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**The Parables of Jesus**

*"The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them..." Matthew 13:10-13*

**Key verses:** Isaiah 6:9; Matthew 13; Mark 4:10-12, 33; Luke 8:10; 15-21

**Key personalities:** Jesus, and the Disciples.

**Timeline:** The God of Eternity; He enters as a Man, being fully God and fully Man, walks this earth as our Lead, 28-29 A.D.

What is a Parable? The word 'parable' comes from the Greek word *parabole*; it means "to throw alongside (the word 'ball' comes from this). Parables use everyday objects to teach deeper philosophical truths which most people might otherwise have a very hard time understanding. Jesus uses parables to teach more profound Divine eternal matters by which non-Christians cannot comprehend. He makes extraordinary out of the ordinary by using common daily happenings to help people along in understanding. By giving us something that we already know--daily occurrences--He helps to reexamine and understand the Truth with a transformed mind and faith. Many people do not look beyond what is around them; we need help to look beyond. A parable does not hide the lesson; rather, it teaches in such a way that it can be grasped better by those who are open to the understanding required for learning and application. It is the intangible wrapped in the tangible. It is beyond logic, metaphor, allegory, or abstract reasoning; it is stimulating the person's interest to open his/her eyes and ears and engaging his mind to seek truth, rather than himself, as a means of grasping the lesson God has for him (Matt. 13:52; Rom. 12:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:7 ).

**Key Happenings:** Jesus conceals truth for us, not 'from' us!

There are two main types of parables in the New Testament--Teaching Parables and Kingdom Parables. Kingdom Parables tell us about the value, veracity, and necessity of the Gospel. Like the parable of the Sower, where the seed is the Gospel, and it is about how people respond to Christ's gift and call. Usually, Jesus tells us with the proclamation: *the Kingdom of God is at hand or the Kingdom of Heaven/God is like*. He then gives a call to repent or an illustration of what and why that is. Teaching parables challenged the Disciples and believers to discipleship and commitment by instruction as found in the Parables of the *Rich Fool* and the *Unjust Steward* in Luke about the coming Judgment like the Barren Fig Tree (Mark 1: 14-15; Luke.12: 16-20;13:6-9; 16:1-8).

In these parables, Jesus explains the value of His Kingdom and the foolishness of chasing after the things of the world. His Kingdom is what life is all about; yet, we tend to wrongly preoccupy ourselves with life in a dysfunctional way. Parables help us come to the point where these teachings of our Lord will make a profound difference.

**List of Parables:** (Taken from Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Nashville, Tennessee, 2003.)

1. The speck and the log, Matt 7:1-6; Luke 6:37-43	27. The narrow gate, Matt 7:14; Luke 13:24
2. The two houses, Matt 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-49	28. The guests, Luke 14:7-11
3. Children in the marketplace, Matt 11:16-19; Luke 7:32	29. The great banquet, Matt 22:2-9; Luke 14:16-23
4. The two debtors, Luke 7:41	30. The wedding clothes, Matt 22:10-14
5. The unclean spirit, Matt 12:43-45; Luke 11:24-26	31. The tower, Luke 14:28-30
6. The rich man's meditation, Luke 12:16-21	32. The king going to war, Luke 14:31
7. The barren fig tree, Luke 13:6-9	33. The lost sheep, Matt 18:12-13; Luke 15:4-7
8. The sower, Matt 13; 3-8; Mark 4:3-8; Luke 8:5-8	34. The lost coin, Luke 15:8-9

