in most classes is still modern because they are designed to train people to be experts in their field, at least in terms of knowledge. The result is a feeding of human pride that will resist godly wisdom.

All of this may sound like it is something new, but as Ecclesiastes 1:9 states, *there is nothing new under the sun*. These are old philosophies and human pride goes back to Adam and Eve. It existed when Jesus walked the earth and was the source of His great conflicts with the scribes and Pharisees. Both groups rejected Jesus because He did not have the same formal training as they did in attending the particular schools or sitting under the particular Rabbis they held in esteem. The scribes were the trained lawyers of the time and the supposed experts in the Mosaic law. However, they freely disregarded what they did not like, such as God's laws concerning divorce, or they thought impossible according to their own experience, such as the promise of a future resurrection of the physical body. The Pharisees were rigidly trained to carry out Rabbinic traditions of keeping the law. However, many of those traditions were developed as ways that either circumvented the law or reduced it something that was manageable for them to do. For both then, truth was determined by a mixture of reliance on "trained experts" and their own desires instead of God's word. Not much different than the present time.

In the passages that we will be examining this morning we will see that God has a strong response to this pride that will result in a change in the way that Jesus carries out His ministry of teaching. To this point Jesus had been teaching in a very plain and direct manner and performing many and diverse miracles which demonstrated the truth of His claims and teaching. Most of the scribes and Pharisees had rejected this even to the point of claiming that Jesus was casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the ruler of demons. Jesus refuted their accusation and warned them that they had condemned themselves because they had turned their back on the working of the Holy Spirit. Jesus also warned the multitudes about the dangers of following the teaching and examples of the scribes and Pharisees.

Jesus had been presenting Himself as the promised Messiah whose "kingdom was at hand," but the religious leaders had rejected Him. Starting in Luke 8 and its parallel passages in Mark 4 and Matthew 13, Jesus starts talking about a spiritual kingdom they had not been expecting instead of the earthly one they were anticipating. Jesus also changes His method of teaching to one that would purposely confuse these proud and self righteous men while letting the spiritually minded understand.

The Setting - Matthew 13:1-3 (Mark 4:1-2; Luke 8:4)

On that day Jesus went out from the house and was sitting by the sea. And great multitudes gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole multitude was standing on the beach. And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying . . .”

This is the same day that Jesus had cast the demon out and healed the man who was blind and dumb. He had confronted the Scribes and Pharisees for their blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, warned the crowd and had demonstrated the new relationship available to men when He called His disciples His, “*mother and My brothers*” and stated in Matthew 12:50 that “*whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.*” We can become the adopted children of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus has now left the house which had been so crowded earlier and He has gone out to shore of Sea of Galilee. Once again the multitudes have gathered around Him. Luke 8:4 points out that the very large crowd included people from various cities that had journeyed to see Him. Jesus gets into one of the boats nearby and puts out a short distance from the shore in order to speak to the crowd without being so confined as He was in the house earlier. Jesus sits down in the boat, the common position of someone who is teaching. The crowd spreads out along the shore so that a larger portion of them can both see and hear Him since sound carries very well over water. Then Jesus begins to speak to them about many things in parables. Matthew 12:3-9 is an example of one of the parables.

An Example - Matthew 13:3b-9 (Mark 4:3-9; Luke 8:5-8)

“And he spoke many things to them in parables, saying, Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 And others fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 And others fell among the thorns; and the thorns came up, and choked them out. 8 And others fell on the good soil, and yielded a crop, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 He who has ears, let him hear.

A parable is simply a story from common life that is told in order to illustrate some principle that is being explained. The word “parable” means “to cast alongside.” This is a story that the people in the crowd would have easily understood since it was an agrarian society, but Jesus does not tell them what spiritual principle He is illustrating. In the later parables Jesus states that the story is related to the kingdom of heaven, but He does not give specific explanation of how the parable compares to God’s kingdom. For the crowds, these were a series of stories that they knew were somehow related, but may not have understood the spiritual point.

What is your response to this business story? One day a broker went to the New York Stock Exchange. Some of his trades were undervalued and quickly resold. Some of his trades were with a new venture which quickly rose in price, but because the company was not well established, it performed poorly and the stock values quickly declined. Some more of his trades were with good companies, but new competition arose which drove them out of business and the stocks became worthless. And then some of his trades were with good companies with good business plans and great personnel so that they grew rapidly so that within a year some doubled in price, some tripled in price and one split three times.

