

The Purpose of Parables

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[0 : 00] I am going to begin our parable series tonight.

! I am preaching on Jesus' explanation in answer to His disciples of why He taught in parables. And Pastor Tyler assigned these texts to us, and this is a great one just to begin, because before we start digging more into the different parables that Jesus taught, it's important that we understand why He chose to teach in that way and what a parable is.

So, in Matthew chapter 13, verses 10 through 17, let's go ahead and stand as we honor the reading of God's Word together. So, Jesus has just taught a parable, the parable of the sower.

And in verse 10, the disciples came and said to Him, Why do you speak to them in parables? And He answered them, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

[1 : 31] For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

Indeed, in their case, the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says, You will indeed hear, but never understand. And you will indeed see, but never perceive. For this people's hearts has grown dull. And with their eyes they can barely hear. And with their ears, I should say, they can barely hear. And their eyes they have closed. Lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people long to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated? When I was a boy, a little boy, I liked to play tricks and pranks on my two older sisters.

[2 : 47] And it got to the point where my mom had to sit me down to address the problem. And she told me the story of the boy who cried wolf.

You guys remember that story? I'm sure you all probably know it pretty well. If you don't, I'm about to tell it to you. A little shepherd boy became bored watching the sheep of his village, so to amuse himself, he decided that he would play a trick on the villagers.

And he cried out, wolf, wolf. And he chuckled to himself as the villagers poured out of the town to help him, and he enjoyed their dismayed expressions when they realized that they had been tricked.

Though he was warned not to do it again as the villagers went grumbling back to town, the shepherd boy had so much fun tricking the villagers that he decided to play the trick on them again. And he cried out, wolf, wolf. The villagers came running, but this time when they realized there was no wolf, they rebuked the boy sternly saying, don't cry wolf when there is no wolf.

[3 : 59] But the boy just grinned and watched them go back down the hill once more. Later, the boy saw a real wolf prowling around the flock.

Alarmed, he leapt to his feet. He alerted the villagers crying aloud, crying louder than before, wolf, wolf. But this time no one came because they thought the boy was trying to fool them again.

The boy was left to defend the herd from the real wolf with devastating consequences. Later in that story, an old man found the boy weeping in the pasture and told him why no one had come to help him fend off the wolf.

He said, nobody believes a liar, even when he's telling the truth. Another famous fable is the story of the tortoise and the hare.

The moral of that story is that slow and steady wins the race. Most people are familiar with fables like these.

[5 : 04] They are stories primarily aimed at children to teach them to have good morals and to be good people. And I think that some people view Jesus' parables in the same way.

But a fable and a parable are not the same thing. As we begin the series of sermons on Jesus' parables, it's important that we understand the difference between the purpose of Jesus' parables and that it wasn't to communicate some kind of moral truth.

The purpose of it was to communicate spiritual truth and spiritual realities. So I want to take a minute to differentiate a fable from a parable so that we avoid communicating and receiving Jesus' parables in ways that he did not intend.

So here's a definition of a parable. A parable is a practical story, often framed as a simile using like or as, that illustrates and communicates spiritual truths to whom God intends to reveal it.

I'll say that one more time. A parable is a practical story, often framed as a simile, a comparison using like or as, that illustrates and communicates spiritual truth to those whom God intends to reveal it.

[6 : 41] The last part of that definition, to those whom God intends to reveal it, is the focus of my sermon tonight. Whereas the moral of a fable is intended basically for everyone to understand, the spiritual truth communicated in Jesus' parables is only received by some.

And so my main idea for this evening's sermon is that Jesus used parables to reveal and conceal spiritual truth. Jesus used parables to reveal and conceal spiritual truth.

As Jesus' earthly ministry brought him closer to the cross, we read in the Gospels that he began to use more parables as he got closer to his crucifixion.

He used parables to reveal and conceal spiritual truth, and his use of them increased. His method, or this method of teaching, often left unbelievers unsure of what Jesus intended to communicate through the parable that he taught.

Mark 4 records several of Jesus' parables, which he taught to a large crowd of people. And at the conclusion of those parables, Mark records in Mark 4, 33 through 34, with many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it.

