

Abraham Lincoln liked to tell jokes and anecdotes. Many were meant to amuse, others were meant both to amuse and make a practical point about some current issue being discussed. The following is one his stories.

A preacher asserted in his sermon that Jesus was the only perfect man who had ever appeared in this world. Also, there was no record, in the Bible or elsewhere, of any perfect woman having lived upon the earth.

Then a woman's voice in the back of the church was heard to say, "I know of a perfect woman and I've heard of her every day for the last six years."

"Who was she?" asked the minister.

The woman replied, "My husband's first wife. "

— Story relayed by soldier-turned-publisher James Grant Wilson (1832-1914)

Jesus told stories too, called parables. There were for teaching truths about the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 13:1-3 (NIV) That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables...

In the verses that follow that statement, we have recorded one of the parables. We will examine that parable next Sunday. Our subject today concerns the parables overall.

It was not always apparent what the point was that Jesus was teaching. Jesus did not explain to the crowds the meaning of his parables. This puzzled his disciples. We pick in verse 10.

Matthew 13:10-11 (NIV) The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them."

The "you" that Jesus speaks of here, is his disciples. He will gladly explain the meaning of the parables to them, but not to the crowds. There was something in Jesus' mind that set his disciples apart from the people in the crowds. And that difference was the basis for why he did not explain to the crowds the meaning of the parables. Let's see what else Jesus said.

Matthew 13:12 (NIV) "Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."

Jesus is talking about people having something or not having something. So what is the something that makes the difference?

The something that some had and others lacked was faith in Jesus as God's prophet.

It wasn't faith in Jesus as savior and lord. That is the faith we are looking for. But no one except Jesus yet knew this. At this point he is only expecting faith in him as God's prophet.

Initially everyone was the same. Those who were his disciples started out as people in a crowd. None of them were born followers of Jesus. At some point they came to the conclusion that Jesus must be a prophet from God, and eventually became his disciples.

They saw the miracles that Jesus did and concluded that he must have been sent by God. For no one could do such miracles except he was given that power by God. One man says exactly those words in John's gospel. So, concluding that this man was a prophet God, whatever this man, Jesus, said was important. Even if, at first, they did not understand what he said, it would be important for them to figure it out, to ask questions, to ponder the stories, even to pray for God to give them understanding.

That was the kind of response Jesus was looking for. I look for this also. Whenever someone comes to me wanting to be baptized I ask them questions to determine what baptism means to them and why they want to be baptized. Not everyone comes for the right reasons. I am looking for those who have been convinced of their sinfulness and their need for Jesus as Savior. We are to baptize those who have been converted to Jesus Christ. We don't baptize now hoping they will become Christians later.

One of the things I look for is evidence of the Holy Spirit in them. If they don't pray much, don't read their Bibles, aren't interested in worship, don't ask questions about spiritual things, then likely they are not yet a Christian. Christians, especially new Christians have a hunger to know the Lord and his will. They have a hunger to understand the blessings we have in Christ. Many of those who come to me seeking baptism have no such hunger. Some think that baptism will get them into heaven and that is all they want.

The disciples of Jesus had that hunger. They left their jobs and families behind in order to follow Jesus.

Jesus was looking for people who were moving in the direction of faith in him as being sent from God. And when he found them, he encouraged their faith with more of what they were looking for.

But those who showed no interest in these things, even what little bit of understanding they had, they would lose. They lost it like they lost other things they read or heard that did not hold their interest. They simply forgot about them.

They did not want to take it seriously, did not want to respond with faith in Jesus. They walked away shaking their heads, saying, “I don’t get what Jesus was trying to say.” And they would soon forget all about it.

But those who believed that Jesus was sent by God walked away pondering the meaning of what Jesus said. They asked God for understanding of what Jesus was teaching. And God graciously supplied that to them. Many of them became Christians later when the apostles started preaching the good news of Jesus. **Those who demonstrated a faith in Jesus as a prophet of God were rewarded with even more understanding.**

This is still how God works today.

He has given every person on the planet enough information to know there is a God, a creator. Some respond by seeking to know God. Others respond by pushing such knowledge away. They do not want to know God. They do not want to answer to God.

Some of the most well-known atheists of our century have said that they do not want God to exist. They do not want a God they have to answer to. So, they refuse to acknowledge any evidence that points to the existence of a creator. They find ways to argue against that truth.

They are the kind of people Jesus spoke of next when he quoted from Isaiah.

Matthew 13:13-17 (NIV) This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

Whoever has faith in God, interest in God, wants to please God, humbles himself or herself before God in prayer... such a person will experience more of the blessings of God. God will add to your understanding. God will reveal himself to you.

The person who has no faith in God, no interest in God, no desire to please God, who does not humble himself or herself before God... will grow more and more resistant to God. And at some point God will quit pursuing that person. That was the point of the Isaiah 6 passage.

God told Isaiah that he would not be a success in the eyes of the world. He would not build a large and growing following. His preaching was not going to result in great numbers of repenting Israelites. Instead, they would get tired of Isaiah’s message. Eventually, they would

shut him out, turn him off. They would close their ears to him. And in so doing they would miss out on many blessings God was ready to give them.

Today, some of your family and friends are actively resisting the truth of God in Jesus Christ.

They may claim to believe in a god, but they are resisting the good news of Jesus. They may already be beyond God's reach. Ask God how you should pray for them. But be warned, he may tell you not to bother.

My main concern this morning is not for them but for you who are Christians. Are you resisting the Holy Spirit?

You responded to the Spirit for salvation.

Are you now resisting the Spirit for living in Christ?

Are you resisting his efforts to convict you of sin?

Are you resisting his efforts to lead you in prayer?

Are you resisting his efforts to get you to read the Bible?

Are you resisting the prompts of the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit prompts us to fulfil the will of Jesus.

When you think to yourself, "I wonder how so and so is doing?" That is a prompt by the Holy Spirit to pray for that person.

If you think, "I should call them." That is a prompt by the Spirit of God.

When thoughts such as, "Do it now" or "Do it correctly" enter your mind, those are prompts from the Holy Spirit. How often have you said to someone, "Yeah, I knew at the time I should have done it differently, but I was in a hurry?" That prompting to do it right was the Spirit.

Are you resisting, ignoring such prompts from the Spirit?

You must not continue living like that, relating to Jesus that way. Come to your senses and repent of such sin. You are preventing God from blessing you more.