

Sermons on Matthew

Why Parables? #1

Matthew 13:1-17

With Study Questions

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Matthew 13:1-17

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. -4- And as he sowed, some
seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. -5-
Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and
they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. -6-
But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had
no root they withered away. -7- And some fell among thorns, and
the thorns sprang up and choked them. -8- But others fell on good
ground and yielded a crop: some _a hundredfold, some sixty, some
thirty. -9- __He who has ears to hear, let him hear! _”

-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 13:1-17)

Preface—the Kingdom

If you were asked what the gospel of Matthew was all about (at least up until now), how would you answer? Have you noticed a recurring theme?

- Chapter one records the genealogy of the King.
- Chapter two records the birth of the King (Matthew 2:2).
- In chapter three we see that John the Baptist came preaching of the kingdom of God (Matthew 3:2).
- In chapter four, when Jesus first began preaching (Matthew 4:17), His message was of the kingdom of God.
- Chapters five through seven records The Sermon on the Mount which begins by Jesus informing us who the kingdom of God belongs to (Matthew 5:3).
- In chapter eight Jesus gives a warning regarding being cast out of the kingdom (Matthew 8:11, 12).
- In chapter nine Jesus went through all the cities and villages preaching the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 9:35).
- In chapter ten, when Jesus sent the twelve out He told them to preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matthew 10:7).
- In chapter eleven Jesus taught how great John the Baptist was, but that the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he (Matthew 11:11, 12).
- In chapter twelve Jesus taught that if He casts out demons surely the kingdom of God has come.

Now we are launching into the kingdom parables. It would appear that the gospel emphasizes the kingdom of God. So it might be appropriate here to give a brief primer on what the kingdom of God is?

The outward expression of the kingdom of God is found in local churches. They are like little embassies scattered throughout the foreign soil of this world.

But not all the ambassadors in these little embassies are sincere members of the kingdom (Ephesians 6:24). Some honor the King with their lips while their hearts are far from Him (Matthew 15:8). Others have a sincere faith. This, of course, invisible to men so there is a distinction made between the invisible church/ kingdom and the visible church/ kingdom.

To summarize, being baptized and joining a local church includes one in the outward manifestation of God's kingdom. This is the call of every Christian (Hebrews 13:17). But merely because you're part of the visible church does not assure that you are truly at peace with God

(Matthew 22:12, 13). Our faith in Christ must be genuine—members of the invisible kingdom.

We have a bit of turning point now in Matthew. Jesus begins the Kingdom parables—parables about the nature of the kingdom of God. There are seven of these kingdom parables. This morning we won't cover one.

I won't presently seek to explain this parable since Jesus will explain it to us later in the chapter. It would appear that this parable was designed to extract a question. So this is the question we'll pursue. Why did Jesus teach in parables?

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. -3- Then He spoke many things to them in parables.
(Matthew 13:1-3)**

A Larger Audience

Matthew records that the audience of Jesus was growing larger. It had become a great multitude. Jesus would sit in a boat while this multitude would stand on the shore. In a group this size there is little doubt that all the types of people mentioned in the parable would be present. Maybe that doesn't help since we haven't discussed the parable yet. Suffice it to say that godly instruction is designed to bring listeners to a state of introspection and a response. It should never merely be academic or to satisfy vain curiosity.

But __be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves (James 1:22).

There should always be a personal point to our lessons. Those under Christ's tutelage 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. It's no wonder that the ungodly welcome all manner of instruction from virtually any source except the Scriptures which becomes very personal.

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

I. Why Parables?

Parables are Confusing

Here's the question. Why was Jesus speaking in parables? A parable (*parabole*) comes from the two Greek words π ____ [para] which means 'with' or 'by' and _____ [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.

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. Let's confess up front that if there is a communication problem, the problem lies not with Jesus, but with us.

But the question by the disciples seems to imply that the parables are confusing to some—at various levels to all the listeners. It makes you wonder if there were people in the multitudes verbalizing their frustration. Perhaps the well-meaning apostles (like today's church growth gurus) are seeking to help Jesus with His communication issues. Jesus gives His answer 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 13:11b)**

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. In addition to this, parables served the purpose of both revealing and hiding. In time we'll see

how this will work itself out in terms of the judgment of Israel. But since that will become clear at a later time I prefer to examine the personal aspect of this, that is, why some understand and others don't—which, by the way, is the subject of the parable of the sower.