[8 : 18] He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything. Now someone might hear that and be tempted to think or say, well, that doesn't seem fair.

Why would Jesus choose to use parables, this form of teaching, that revealed spiritual truth to some, but intentionally concealed those same truths to others?

Jesus' disciples had the same thought and expressed that same concern to Jesus after he told the parable of the sower in Matthew chapter 13.

And Jesus' answer to them communicates two spiritual realities about his purpose for using parables to communicate spiritual truth. Why does this matter?

While a fable communicates moral truth that helps people be a better person, live a better life, a parable contains spiritual truth that has eternal implications.

[9 : 27] A person is not saved based on their being morally good, that their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds. A person is saved by God when he opens their eyes and their ears and their hearts to receive spiritual truth, that they are sinners in need of a Savior, and that it's through that Savior, not their good deeds, that their sins are forgiven and that they are made righteous.

Additionally, as Christians, we must avoid turning Jesus' parables into fables. Like Jesus, we must communicate these realities in ways that demonstrate people's sinful condition and show them that Jesus is their homely hope for salvation.

So, Jesus' parables, one, reveal spiritual truths to those whom God graciously enables to understand it.

So, in his answers to his disciples, this is what we see. Jesus' parables reveal spiritual truths to those whom God graciously enables to understand it. In verse 10, the disciples, again, approach Jesus to seek clarification over his use of parables, which confused them.

We read again in verse 10, then the disciples came and said to him, why do you speak to them in parables? The disciples did not understand why Jesus would tell a parable without providing an explanation at the end of it.

[11 : 04] You would probably be frustrated too. It's like those movies that end without a clear resolution. I hate movies like that. Like the movie Inception.

Maybe you've seen Inception, maybe you haven't. This is a little bit of a spoiler. It's been out for a while, so if you haven't seen it by now, you probably never will. At the end of the movie, you can't tell if the main character is dreaming a happy ending or if he's really experiencing a happy ending in reality.

And so the movie just leaves you kind of guessing what the ending might be. I hate endings like that. The disciples were puzzled by Jesus' decision to not wrap up his parables with a clear explanation of the spiritual truths or the spiritual truth that he intended or that the parable was intended to communicate.

They were asking, in effect, why do you bother saying anything to them at all if they can't understand it? In verse 11, Jesus gives his answer. Again, we read, to you, and I believe this also includes everyone who believes in him, is saved by him, to you, it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

But to them, and I believe this includes all who did not believe or who will not believe in him, it has not been given. Let's lock in on a couple of things that Jesus said in his answer.

[12 : 37] The first is the word translated as secret in the ESV or translated as mystery, mysteries, in other English translations.

The Greek word is *mysteria*. That word was used to describe a mystery or a secret that was only disclosed by initiation.

So you had to be initiated to know the mystery or to have an answer to the secret. When I was in third grade, I went on a field trip with my class and I was sitting next to a good friend of mine on the bus to the place where we were going and I told my friend a joke.

And here's the joke. If two wrongs don't make a right, then what do two rights make? Any guesses on the punchline? Wes? No.

An airplane. I think that was Paul. An airplane. Because of the Wright brothers who made the airplane. Anyhow, he took that joke that I told and he went in a completely different direction with it.

[13 : 50] He said, you know what? We should be the wrong brothers. And so, we came up with a secret handshake and before long, all of our friends wanted to be a member of the wrong brothers.

Not only was there a secret handshake, but to make the group even more exclusive, you had to know how to play black magic. Okay.

And by black magic, I'm not saying that we were, you know, sacrificing animals or throwing things into a cauldron and making some kind of a potion. This was like a guessing game where basically you would tell somebody pick an object and you would tell that object to one wrong brother and then the other wrong brother who didn't know what that object was would come in and you'd kind of say different things.

No, that's not it. No, that's not it. And why it was called black magic was because the thing before what the actual object was, it had to be black.

Okay. So, anyhow, if you want to know more about that later, I can let you know. But that's, but you didn't know how to play it. Everybody thought we were, I don't know, they thought, they didn't think we were magical.

