

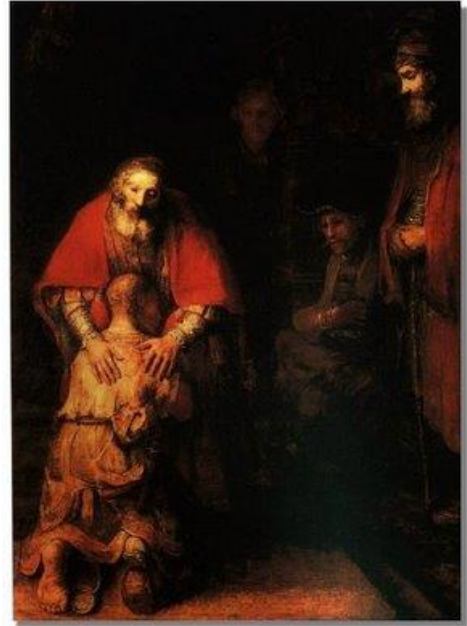
The Parables

Part 1 – Why Parables?

Matthew 13:10-17

A parable is story taken from real life in order to teach a spiritual or moral truth. Jesus used parables to teach about the nature of God's present and future reign. This reign or "kingdom" is wrapped up in the person and work of Jesus Christ. So Jesus used the parables to announce the value of God's Kingdom, describe the citizens of God's Kingdom, and warn of the impending arrival of God's Kingdom.

The parables make up only one-third of the recorded content of Jesus' teaching. When Jesus began to teach in parables the shift was sudden enough for the disciples to ask him, "Why do you teach in parables" (vs. 10). Their curiosity was spurred on at least in part because parables were difficult to understand. "Why," they wondered, "would Jesus willingly make his teaching more challenging to understand?"



Jesus' explanation is remarkable and quite stunning: "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it has not been given..." (vs. 11).

You may remember that Jesus was routinely confronted with hard heartedness and outright hostility. The number of those who remained faithful followers was small compared to the multitudes who periodically gathered to be healed or fed. Add to this the opposition Jesus encountered from many of the religious elites of the day and it is easy to understand why the apostle John wrote, "He came unto his own and his own received him not" (Jn 1:11). Jesus answered his disciple's question by explaining that he taught in parables as 1) an act of judgment upon unbelief, 2) a fulfillment of prophecy and 3) a demonstration of the grace of the gospel.

Main Idea: Jesus taught in parables to add to the blessings upon his own people and to exercise judgment upon the hard-hearted.

Exegetical Outline:

- I. The Purpose of Parables (13:10-17)
 - A. The question from the disciples (vs. 10)
 - B. Jesus' first answer: There are insiders and outsiders (vv. 11-12)
 1. The knowledge given only to some (vs. 11)
 2. More is given to those who believe (vs. 12)
 - C. Jesus' second answer: The parables are a means of judging unbelievers (vv. 13-17)
 1. The guilt of unbelievers (vs. 13)
 2. The punishment of unbelievers (vs. 14-15)
 3. The blessedness of the disciples (vv. 16-17)
 - a. They see and hear the truth (vs. 16)
 - b. The prophets desired to know what the disciples know (vs. 17)

Jesus taught in parables as...

1. An act of judgment upon unbelief.

Vv. 10-12

- Jesus' typical pattern of teaching was a direct approach of propositional statements. He gave to his hearers both straight forward instructions concerning sin and righteousness (i.e. the Sermon on the Mount) and prophetic statements about his coming death and resurrection. So it represented quite a change when he began to teach in cryptic parables which were difficult to decipher. Quite naturally Jesus' disciples desired to know why his teaching changed to a manner which was more difficult to understand (vs. 10).
- Jesus' first answer to the question of his disciples is that it is an exercise of judgment upon the sin of unbelief (vv. 11-12). In his answer Jesus explains that the gospel divides humanity into two groups: those who believe and the hard-hearted who refuse. What is more, Jesus makes it clear that the belief which his disciples possess has been "given to" them. That is grace. At the same time, that grace has not been given to everyone ("but it has not been given to them.").
- This however does not in any way diminish the moral responsibility of the unbeliever for he still acts according the desires of his sinful heart. So Jesus explains that the cryptic property of the parables is meant to judge unbelievers by further veiling from them what they have refused to accept in the first place (vs. 12).

2. A fulfillment of prophecy.

Vv. 13-15

- The people of Israel had specific expectations about what the Messiah and the arrival of God's kingdom would be. Jesus overturned those expectations. And even though extraordinary miracles and the teaching of their own Scriptures attested to Jesus as Messiah they nevertheless refused to believe. So Jesus said that it was upon these contemporary unbelievers that the words of Isaiah were being fulfilled: "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." Just as the people of Israel rejected the truth in Isaiah's day so too will many reject Jesus.

3. A demonstration of the grace of the gospel.

Vv. 16-17

- Parables were a fitting way for Jesus to illustrate the grace of God in redemption. Our belief and understanding depend upon God's grace to us. The reason Jesus' disciples then and now believe and understand the gospel and parables which illustrate it is because it has been given to them.

Theology in Application:

1. Belief proceeds depth of understanding.
2. Believers ought to be deeply grateful to God for his grace.
3. God's sovereignty does not diminish the guilt of the hard-hearted.
4. The call to abandon sin and believe in Jesus should be broadly proclaimed.
5. The consequences of unbelief are terrifying.