

Parables

Matthew Chapter 13

“Therefore I speak to them in parables...” By definition, a parable is a short, didactic story meant to teach a moral or principle. It comes from the Greek word παραβολή (parabole), para meaning “close or beside, with” and ballo meaning “to cast”. In other words, a parable is a teaching aid that is cast alongside the truth being taught. This type of teaching is found throughout scripture. An example in the Old testament would be Nathan’s confrontation of King David. He uses a parable of a little ewe lamb thereby condemning King David’s adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, the killing of her husband and then covering up what he had done. (2 Samuel 12:1-4). In the New Testament, we find Jesus frequently using this teaching tool to illustrate divinely profound truths. He used stories that were familiar, easily remembered and rich in symbolism and meaning. On the surface, a parable had a lesson or meaning, however it concealed a much deeper Truth. Jesus used common everyday examples and language, not the often-lofty language of the religious leaders of the day. In a time when the religious leaders were attempting to trap Him, Jesus’ use of parables enabled the true of heart and His to understand, while confusing the religiously intellectuals of the day. After all, what were they going to arrest Jesus for? Telling stories?

Why did Jesus teach in parables? Jesus tells His disciples, “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. “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; for the heart of this people had become dull, with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes, otherwise they would see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them.’” Isaiah preached of the impending doom and judgment of God but the people did not listen then, and the leaders of Jesus’ time were not listening now.

Jesus goes on to tell his disciples of the amazing gift they possessed, ““But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. “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.”” They can see, hear and understand God’s truth. Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah (and many others) looked to the future, looked for God to fulfill His promises but died in faith without seeing, without hearing, their aspirations unfulfilled. However, the disciples were privileged to see, hear and understand. After explaining the parable of the sower, Jesus goes on to tell seven additional parables and then asks his disciples a question, “Have you understood all these things”? Συνιέναι (understood) means to bring or put things together. You could rewrite the question to say, “have you put all these things together”. The kingdom of God is here however it will continue to have good and evil in it. The tares will grow with the wheat but when the harvest comes, the wheat will be stored, the tares bound and burned up. The kingdom of God will continue to grow and grow. Their answer to Jesus question is, “yes”. Yes, we understand.

As we look at the parables, Jesus teaching, and the response of his disciples, I wonder what our answer would be if Jesus asked us that question after a Sunday Service? Every week, many people get up, shower, get dressed and go to church. Once there, they visit with people, sing some songs and listen to a pastor preach the word of God. But have they “understood”? J.C. Ryle explained, “a sermon without an application is like a letter posted without a direction. It may be well written, rightly dated, and duly signed. But it is useless if it never reaches it’s destination.” If we were to examine those going to church on Sunday at the end of a year, would there be an indication of increased Biblical knowledge, love for the Lord, a progression toward sanctification or would we see little to no spiritual growth, a stark similarity between them and the world.

There are two significantly different people described in this chapter, those who understand and those who do not. One that included the scholars, the scribes and the Pharisees, those who did not understand because they refused to see, acknowledge or even consider Jesus words. Who, because of the hardness of their heart, it was not granted to them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. The other, were those whose faith allowed their eyes to see and their ears to hear what the unbeliever could not see. For those who had ears to hear and eyes to see, Jesus parables were words of life, understandable and precious. To the others, they were gibberish, confusing, irrational, indiscernible and aggravating. Which one are you?

1. Why did Jesus teach using parables? Describe and explain the parable of the sower. What do we discover about parables and Jesus meaning as we examine verses 3-23? How would you explain verses 13-17?

2. Describe and explain the parable of the Tares among the Wheat. What is Jesus describing and what is the overarching meaning 24-30?

3. Describe and explain the parable of the mustard seed. What is Jesus describing and what is the overarching meaning 31-32?

4. Describe and explain the parable of the leaven. What is Jesus describing and what is the overarching meaning 33-35?

5. Describe and explain the parable of the hidden treasure, the costly pearl and dragnet. What is Jesus describing and what is the overarching meaning 43 -52?