9. The tares, Matt 13:24–30	35. The prodigal son, Luke 15:11–32
10. The seed, Mark 4:20	36. The unjust steward, Luke 16:1–9
11. The grain of mustard seed, Matt 13:31–32; Mark 4:31–32; Luke 13:19	37. The rich man and Lazarus, Luke 16:19–31
12. The leaven, Matt 13:33; Luke 13:21	38. The slave's duty, Luke 17:7–10
13. The lamp, Matt 5:15; Mark 4:21; Luke 8:16; 11:33	39. Laborers in the vineyard, Matt 20:1–16
14. The dragnet, Matt 13:47–48	40. The talents, Matt 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27
15. The hidden treasure, Matt 13:44	41. The importunate widow, Luke 18:2–5
16. Pearl of great value, Matt 13:45–46	42. The Pharisee and tax-gatherer, Luke 18:10–14
17. The householder, Matt 13:52	43. The two sons, Matt 21:28
18. The marriage, Matt 9:15; Mark 2:19–20; Luke 5:34–35	44. The wicked vine-growers, Matt 21:33–43; Mark 12:1–9; Luke 20:9–15
19. The patched garment, Matt 9:16; Mark 2:21; Luke 5:36	45. The fig tree, Matt 24:32; Mark 13:28; Luke 21:29–30
20. The wine bottles, Matt 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37	46. The watching slave, Matt 24:43; Luke 12:39
21. The harvest, Matt 9:37; Luke 10:2	47. The man on a journey, Mark 13:34
22. The opponent, Matt 5:25; Luke 12:58	48. Character of two slaves, Matt 24:45–51; Luke 12:42–46
23. Two insolvent debtors, Matt 18:23–35	49. The ten virgins, Matt 25:1–12
24. The Good Samaritan, Luke 10:30–37	50. The watching slaves, Luke 12:36–38
25. The three loaves, Luke 11:5–8	51. The vine and branches, John 15:1–6
26. The good shepherd, John 10:1–16	

Parables about the Kingdom of Heaven are also how God works both in the Universe and in our hearts. These parables help us to see, to internalize and to apply truth--the Truth of God's most precious Word. We, as followers of Christ, do not need to search for Truth, since we have it already. As such, we are required to learn it, preserve it, study it, apply it, and teach it to others. We are to realize our privilege of having the Truth to study, learn, grow, and proclaim, because it has been revealed to us. We have the Pearl of Great Price; let us learn it and live it! Let us display it with honor and glory regardless of the sacrifice, because our Treasure is far more valuable than anything we could ever possibly give up (John 14:6; 16:13; 17:17)!

- Speaking in parables was not a new teaching tool for Jesus to use; in fact, it was a common literary and speaking device for Greek Philosophers, as well as Rabbis, in Jesus' time to communicate the point. Sometimes, teachers used the term *mysteria*, as in the Matthew 13 passage, or riddles to reference for something being clear with hindsight what was unclear with foresight. Thus, when the truth was taught, when Jesus was foretelling His death, the point was clearly given, but few chose to understand it. The truth became very clear after the event occurred.
- Parables also contain comparisons and narratives with central points that are enlightening to those who avail themselves to it and its truth. It is concealed from those who do not believe, who refuse to see or hear. This is so with the Second Coming of Christ; Matthew 24 and 2 Peter make the concept clear and when it comes about, it will be fully realized. We are the ones that cloud it up with our non-sequitur theories that come from clever minds devoid of Scriptural Truth.
- Jesus, as well as other gifted teachers in Scripture, used parables as instruments of judgment, because people refuse to listen to God! It also gives credence in an apologetic fashion as strong evidence that these were Jesus' authentic teachings--not things made up centuries later--as only first century Jewish Palestine used such literary devices. Such devices were not used in centuries hence!
- There are two main conceptions on what and why Jesus uses parables in edifying and instructing us. One, He uses simple everyday illustrations, allegories, stories, and word pictures that He pointed to, showcasing an illustration that people could understand and relate to. Second, in the illustration

dwells a layered meaning-like an onion, if you will--that has a depth to it. His main reason? People, for the most part, are 'concrete' thinkers. We tend to look for the simplest, easiest meaning to mentally digest solution and rarely seek a deeper meaning or application.

- However, to grow in faith, we need to grow beyond ourselves, our perception, and our assumptions in order to grasp the true Truths Christ has for us. Thus, for us to grow in faith and character, we must ponder what and how we can get there--by seeking the deeper meaning and application.
- We must begin seeking, *what is Jesus saying here, what is He saying to me?* These truths can be had when one is ready. A parable's more profound meaning can be hidden from those who would not comprehend, who were not ready to make that truth real and relevant in one's life. The truth can be hidden from those who refuse to grow beyond what their fears and pride will allow. Yet, Jesus gives us the ability to peel the layers off as we realize and internalize them.
- Isaiah's contemporaries refused to listen to the signs of the times. They did not recognize that their sins and willful disobedience to God would lead them, as well as the next two generations, into captivity. Even though every prophecy of Isaiah came true, they denounced his current prophecy and refused to listen. Many today do the same with the Gospel, and many Christians do the same with the Word. We have to be disciples who are willing to hear, to bend our will down, so He remains in control, and so we remain on His path. God gives us the ability to listen and to understand, as well as the ability to respond (Isaiah 6:9-10).