Would your response be: A) “So what?” B) “Why are you telling me this?” C) “What is the name of this broker?” D) I wonder what the connection of this is to the things you have previously taught? Those in the crowd would have had a similar mixture of responses to the parable of the sower because Jesus just told the story without explaining it.

Why then did Jesus speak in parables? Our text will give us three reasons. 1) To fulfill prophecy. 2) To reveal truths to His followers. 3) To conceal the truth from the self righteous.

Fulfilling Prophecy - Matthew 13: 34-35 (Mark 4:33-34)

All these things Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables; and He did not speak to them without a parable, so that what was spoken by the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world.

This quote is from Psalm 78:2 which in poetic form speaks about the display of God's power and His awesome works as well as the Lord's unfailing and forgiving love. The psalmist continues and speaks of the tragedy of those who in spite of God's love still reject Him, and then finishes with showing how David was chosen by the Lord to be Israel's shepherd. This is the same basic message that Jesus gives through His parables and thus He fulfills the beginning of the Psalm which says that He would speak in such a manner in telling the people of these things.

Note the chronology indicated here. Matthew states that Jesus spoke all these things to the multitudes in parables. That tells us that Matthew 13:10-23 in which the disciples asked Jesus to explain the parable of the Sower actually takes place at a later time when the crowd was no longer present. Mark 4:10 specifically states this was *"As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve began asking Him about the parables."* Matthew is known for moving events out of chronological sequence in order to emphasize his points. Putting the explanation immediately after the telling of the parable lets Matthew's readers quickly gain an understanding of what was happening and also give them a basis to understand the rest of the parables.

The first reason Jesus taught in parables was so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. The second reason is found in verses 10-11, 16-17.

Enlightening to His Disciples - Matt. 13:10-11; 16-17; (Mark 4:10-11; Luke 8:9-10).

"¹⁰ And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" ¹¹ Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted." Drop down to verses 16-17, ¹⁶ "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. ¹⁷ "For truly 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."

Jesus' parables enabled Him to reveal truth to His disciples while at the same time hiding that truth from His enemies. They were blessed in both being able to see and hear Jesus and in being granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom. Note that second blessing. Their understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom did not come from superior intellect or even diligent study but from the fact that God Himself granted to them to know these mysteries - that's a gift!

What mysteries is Jesus talking about? In brief, He is talking about the fullness of the gospel message and the coming of the Church Age. Both were hinted at in various places in the Old Testament, but it was not understood. Isaiah 53 speaks about the Messiah being the Suffering Servant who would die as a substitute for sinful man, but none of the prophets understood clearly the atonement made by Jesus Christ for us on the cross of Calvary. Many passages in the Old Testament hint about the Gentiles also being able to become true followers of the Lord God of Israel, but no one understood a Church Age in which Gentiles would also be grafted into the vine as part of *"God's chosen holy nation of royal priests"* (1 Peter 2).

What a special blessing was given to them and to us, a blessing even the prophets of old did not have. 1 Peter 1:10-12 describes it this way, *"As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what time or manner of time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven - things into which angels long to look."* Hebrews 11:13, *"All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth."* Then verses 39-40 add, *And these*

all, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive the promise: because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect (Hebrews 11).

Jesus was revealing to His disciples mysteries that the prophets of old did not understand for they only saw them from a distance and trusted God for their future - as we should too. These truths are contained in the parables, but the only ones that will understand are those to whom God grants it. That is an offense to the pride of men who are so arrogant and proud that they reject any truth they cannot figure out and understand for themselves. Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 apply to this directly, ¹⁸ *For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* ¹⁹ *For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE."* ²⁰ *Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?* ²¹ *For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.* ²² *For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom;* ²³ *but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,* ²⁴ *but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* ²⁵ *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.* ²⁶ *For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;* ²⁷ *but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,* ²⁸ *and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,* ²⁹ *so that no man may boast before God.* ³⁰ *But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,* ³¹ *so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."*

Neither the religious leaders of Judaism nor the Greek philosophers understood Jesus' message. Their pride blocked them from comprehending God's revelation of truth and so it remained mysterious to them as it still does to so many today. Jesus used parables to reveal hidden truths to His disciples while at the same time making those truths even more mystifying to the unbelieving regardless of their intelligence or training.

