

Text: Matthew 13:10-17

Title: The Parables of Jesus

Truth: Parables reveal truth and conceal it.

Date/Location: All Parables of Jesus, October 30, 2016 at FBC; rev. 12/15/2021

I. The Meaning of Parable

- A. The term is used in English four or five times in the Old Testament (Psalm 78:2, Ezekiel 17:2, 20:49, 24:3). It translates a Hebrew word that has a range of meanings including: sayings, proverbs, hidden truths, riddles, ambiguous sayings, allegories, wisdom teachings. This Hebrew word occurs dozens of times in the OT and is not always translated as parable. For example, 1 Kings 4:32 explains that Solomon spoke 3000 proverbs which is the same word translated elsewhere in the OT as parable.
- B. Generally, in modern English we use *proverb* for a very short saying, and we use a *parable* for a somewhat extended story or illustration that has a lesson or main point. But sometimes the parable is quite short. Parables are not parabolas (like in math) or hyperboles (non-literal exaggerations)!
- C. The Greek word can refer to a type or model. But more to the point of the cases we will be studying, it is "a narrative or saying of varying length, designed to illustrate a truth especially through comparison or simile."¹ It refers to comparisons or even "riddles." A riddle is speaking about something in a way that requires the listener to exercise some cleverness to figure out the meaning. The illustration need not use the word *parable* for us to consider it as a parable. The line between a parable and a "regular illustration" is somewhat fuzzy, so it is very likely that we could debate which what parables belong in my list (see the end of these notes).
- D. The parable is a teaching tool. It is an indirect teaching method rather than a direct method. But this indirectness has an advantage of encouraging careful thought about the story and its point.

¹ BDAG, s.v. παραβολήν.

We are blessed that Jesus explained some of the parables to help clear the fog of our understanding when we read them. These explanations show us that the Lord *does* want His children to understand parables. Because they are a bit opaque, it takes time and effort to understand them, but such time is very well spent in your own readings and in our time in the church.

- E. The word *parable* in the New Testament is used only in the synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And the first time that we find it is in the 13th chapter of Matthew. The reason we find it there is significant.
1. Backing up to Matthew 12, we read about how the Pharisees continued to show the fruit of unbelief toward the Lord. They complained about His disciples breaking the Sabbath. In 12:14, the text records how they actually planned to destroy Him. This is not just garden-variety frustration at a political opponent. This is first-degree, preplanned murderous hatred against Jesus.
 2. In 12:24, they accuse Jesus of being in league with Satan, to which Jesus responds by giving some illustrations about a divided house. Their stubborn-hearted unbelief is the unpardonable sin (12:22-32). Jesus then explains in 12:33-37 that the output (fruit) of an evil person's life is evil. The heart of the leadership in the nation was evil and they were unable to speak good things.
 3. The scribes also wanted a miraculous sign from Jesus to satisfy themselves, but Jesus refused to bow to their petty desire (12:38-42). He had given them plenty of signs already in His healings, demon exorcisms, resurrections, and teachings. These signs were not something they could not see; instead, they were willingly ignorant. They refused to believe the obvious.
 4. Jesus then gives a brief illustration of a demonic spirit that leaves a person and then returns with even worse evil spirits. It was the same with the nation of Israel – “So shall it also be with this wicked generation” (12:45).
 5. Finally, the chapter ends with Jesus saying that those who **do** the will of God are His real relatives—not those who merely talk

like they are spiritual but prove otherwise by their actions and speech!

II. Pattern of Parables

- A. Sometimes parables begin with a call to hear and understand.
- B. Many times the word *parable* is used at the start or end of them.
- C. Many times they say that something (*the kingdom of heaven*), is “like” something else.
- D. Sometimes they end with a “whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.” This is an important call to apply what is being said, not simply to hear it.
- E. Many times they repeat the message of other parables, or occur in pairs to emphasize the message of the parable.
- F. Sometimes the Lord explained the parables to make them easier to understand.

III. Reasons for Parables, Matthew 13:10-17

- A. We have the explanation for the parabolic teaching method in Matthew 13:10-17; 34-35; and 51-52. (See also Mark 4:10-12 and 33-34 as well as Luke 8:9-10). The disciples ask explicitly the reason for His speaking in parables. He answers their question directly. Let me paraphrase His answer:

"I speak to them in parables because it has been given to **you** to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but I speak to them in parables because to **them** it has not been given."