**Does Jesus Hide the Truth?** Jesus speaks in parables, not to hide the wisdom, but to explain the powerful Truth in a way that it can be easier to grasp. There are no hidden meanings or codes in Jesus' words. Remember, parables are illustrations that made perfect sense to the audience when first given; it may require more effort for us because we are 2000 years culturally removed, but His Truth is there, and it is clear! The clarity lies in the various levels of our spiritual development and employment of that truth. The more mature we are, the more we can discover and handle. Just like math, the more we study and learn, the more we can understand and do with it! Just like music, the more we practice the better we get and a better blessing we are to those around us (Isaiah 6:9; Mark 4:11-12; Luke 8:10).

**What causes us not to understand Parables?** First off, the parables will confound those who are not His, those who fight the way of the Way, those who refuse God's love and grace; this ignorance causes them to appear more silly, more foolish. The Matthew 13 passages gives us a hint with the phrase *hidden treasure*; God does not intentionally hide His Word from us. It is actually clearly proclaimed; we just fail to recognize it. What causes the truth to be hidden? It is because we cannot see the value. It is hidden by our own pride, arrogance, busyness, hurts, expectations, and the tyranny of what we think is important. Even what we think is valuable is not always recognized. A diamond looks like broken glass unless you know what a diamond is; a fake diamond will fool anyone who does not know what a real diamond looks like. His Truth looks like gibberish to a fool or to a hardened heart, but not to one who has the Holy Spirit within him/her.

In Jesus time, many of the people could not get beyond the literal meaning of Jesus' teachings; they wanted a show or easy *belief-ism* or just 'help for today with no hope for tomorrow'. This thinking leaves behind a great spiritual substance that would last for eternity for something that is fleeting, or blocked by our hurt feelings or the complaint that He did not meet their expectations. So, they turned off their brains and chose to argue instead of understanding or seeking help in understanding, just like so many of us do today. Of course, the Holy Spirit is the Great Instructor, too. He prepares and guides those who are His (John 6:52-71; 16:13).

**Key Takeaway:** Christianity is not just about the mechanics of our spiritual formation, rather it is a journey of our faith development and deployment as we encounter more of Christ through our learning and discoveries from His Word. We learn from our discipleship in Him and from other encounters with our Lord. We grow in our knowledge and faith but we are not always ready for the deeper truths until we understand the basics and foundations. There are many truths and precepts in God's Word to be

discovered and applied into our lives and churches. I have been deeply studying God's Word for over 35 years, and I find something new every day. This does not mean that the Word is new, nor does it mean that something has "just appeared" or that I change the meaning to fit my current view. Instead, my new discoveries or rediscoveries come from deeper thinking upon the precept, and this comes only as I grow in faith and understanding the Word in a more profound manner. Why is this? Sometimes, we are not ready for the Truths, or we have forgotten, and, as we grow, we discover more. We are able to discover and rediscover and better understand; we are better able to apply what He has for us and our church. So, Jesus teaches us in a way that illustrates a point that will showcase a more profound point when we are ready for it.

**The Call to the Church?** We have to ask the questions, and we must present a real, genuine answer to our Lord and to others around us. As leaders, is our faith in Christ authentic; is it making a difference? Or, are we the fakers, the pretenders, the people who cause strife and dysfunction in His Church instead of glorifying Him?

### **Questions to Ponder**

1. What can cause you to chase after the things of the world?
2. Why do you suppose that Jesus conceals truth for us, not 'from' us?
3. How can the use everyday objects and other people's life illustrations help teach deeper philosophical truths?
4. Why do you think Jesus uses parables? What are other ways to teach profound, eternal truths?
5. What can help you nudge a deeper thinking process to reexamine your views and what is real and truth of a transformed mind and faith?
6. What can you do to check and see if your faith is real? How can you present a real, genuine answer to our Lord and to others around us?
7. How is your faith in Christ authentic; making a difference?
8. What happens when we become the faker, the pretender, the person who causes strife and dysfunction in His Church instead of glorifying Him?
9. How does your heart receive God's Word? When you are doing your devotions, are you only looking to yourselves or is it all about Christ as LORD?
10. As Children of Christ, why do, we tend to wrongly preoccupy ourselves with life in a dysfunctional way? How have you seen this? What can you do to prevent this?
11. What do you need to do to stimulate interest to engage your heart and mind to seek truth, rather than the distractions of life in the world?
12. Are you open to the understanding required for learning and application of God's Word? If not, why not? What is in the way? What can you do? What can your church do?