

Introduction to the Parables

Matthew 13:1-3, 10-17

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Do you cherish the teachings of Jesus? I believe it is important that we do so.
1. Deuteronomy 18:15 – “The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.”
 2. **John 5:46** – “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.”
 3. **Matthew 17:5** – “While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!’”
 4. **John 1:17** – “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”
 5. **John 8:32** – “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”
- B. Jesus Christ was the Master of all teachers and the Teacher of all Masters.
1. **Matthew 7:29** – “For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”
 2. **Matthew 22:16** – “And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, ‘Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth . . .’”
 3. **John 8:28** – “Then Jesus said to them, ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.’”
 4. **John 7:46** – “The officers answered, ‘No man ever spoke like this Man!’”
 5. **Matthew 13:3** - “He spoke many things to them in parables . . .”
 6. **John 21:23** (Last verse in the Book of John) – “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.”
- C. During His earthly ministry, as Jesus went about preaching and teaching, He frequently used parables - cf. **Mt 13:1-3, 13:34-35**
1. It has been estimated that at least **one-third of Jesus’ recorded teaching is found in the parables** (Wiersbe, *Windows On The Parables*, p. 15)
 2. Certainly many of the most often remembered sayings of Jesus are His parables
- D. It is therefore proper for disciples today to ask such questions as:
1. What is a "parable"?
 2. Why did Jesus teach in parables?
 3. What are they about?

4. How should we interpret them?

E. With this lesson, we begin a study of **"The Parables Of Jesus"...**

1. This first lesson will serve as an introduction to the parables in general
2. Succeeding lessons will examine the parables in particular

THE DEFINITION OF "PARABLE"

A. THE WORD "PARABLE"...

1. Is a transliteration of the Greek **"parabole"** (para-bow-LAY)
2. Means "to place beside, to cast alongside"
3. As defined by Vine's Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words, it **"signifies a placing of one thing beside another with a view to comparison"**
4. Wiersbe's description of a parable...
 - a. As **"a story that places one thing beside another for the purpose of teaching"**
 - b. **"It puts the known next to the unknown so that we may learn"**
5. A parable can usually be identified by the use of the word **"like"** - cf. **Mt 13:31, 33**

B. AS USED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, A PARABLE...

1. Is usually a story or narrative drawn from nature or human circumstances
2. From which spiritual lessons can be made by comparison -- A common definition of a parable is **"an earthly story with a heavenly meaning"**

C. "Parable" or "parables" appear 45 times in the first four books of the New Testament.

1. Specifically . . .
 - a. Matthew – 15 times
 - b. Mark – 12 times
 - c. Luke – 17 times
 - d. John – 1 time
2. Herbert Lockyer in his scholarly work, *All the Parables of the Bible*, presents a study of more than 250 parables in the Bible.
3. There are some 39 parables and 37 miracles recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John. Two more parables than miracles in these accounts.
 - a. **10** parables appear in **Matthew**
 - b. **2** parables appear in **Mark**
 - c. **15** parables appear in **Luke**
 - d. **3** parables appear in **John**
 - e. **2** parables are common to **Matthew** and **Luke**
 - f. **8** parables are common to **Matthew, Mark, and Luke**

[The next question often raised is **"Why did Jesus teach in parables?"**

In other words, why did he not simply speak straightforward when He was teaching? To understand why, consider...]

THE PURPOSE OF THE PARABLES OF JESUS

A. THE PRIMARY PURPOSE WAS TO "CONCEAL"...

1. Jesus began speaking in parables because of the hardness of many people's hearts - cf. **Mt 13:10-17**
 - a. The disciples' attitude was such that they were blessed to learn "**the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**" - **Mt 13:10-12,16-17**
 - b. But because of the hard hearts of many in the multitude, Jesus began speaking to them in parables - **Mt 13:13-15**; cf. **Mk 4:10-12**
 - c. He would then explain the parables in private to His disciples - **Mk 4:33-34**
2. By resorting to parables, Jesus effectively separated the truth-seekers from the curiosity-seekers!
 - a. Those seeking the truth would say "Explain to us the parable..." - **Mt 13:36**
 - b. Whereas the simply curious could easily be sent away
3. Indeed, Jesus used parables to carry out Divine judgment... - **Matthew 13:12**
 - a. **Matthew 13:12** - "For whoever has (a good heart, listening ears), to him more will be given, and he will have abundance (by virtue of the parable being explained)"
 - b. "But whoever does not have (a good heart, listening ears), even what he has will be taken away from him (by virtue of being sent away with the multitude)"

B. BUT ANOTHER PURPOSE WAS TO "REVEAL"...

1. Even though the primary purpose in telling parables was to conceal the "**mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**" from the multitude!
 - a. For once the disciples understood the basic meaning of the parables...
 - b. ...the comparison of the "known" (earthly) truths with the "unknown" (heavenly) truths would shed further light on the unknown.
2. Therefore, with the help of the Lord's explanation of His parables we can learn more about "**the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**" - **Matthew 13:34-35**

C. WHY DID JESUS SPEAK IN PARABLES?

1. It was a fulfillment of Prophecy.
 - a. **Isaiah 6:6-10** – “And He said, ‘Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’”

10 ‘Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed.’”