- B. Our Lord thus gives two clear reasons for teaching in parables in v. 11. He uses **one special teaching method to accomplish two things at the same time**: to show his followers truth about the kingdom; and at the same time to hide from unbelievers that same truth. You can remember it this way: parables both *reveal* and *conceal*.
 - 1. For believers, they reveal truth and are a blessing.
 - 2. For unbelievers, they conceal truth and are a form of judgment.

C. The truth content revealed in the parables has to do with the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

1. A mystery in the Bible is something that previously was not disclosed, but now is. It is something that cannot be known by the mind of man except through divine revelation. Example: it was a mystery that Jews and Gentiles would be united in one body, the church (Eph. 3:3-6).
2. The subject matter of these particular mysteries is the kingdom of heaven. By this we know that Jesus' parables will have a lot to do with this kingdom. I do not plan to pause now and give a long explanation of this kingdom, but I can say this: The kingdom of heaven (where it comes from) is the same as the kingdom of God (who rules and owns it). It is a kingdom which in an earlier form operated under the theocracy, then the Davidic monarchy. It fell into disrepair after Solomon. It disappeared entirely during the Babylonian captivity. It was offered by John the Baptist and Jesus in their early ministries ("Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"). It was subsequently rejected by the Jewish people. We will learn from some of the parables that the kingdom is "on ice" right now and it will come back in power with Christ's second coming. It will then continue for 1000 years (Revelation 20:1-6) before the commencement of the eternal state. Presently we are not in the kingdom; we are in the church age in which God is regenerating a group of people who will be citizens in that glorious kingdom (John 3:3, 5).

D. The principle of increasing or decreasing revelation, v. 12

1. There is a general principle given in v. 12 that we must take heed to: the person who has will be given more; and the person who does not have will lose even what he does have. The "thing" which is possessed is knowledge about the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.
2. The implications of this statement are huge. If you believe and thus "have" a certain amount of God's revelation, that knowledge can increase. It will not stay static. And this is what you should want. Believe what God has given you and you will receive more. If you want more, do something with what you

have already! If you ignore it, how do you expect God to "care" to give you more?

3. If you do not believe and thus do not "have" much or any revelation, then even that information and its positive effects will degrade and become less and less. You might be an unbeliever with some biblical literacy but no application. But even that literacy will do you less and less good. Coming at this from another angle, recognize that depravity is not static. People get worse over time as they do not heed God's word.

E. The principle of divine judgment, v. 13-15. Matthew records Jesus here speaking of the people of His generation using words found in Isaiah 6:9-10 about that generation. That was not a predictive prophecy about Jesus's ministry. Matthew refers to it as an analogy to the current situation.

1. In verses 13-14, the fact is recorded that although people "see" and "hear" the truth of God, they do not really see or hear it. It passes before their minds, but it is not grasped. They don't know what they are looking at. They are in a mental fog and their eyes don't understand what they see (2 Cor. 4:3-4).
2. In verse 15, the text extends this idea by saying that the people have grown hard against the things of God, and the "lest they should see" clause indicates that they are willingly opposed to the knowledge of God. They don't see because they don't want to see and be changed. If they did, they would be healed, but they don't want that.
3. There is something here about the hardening of the heart. With Pharaoh in Exodus 7–14, God hardened his heart and Pharaoh hardened his own heart. So it is with people as they respond negatively to divine revelation. They harden their own hearts, and God allows their own sin to push them into a more obstinate state.
4. Although God could overcome this awful situation, He does not (always) do so. Sometimes He makes it even worse. Consider Isaiah 28:11, which sits in a context of judgment. It tells us that God would use people of another language to judge His people.

God did that in Acts 2 when He granted the disciples to speak other languages. He was making clear that He was moving away from Israel toward the Gentiles. The speaking in other languages assured that they would not understand the revelation of God! Tongues are a sign not for those who believe (1 Cor. 14:22). They are not a good sign. They are a bad sign!