[15 : 05] They just knew there was something. They just couldn't figure it out. But you couldn't know what it was unless you were initiated into the wrong brothers. So, this was hidden knowledge, secrets, mysteries that were only required through, or acquired, I should say, through initiation into the group.

The secrets or mysteries that Jesus referred to were revelations of things previously hidden and unknown. In this case, the secrets or mysteries concerned the kingdom of heaven.

These secrets or mysteries were contained in Old Testament scriptures and they primarily concerned the Messiah, the promised one of God.

It was no secret that God was going to send the Messiah to usher in a kingdom, a great kingdom. But what was a secret or what was a mystery was the kind of Messiah that God would send and how that Messiah would conquer and establish His kingdom.

Most Jews believed that the Messiah would conquer through political strength and military force. At this point in Jewish history, the Jewish nation was under the rule of the Roman Empire and they hated that.

[16 : 32] According to their interpretation of Old Testament scriptures, if Jesus was truly the Messiah, then He must conquer the Roman Empire and establish a Jewish nation in its place.

they were not looking for a Messiah who would conquer instead by living a sinless life and dying a sacrificial death on the cross.

They were looking for a Messiah who would bring material and earthly prosperity to their people, rescuing them from Roman rule. Not a Messiah who would bring them and the nations surrounding them spiritual prosperity, rescuing them from sin, hell, and conquering the kingdom of darkness ruled by Satan, its ruler.

Jesus' kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, was inaugurated on the cross where He was rejected by sinful men and where there He atoned for the sins of His people.

Jesus, the promised Messiah of the Old Testament, now rules and He now reigns in the hearts of those He saves by the indwelling of His Spirit when He calls them from death to life.

[17 : 52] Such is the case until He returns. The secret, the mystery of the kingdom of heaven is that Jesus is the Son of God, the promised Messiah who fulfilled all the promises, all the prophecies concerning Him, the Messiah, in the Old Testament.

all those promises that pointed to Him. Jesus said to the Pharisees in one instance in John 5, 39-40, you search the Scriptures and again, the Scriptures they had were the Old Testament Scriptures, you search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life and it is they that bear witness about Me.

Yet you refuse to come to Me that you may have life. So, one thing you need to understand about Jesus is that He is the interpretive key that unlocks all the mysteries and secrets in Scripture, things concerning our lives, sin, salvation, redemption, and eternity.

Without Him, a person will never know the purpose of their existence. The reality of who He truly is and what that ultimately means comes through His saving us by His grace, opening our eyes and our ears to receive the gift of salvation, initiating us into His kingdom.

I want to read Ephesians 2, 1-10. It's a lengthy passage but an important one for us to look at at this point. Paul here is talking to the Corinthian believers and he begins by talking about who they were before they were saved, before they were initiated into the body of Christ and how that initiation took place.

[19 : 45] And he says, And here's that great phrase, but God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace, you have been saved and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace, you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast.

For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. For those who, like the disciples, trusted that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the promised King, for those to whom God revealed this truth, Jesus' parables were helping them understand and more fully comprehend what kind of King and what kind of kingdom He was ushering in and initiating them into.

Jesus continues in verse 12. He says, For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

[21 : 42] Jesus is not only gracious to save us, but to sanctify us, to give us more knowledge, to give us more understanding, to give us more conviction, as He increasingly transforms us, making us more like Himself.

The person who is truly saved has a desire to know more about the one who has saved them. As we continue to seek Jesus and His kingdom and His righteousness, we desire this world and the things of this world less.

We are like the good soil which Jesus taught in the parable that preceded this answer. The seed of the gospel is implanted in our hearts. It grows and it flourishes as the Holy Spirit waters and nourishes us with spiritual truth which then produces spiritual fruit.

On top of that, up to this point in redemptive history, if you are a Christian, Jesus says, you should consider yourself more blessed than any of the prophets or the righteous people who came before

the coming of God's Son.

That's what He says in verse 16. But blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear. For truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous people long to see what you see and did not see it and to hear what you hear and did not hear it.

[23 : 11] Peter reiterates this truth in 1 Peter 1, 10 through 12. Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preach the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven things into which angels long to look.