- b. **Psalm 78:2-3** – “I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us.”
- c. **Matthew 13:14-16** – “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”
- d. **Matthew 13:34-35** – “All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them,
35 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: "I will open My mouth in parables; **I WILL UTTER THINGS KEPT SECRET FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.**"

- 2. Jesus taught in parables because His time had not come to speak plainly.
 - a. In John 10:1-5 Jesus had just spoken a parable relating that if any man tried to enter the fold through any other means other than Him, the same would be a thief and a robber. Notice **verse 6** – “Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.”
 - b. **John 16:25** – “These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father.”
 - c. **John 16:30** – “His disciples said to Him, ‘See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech!’”
- 3. Jesus taught in parables in order to reveal the truth to honest hearers. Those to whom it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom would increase their knowledge. **Matthew 13:10-12** – “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.”

[This leads us to the next question, "What are the parables about?"
Mt 13:11 certainly gives us a clue...]

THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THE PARABLES OF JESUS

A. THE GENERAL THEME IS "THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN"...

1. As suggested by Mt 13:11
2. As illustrated with several parables, which all start with
"The kingdom of heaven is like..." - Mt 13:24,31,33,44,45,47
3. Indeed, "the kingdom of heaven" was the theme of...
 - a. Jesus' itinerant ministry - Mt 4:17,23
 - b. His sermon on the mount - Mt 5:3,10,19-20; 6:10,33; 7:21

B. THREE "SUB-THEMES" ARE STRESSED IN THE PARABLES...

1. **The character of the KINGDOM** - for example...
 - a. The Parable of the Mustard Seed
 - b. The Parable of the Leaven
 - c. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure
 - d. The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price
2. **The character of the KING** - for example...
 - a. The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard
 - b. The Parable of the Lost Son
3. **The character of the KING'S SUBJECTS** - for example...
 - a. The Parable of the Good Samaritan
 - b. The Parable of the Persistent Widow

[Of course, the sub-themes often overlap in some parables, but they clearly demonstrate that the overall theme of the parables was "the kingdom of heaven."]

Finally, a few thoughts in answer to the question, "How do we interpret the parables?"]

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLES OF JESUS

A. THERE ARE TWO EXTREMES TO AVOID...

1. Seeking to find some spiritual truth in every little detail
2. Saying that there is only ONE spiritual truth in each parable

B. SOME GUIDELINES FOR PROPER INTERPRETATION...

1. Learn from the explanations Jesus gave in those parables He explained
 - a. Understanding the parable of the sower helps us to understand other

parables - **Mk 4:13**

- b. Jesus therefore went on to explain that parable...
- 2. Look for the **CENTRAL** truth of the parable, making sure that any other truths gleaned from the parable are in harmony with it
- 3. Consider carefully the **CONTEXT** of Jesus’ words...
 - a. Looking for an introduction or an application which may give insight
 - b. As supplied by either the Lord Himself, or His inspired writers
- 4. Don't use the parables to formulate new doctrine
 - a. Remember, parables were originally told to conceal, so they are not always that clear in their meaning
 - b. Therefore don't try to build a case for a doctrine based solely on a parable

C. In studying parables, always establish the truth of the text.

- 1. In some cases, parables were the basis of other doctrinal addresses, as in the parable of the sower, and others.
- 2. In others, the parable provide the application for the message he had delivered, as in the parable of the wise and foolish builders, which concluded the sermon on the mount.
- 3. From the New Testament record, Jesus seldom spoke to an audience without making use of a parable.
- 4. In some cases, he used a series of parables in succession, even as many as seven.

CONCLUSION

- A. Following these sensible guidelines to interpreting the Parables of Jesus, we can look forward to the joy of understanding more fully "**the mysteries**" or revealed truths of the kingdom of heaven
- B. As we get into the parables themselves, I hope that we will appreciate how blessed we are to live in an age when people who have a desire to learn about the kingdom can do so:

"But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; 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 13:16-17**

- C. What we are about to study in these parables concern things which Abraham,

Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and many others looked forward to, but did not fully understand in their lifetime!

- D. Yet these "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" ([Matthew 13:11](#)), containing "things kept secret from the foundation of the world" ([Matthew 13:35](#)), are now being made known through the preaching of the gospel of Christ:

"Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began"

"but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith;"

- Romans 16:25-26

- E. The parables served a purpose in our Lord's teachings. Remember also what Jesus said. [John 17:8-9](#) – "For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me." Parables were a part of those words.

F. God's Plan for Man's Salvation