Mystifying to All Others - Matt. 13:12-15; (Mark 4:12, Luke 8:10)

¹² *"For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.* ¹³ *"Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.* ¹⁴ *"In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; 15 FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.'*

The spiritual discernment of the followers of Christ is increased to understand even more, but the rest will have taken away even what little understanding they do have. The scribes and Pharisees knew the Hebrew Scriptures well, but they had little understanding of them since they always interpreted them through the rabbinic traditions that had been built up over the centuries. They had replaced God's revelation with man's wisdom. Jesus' teachings became even more confusing to them. Every confrontation between them and Jesus demonstrated their increasing departure from the truth and understanding of the things of God.

Some have questioned God's fairness in this, but in doing so they fail to understand several fundamental points. First, if God was fair, everyone of us would be doomed to hell without hope or recourse. We don't want God to be fair, we want Him to be merciful and gracious. Second, God did not

set them up for their condition. In the context of the passage of Isaiah quoted and in the lives of the scribes and Pharisees as we have seen in our previous studies, these people were those who “*hear but do not understand*” and “*see but do not perceive.*” Their dull hearts, hardened ears and closed eyes came after they had consistently turned their back on the work of the Holy Spirit. God simply sealed them in the state they have reached by themselves much as He had done with Pharaoh. God told Moses that Pharaoh’s heart would be hardened in Exodus 7:3 because God knows the future. However, Pharaoh hardened his heart against the obvious work of God’s hand five different times (7:22; 8:15,19,32; 9:7) before God sealed him in that state by hardening his heart for him (9:12).

These principles are still true today. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:14, “*But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.*” The Scriptures record the interpretations of the parables Jesus gave to His disciples, but that does not mean they are any more understandable to those who do not have the Holy Spirit. The commentaries range widely in interpreting them because of this. Some are quite outrageous.

Man in his pride thinks that he can figure out things for himself, but because his mind has been darkened by his sinful nature, he cannot discern spiritual truth from spiritual error. The Bible scholars of the liberal theological schools such as Princeton, Yale, Harvard, Chicago, Union, etc. use incredible reasoning and logic in their effort to contradict what the Bible clearly teaches. They seek to explain away the authorship of almost every book of the Bible as well as the miracles record in them. They twist the Scriptures to make them match the preconceived ideas of their darkened minds.

Does it take scholarship to understand the Scriptures? Of course. The mystical interpretations of those who fail to be diligent students of the Bible are often worse than those of liberal scholarship. There are barriers of language, cultural and history that must be crossed in order to understand what the Bible says, and that takes hard work. Much study must be done to understand the cultural and historical settings as well as learning the meaning of the words in their grammatical settings. All that is foundational to even get to the point where the Scribes and Pharisees were. But once you are there, the only way you will understand the depth of meaning and how to apply the Scriptures to your life is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Do you want to understand God and His will? That is only possible for His true followers. Have you sought after Him and yielded your will to His? Ask God to reveal Himself to you for He promises to reward those who diligently seek Him. Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten your mind, then begin your study of the Scriptures. To do anything less is only an expression of human pride, and that runs the risk of losing what little understanding you now have and of eventually being confirmed in your rebellious state and doomed to eternity separated from God. Don’t be as the Scribes and Pharisees who decided the truth before they even talked with Jesus. Be like the disciples who sat at His feet and learned of Him.

Sermon Notes: *Introduction to Parables*
Matthew 13:1-3, 10-17; Mark 4:1-2, 10-12; Luke 8:4, 9-10

Introduction

_____ is existent in all humans and exhibits itself in many different ways
Science took on a _____ role in which scientists became the high priest of the worship of knowledge
Government and national leaders do not seek _____ in a crisis the way we did historically
Now the normal response to a _____ is to find scientists and experts to define, diagnosis and solve it
“Science” feeds man pride into believing he is _____ than God and so he rejects God’s revelation
_____ autonomy is a great source of pride in the post-modern generation
Pride is fed by a mix of both science and personal autonomy in current society, especially at _____
Nothing is new under the sun (Eccl. 1:9) for scribes and Pharisees followed similar _____
Scribes were experts in the Mosaic Law, but they freely _____ what they did not like or understand
Pharisees rigidly followed _____ which would often circumvent or reduce the law to manageability
Both determined _____ by a mixture of trained experts and personal desires instead of God’s word
Most of the scribes and Pharisees have _____ Jesus and His teaching - Jesus now changes His teaching