- F. The principle of divine blessing, v. 16-17. If you can see and hear (understand) the things Jesus says, you are blessed. Never forget that. That blessing is not worked up from inside, but is given from outside. This blessing is remarkable because many holy men of old desired to see and hear what we see and hear, but could not because of their placement in the chronology of world history and divine revelation. You have the privilege to know revelation from God that Abraham did not, that Moses did not; that David did not; that Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel did not; that Daniel did not! Think of it...and then remember the responsibility that it brings.
- G. We have discussed reasons for the parables in general. Now I want you to notice Mark 4:13. It indicates that a basic grasp of the parable of the sower is the starting point for understanding the other parables used in our Lord's teaching. This "first" parable has a kind of "eye opening" function. It is a gateway, by understanding it, to all the other parables. This is because it is a very basic, entry-level lesson. It is not a secret key, but a foundation upon which to build. By understanding and applying this parable, you will demonstrate a basic grasp of the things of God that indicates regeneration.

IV. Expository Preaching and the Parables

- A. It is important to note that we can preach parables expositively.
 - 1. An expository message is an explanation and application of a text of Scripture that is controlled by that text. The text can be long or short; in fact, it can be an entire chapter or a book. Normally, our diet consists of expository messages in a series that walks through an entire book in sequence, part by part.
 - 2. A series of expository messages can take any texts, in this case, the parables. It is expository but not necessarily sequential.

3. Expository messages aim for understanding (thus explanation) and obedience (thus application) in the lives of the hearers.
- B. An entirely different type of message is a topical message. It is concerned with a topic and (if the message is biblical) it draws its teaching on that topic from Scripture. The topic can be something about applying Christian truth in the current culture, or it can be about a theological topic such as "salvation" or "end times" or "creation." We have studied several topical series after this sort. But I believe expository messages should be our main diet.
- C. *This* message is a mixture of the two types of sermons—in the main it is a topical message about all the parables. In the section about Matthew 13:10-17, it is expository because it explains Jesus' words there.
- D. A topical message which uses a text of Scripture as a launching pad, and never returns or explains that text or any other, is not worthy of any Christian church. Sermons must have as their material the Word of God. Otherwise, they are just talks, lectures, or speeches.

A List of the Parables

	Matthew	Mark	Luke
1. Believer as a light/lamp	5:14-16		
2. The eye as lamp of the body	6:22-23		11:33-36
3. The Word of God as lamp		4:21-25	8:16-18
4. Building on the rock	7:24-27		6:46-49
5. The old and the new	9:16-17	2:21-22	5:36-39
6. A house divided	12:22-30	3:22-27	
7. The soils	13:3-9	4:2-9	8:4-8
Explained	13:18-23	4:13-20	8:11-15
8. Wheat and tares	13:24-30		
Explained	13:36-43		
9. Mustard seed	13:31-32	4:30-34	13:18-19
10. Leaven	13:33-35		13:20-21
11. Hidden treasure	13:44		
12. Pearl of great price	13:45-46		
13. Dragnet	13:47-50		

	Matthew	Mark	Luke
14. What defiles the heart	15:10-11	7:14-16	
Explained	15:15-20	7:17-23	
15. Lost sheep	18:12-14		15:3-7
16. Unforgiving servant	18:21-35		
17. Workers in the Vineyard	19:27-20:16		
18. The barren fig tree (1)	21:12-22	11:12-26	
19. Two sons	21:28-32		
20. Wicked vinedressers	21:33-46	12:1-12	20:9-19
21. Wedding feast	22:1-14		
22. The blooming fig tree	24:32-44	13:28-37	21:29-36
23. Faithful and wise servant	24:45-51	13:32-37	12:35-48
24. Wise and Foolish Virgins	25:1-13		
25. Talents	25:14-30		
26. The growing seed		4:26-29	
The parables that appear only in Luke are these:			
27. The blind leading the blind			6:39-42
28. The two debtors			7:36-50
29. Good Samaritan			10:30-37
30. The persistent friend			11:5-13
31. The rich fool			12:13-21
32. The barren fig tree (2)			13:6-9
33. Attending and hosting a dinner			14:7-14
34. The great supper			14:15-24
35. Counting the cost			14:25-35
36. Lost coin			15:8-10
37. Lost son (Prodigal Son)			15:11-32
38. Unjust steward			16:1-13
39. Rich man and Lazarus			16:19-31
40. Unprofitable servants			17:7-10
41. Persistent widow			18:1-8
42. Pharisee and tax collector			18:9-14
43. Delay of the kingdom			19:11-27