People of the Old Testament received prophecies about the coming of a future Savior. We have the complete revelation of God. We have the privilege of seeing in Scripture how the Bible ties together and we are blessed to have the Holy Spirit who continually reveals these truths to us.

God has been gracious not only to save us but to give us the complete revelation found in His Word which also includes explanation of all of the parables that Jesus taught.

As we go through more and more of Jesus' parables and the parable of the sowers the sower in Matthew 13 we'll see more of the understanding the explanation as the disciples were given following His answer to them here about why He preaches in parables.

[24 : 47] Then He went on and gave explanation to them. He told them what the parable meant and then in Matthew 13 51 He asked them have you understood these things? It was not that the disciples were smarter more educated or better than anyone else.

They understood the meaning of the parable because Jesus revealed the meaning the truth to them. Christian if God has saved you He has not only blessed you with salvation but He's given you the Bible and He's given you its author the Holy Spirit who lives in you to explain to interpret and to apply these truths to your life.

The parables of Jesus provide vivid illustrations that help us better comprehend deep spiritual truths. You know I've heard the parable of the prodigal son many times but recently I purchased a book called The Surprising Genius of Jesus written by Peter Williams and even though I still understand the main point of that parable that wasn't new information it was all these other things about the story that go back into Old Testament scriptures and He's bringing all of these things out and you just read this small book it's not very big I recommend that you read it and you're just flabbergasted you're just amazed by how great of a storyteller Jesus was.

So we who are in Christ have been enabled to understand the parables that Jesus taught because He has given us understanding.

But secondly Jesus addresses another group here in His answer. Jesus' parables also conceal spiritual truths to those who reject Him.

[26 : 50] So while He chooses to reveal the purpose and the meaning of parables to some we also read here that Jesus' parables conceal spiritual truths to those who reject Him.

Now by conceal I don't mean and I don't think that this is what Jesus meant that in some way He was trying to keep unsaved people from salvation.

The Bible says that we are all born sinful and we're all born spiritually dead. Left to ourselves none of us seeks God. God in His grace chooses to save some but not all.

And if you think that that's not fair then you need to understand that your definition of fairness is corrupted by your sinfulness. If God were fair He'd give us what we deserve all of us which is an eternity in hell for rejecting Him.

We don't know whom God will save but we know that He does save. And in the case of many Jesus said they will be left to pursue their sin which they love more than Him.

[28 : 02] In verse 13 again He says this is why I speak to them in parables because seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear nor do they understand. Jesus follows that statement by quoting Isaiah chapter 6 where right after the prophets commissioning God told Isaiah that He would preach but nobody would listen to Him.

In verses 14 and 16 Jesus says indeed in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says you will indeed hear but never understand and you will indeed see but never perceive for this people this people's heart has grown dull and with their ears they can barely hear and their eyes they have

closed lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn and I would heal them.

Isaiah wrote during a time when God's judgment against Israel's many sins was coming the people had turned away from God King Uzziah's death only further plunged the nation into darkness as they pursued sinfulness they were on the verge of destruction Babylon was coming as God's instrument to discipline his people severely yet they refused to listen to him and turned to him and humbly acknowledged their need for God's help and for God's mercy because they chose to continually ignore God rejecting him and his word God judiciously locked them into their unbelief so that they would fear his judgment likewise the Jews living in Jesus' day saw him perform many miracles they heard him teach with authority they were warned of coming judgment for refusing him as their

Messiah but they still rejected him and they rejected his word so Jesus judiciously concealed the meaning of his parables because they rejected him and truly they had no desire to learn the meaning of his parables from him anyways makes me think of my eighth grade math class I hate math so you know I hate movies that don't have a clear ending at the end I also hate math the older I got as a student the more difficult my math classes were and the more I didn't see how any of the things that they were teaching us in math could be used in my life what do I need algebra for right I just couldn't understand that and so I pretty much quit paying attention in math class

I didn't ask questions I didn't seek a tutor I didn't stay after class to ask my teacher if she could help me she would have but I didn't ask her that I had no desire to learn math needless to say I didn't get a good grade on my report card and none of my excuses persuaded my parents that I wasn't at fault for my poor grade my teacher wasn't concealing anything from me that I didn't really want to learn she wasn't forcing me to get a bad grade I earned it I earned that bad grade and I had to bear the consequences that came with it in a similar way those who heard Jesus' parables didn't really want to understand them they didn't really have any interest in the spiritual truth that was contained within them Matthew doesn't record anyone from that large crowd that