The Setting - Matthew 13:1-3 (Mark 4:1-2; Luke 8:4)

On this _____ Jesus had cast out the demon, condemned the Pharisees & revealed new relationships
Jesus is by the shore of the Sea of Galilee and once again a large _____ has gathered around Him

An Example - Matthew 13:3b-9 (Mark 4:3-9; Luke 8:5-8)

A parable is a story from _____ life that told to illustrate to some principle being taught
Jesus does not _____ to the crowd the spiritual principles He is illustrating by parables
Those in the crowd would have responded differently to the parables depending on their _____

Fulfilling Prophecy - Matthew 13: 34-35 (Mark 4:33-34)

Jesus quotes from Psalm 78:2 to show that He is speaking in parables in fulfillment of _____
Jesus did not explain the parable to the disciples until _____ the crowd had left

Enlightening to His Disciples - Matt. 13:10-11; 16-17; (Mark 4:10-11; Luke 8:9-10)

Jesus’ parables enabled Him to _____ truth to His disciples that was hidden from the prophets
The mysteries revealed are the fulness of the gospel message and the coming of the _____ age
1 Peter 1:10-12; Hebrews 11:13, 39-40 - they received a _____ the prophets did not have

The only ones that will understand the mysteries are those to whom God _____ it - 1 Corinthians 1:18-31
_____ blocks people from comprehending God's revelation of truth for they reject it

Mystifying to All Others - Matt. 13:12-15; (Mark 4:12, Luke 8:10)

The spiritual discernment of Jesus' follower is increased while it is _____ for everyone else

We don't want God to be _____ - we want Him to be merciful and gracious

Their dull hearts, hardened ears and closed eyes came _____ they had consistently rejected the Holy Spirit

Pharaoh hardened his own heart _____ times before God hardened it (Exodus 7:22; 8:15,19,32; 9:7 - 9:12)

1 Corinthians 2:14 - without the Spirit of God, people will reject the things of God as _____

Scholarship and the Holy Spirit are needed in order to understand the Bible _____

God's will is discernable to His followers as they seek Him and _____ to Him

Be _____ to ask the Lord to enlighten your mind, then study the Scriptures and submit to what it reveals

KIDS KORNER

Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help.

Young Children - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch. **Older Children** - Do one or more of the following: 1) Write down all the verses mentioned in the sermon and look them up later. 2) Count how many times the word "pride" is said. Talk with your parents about why pride blocks a person from understanding the things of God.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Questions to consider in discussing the sermon with others. How have you seen pride expressed in other people? How have you seen it expressed in your own life? How does a reliance on "science" fuel human pride? Who do government officials normally go to when they face a crisis? Who should they go to? Why don't they? How does the societal response to the AIDS crisis reflect its rejection of God's revelation? How does post-modern philosophy feed the pride of self autonomy? How do science and self autonomy mix at colleges? What is the result? What was the response of the scribes to the Mosaic Law? What was more important to the Pharisees than God's word? What has been the response of most of the scribes and Pharisees to Jesus and His teaching? What has already happened on this particular day Jesus teaches from a boat by the shore of the Sea of Galilee? What is a parable and why are they used? What would be your response to the parable in Matthew 13:3-9 if no explanation was given? How did Jesus fulfill prophecy by telling parables? When did Jesus explain the parables to His disciples? Why were the disciples able to understand the parables and how was that a blessing? What mysteries were the parables revealing? Why can't wise men, scholars and philosophers understand the Scriptures by their own abilities? What blocks them from understanding even what seems very obvious spiritual points in a Scripture text? What is necessary in order to understand God's word? How do parables take away even what knowledge did exist in the proud? Why do the proud develop dull hearts, hardened ears and closed eyes? Would you want God to be fair? Why or why not? What is the role of scholarship in understanding the Scriptures? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in understanding the Scriptures? What do you need to do in order to properly understand the Scriptures? What do you need to do to know and properly follow God's will?