Parable and Election

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.

Here we have yet another of the innumerable passages which testify to God's election in redemption. 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 to grab. 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)

Succinctly put, a certain type of response to the teaching of Christ reveals who are and are not the elect of God. In the following verse, the Apostle Paul connects a positive response to the gospel with being the elect of God.

_We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers,⁻³⁻ remembering without ceasing _your work of faith, _labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father,⁻⁴⁻ knowing, beloved brethren, _your election by God.⁻⁵⁻ For _our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, _and in the Holy Spirit _and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. (1 Thessalonians 1:2-5)

For the elect of God, the gospel is not merely words. But it comes in power, in the Holy Spirit and, therefore, produces a sure response.

A Despised Doctrine

Jesus teaches that some have **“been given”** and others have **“not been given.”** And it is God who either gives or does not give. This much despised doctrine of the sovereignty of God may be the most important and hated article of faith in all of modern Christendom. But the instruction is true and there are many good reasons for it, not the least of which is that we might continue to preach the pure, unadulterated gospel message.

Morphing the Message

Jesus was surrounded by religious leaders who had no problem morphing the Word of God to satisfy their personal pursuits or cultural biases. Addressing priests, Jesus asked,

**— Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of __hell as yourselves.
(Matthew 23:15)**

Jesus gives us the real reason why some do and others do not respond to the gospel, this being the election of God.

In today's pragmatic, mega-church mentality, the reasoning of Jesus is simply not accepted. The church mogul must have his thousands. And if the thousands don't arrive, it is not enough to say, "Study deeper and preach more accurately. Trust the sovereign power and election of God to bring whom He will." Keep in mind that in the parable of the sower, the seed never changes. Can we make the same observation in today's gospel presentations?

The Gospel and Sales

The gospel should not be thought of as 'sales'. In sales if a person can't make a sale, they may have to re-think not only their presentation, but also their content and perhaps their product. The sales-person placed before the sales-conference is the sales-person who has made the most sales. It is not necessarily the one who understands the product the best.

For the salesmen to suggest that the problem is with the potential client simply won't fly. But these are the exact implications of Jesus' teaching.

I found it quite illuminating when I explained to my mature Christian friend why I didn't believe that the film *The Passion of the Christ* was an appropriate method for presenting the gospel since it was a violation of the Second Commandment. His argument was, "But look at how many people are being saved!" thus making me look like some uncaring, cold-hearted Pharisee.

Leaving aside for now whether or not you agree with my understanding of the Second Commandment, is this how these situations are to be approached? How does he know how many people are genuinely getting saved in those theatres? And if I'm correct in concluding that *The Passion* is a violation of the Second Commandment, are we then to conclude that God doesn't care if people get saved? The real question to ask is, "What saith the Scriptures?" not "How goeth the box office?"

If we don't trust that God effectually brings His elect at the preaching of His message, the temptation will be to adjust the message.

A Humbling Message

Add to this the effect this has on the potential pride of the disciples. They must humbly acknowledge that the only difference between them and the grumbler was the grace of God.

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)

It's sad how often the above passage is interpreted in such a way as to allow for boasting. Don't be deceived; the "it" refers to the entire process of salvation.

This doctrine has the common nickname of Calvinism, which Spurgeon called biblical Christianity. Today's rants against Calvinism reveal what a man-centered doctrine is preached in a man-centered church. The message of God's election is glorious to God. For it is only when we embrace this that we genuinely begin to recognize that the totality of our salvation was purchased at the cross of Christ. Therefore the totality of praise and thanksgiving goes to God alone.

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Questions for Study

1. What appears to be the theme of the gospel of Matthew (Page 3)?
2. Explain the kingdom of God (pages 3, 4).
3. Discuss some of the methods of Jesus' instruction (pages 4, 5).
4. What is a parable (page 5)?
5. Are parables always easy to understand (page 5)?
6. What are two functions of parables (page 6)?
7. Why do some people understand and others not understand parables (pages 6, 7)?
8. Discuss election (pages 6, 7).
9. What are some of the dangers of neglecting or ignoring the doctrine of election (pages 7, 8)?
10. What are some qualities the doctrine of election should bring out in Christians (page 9)?