[31 : 55] Jesus told this parable to coming to Jesus afterward and saying hey what did that mean what were you trying to teach us what were you trying to tell us only his disciples asked that question and even in that group there was Judas who ultimately betrayed Jesus he heard the parable he heard Jesus' explanation of it but he didn't truly believe it or apply the truths of it to his life and I hope that isn't the case for you I hope that you are eager to not only understand the parables Jesus taught but everything else that Jesus taught and apply those truths to your life so how should we adjust our lives concerning these truths that we've just heard from God's word I think it's this if you truly know Jesus you will desire to comprehend and apply the teachings found within his parables if you truly know

Jesus you will desire to comprehend and apply the teachings found within his parables so instead of having application questions for you tonight I'm going to provide you with three I think simple but helpful guidelines that you should use when you're trying to understand seek comprehension of Jesus parables and know how he desires for you to apply that meaning to your life the first is determine to determine the scope of the spiritual truth presented determine the scope of the spiritual truth presented sometimes a parable is preceded by some introductory words that provide context for example Jesus would sometimes begin a parable with a statement like this this is what the kingdom of heaven is like and so you know that that parable is explaining what what the kingdom of heaven is like another example is the parable of the pharisee and the tax collector that parable begins with this statement he

Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt who's that parable addressed to those who think that they're righteous and who treat others with contempt so look for those introductory statements to help you understand who the parable is directed to and what the situation was that prompted Jesus to share it the next helpful guideline distinguish the meat of the parable from the sides I so I've told you a couple things that I hate here's something that I love besides Jesus he's great green bean casserole man I love green bean casserole and at Thanksgiving time I am looking to pile the green bean casserole on my plate but green bean casserole is not the main dish it's not the main course of Thanksgiving is it it's the turkey so not every detail in Jesus' parables contains a deep spiritual meaning Jesus provides some details to enhance the realism of the story sometimes those details do have meaning like in the parable of the prodigal son but even those details ultimately are rooted in the

main course the main principle that he is teaching but for instance you could let's look at the parable of the hidden treasure very short parable that Jesus told about you know a man uncovers a hidden treasure in a field and he goes and he sells everything that he has to buy that field and the treasure within it so this would be a wrong way to handle that parable you could focus on like the field or you could focus on the unnamed person who buried the treasure in the field in the first place and you could go off on these rabbit trails about why they would do that and who this person might be that doesn't matter that's not the point of the parable the point of the parable is that Jesus is the treasure who is worthy and who is worth more than anything in this world who we must forsake all things in order to seek and to possess and then thirdly discern a parable's meaning by comparing it with other scriptures discern a parable's meaning by comparing it with other scriptures this is a basic!

[36 : 39] principle for Bible study use scripture to interpret scripture Jesus parables will never contradict the rest of the Bible Jesus parables illuminate and they illustrate the doctrinal truths that are taught throughout the Bible and once you know the meaning of the parable then I encourage you look to those other scriptures that teach the same thing and if you do that that's when it gets really fun that's when it gets really enjoyable because you see how brilliant Jesus is truly the son of God no one like him truly God truly man the savior of sinners!

And so I hope that as we go through these series of parables that not only will we all seek to comprehend but that we'll all seek to apply these deep rich eternal spiritual truths to our lives let's pray Lord we thank you that you have been gracious to save sinners Lord we're thankful that you have been gracious to open our eyes and our ears and our hearts to receive knowledge and truth from you that otherwise Lord we wouldn't be able to discover on our own God I pray that as we go through this series of sermons on your parables Lord that you will help us to comprehend in more deeper and fuller ways these spiritual realities these spiritual truths that you taught and not only would we comprehend them Lord but I pray that your spirit would be at work in our lives to help us apply them

God I pray that in doing so you will be pleased by what results that we would be people of your word and that we would be eager to share with believer and unbeliever alike the amazing truths that are contained within your word and we ask these things in Jesus name Amen