

Jesus in his own words, Introduction

⁹ He said, "Go and tell this people:
" 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding;
be ever seeing, but never perceiving.'

¹⁰ Make the heart of this people calloused;
make their ears dull
and close their eyes. [a]
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed."

Isaiah, Chapter 9

¹⁰The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

¹¹He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹²Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ¹³This is why I speak to them in parables:

"Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand. ¹⁴In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

" 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

¹⁵For 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.' [a] ¹⁶But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. ¹⁷For 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.

Matthew 13:10-17

1. Jesus frequently taught using parables- cf. **Mt 13:1-3, 13:34-35**

a. About 1/3rd of his teaching comes to us in parables, about 1/3rd in the Sermon on the Mount, and the rest during various recorded conversations.

b. Much of his most remembered teachings come to us from the parables.

2. So then....

- a. What is a "parable"?
- b. Why did Jesus teach in parables?
- c. What are they about?
- d. How should we interpret them?

I. What is a parable?

A. THE WORD "PARABLE"...

1. Is a transliteration of the Greek "**parabole**" (para-bow-LAY)
2. Means "to place beside, to cast alongside"
3. As defined by Vine's Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words, it "**signifies a placing of one thing beside another with a view to comparison**"
4. Wiersbe's description of a parable...
 - a. As "**a story that places one thing beside another for the purpose of teaching**"
 - b. "**It puts the known next to the unknown so that we may learn**"
5. A parable can usually be identified by the use of the word "**like**" - cf. **Mt 13:31,33**

B. AS USED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, A PARABLE...

1. Is usually a story or narrative drawn from nature or human circumstances
2. From which spiritual lessons can be made by comparison
-- A common definition of a parable is "**an earthly story with a heavenly meaning**"

II. Why Jesus used parables

A. THE PRIMARY PURPOSE WAS TO "CONCEAL"...

1. Jesus began speaking in parables because of the hardness of many people's hearts - cf. **Mt 13:10-17**
 - a. The disciples' attitude was such that they were blessed to learn "**the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**" - **Mt 13:10-12,16-17**
 - b. But because of the hard hearts of many in the multitude, Jesus began speaking to them in parables - **Mt 13:13-15**;
cf. **Mk 4:10-12**
 - c. He would then explain the parables in private to His

disciples - **Mk 4:33-34**

2. By resorting to parables, Jesus effectively separated the truth-seekers from the curiosity-seekers!
 - a. Those seeking the truth would say "Explain to us the parable..." - **Mt 13:36**
 - b. Whereas the simply curious could easily be sent away
3. Indeed, Jesus used parables to carry out Divine judgement...
- cf. **Mt 13:12**
 - a. **"For whoever has (a good heart, listening ears), to him more will be given, and he will have abundance (by virtue of the parable being explained)"**
 - b. **"But whoever does not have (a good heart, listening ears), even what he has will be taken away from him (by virtue of being sent away with the multitude)"**

B. BUT ANOTHER PURPOSE WAS TO "REVEAL"...

1. Even though the primary purpose in telling parables was to conceal the **"mysteries of the kingdom of heaven"** from the multitude!
 - a. For once the disciples understood the basic meaning of the parables...
 - b. ...the comparison of the "known" (earthly) truths with the "unknown" (heavenly) truths would shed further light on the unknown
2. Therefore, with the help of the Lord's explanation of His parables we can learn more about **"the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven"** - cf. **Mt 13:34-35**

III. What are the parables about?

A. THE GENERAL THEME IS "THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN"...

1. As suggested by **Mt 13:11**
2. As illustrated with several parables, which all start with **"The kingdom of heaven is like..."** - **Mt 13:24,31,33,44,45,47**
3. Indeed, **"the kingdom of heaven"** was the theme of...
 - a. Jesus' itinerant ministry - **Mt 4:17,23**
 - b. His sermon on the mount - **Mt 5:3,10,19-20; 6:10,33; 7:21**

B. THREE "SUB-THEMES" ARE STRESSED IN THE PARABLES...

1. **The character of the KINGDOM** - for example...
 - a. The Parable of the Mustard Seed
 - b. The Parable of the Leaven
 - c. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

- d. The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price
- 2. **The character of the KING** - for example...
 - a. The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard
 - b. The Parable of the Lost Son
- 3. **The character of the KING'S SUBJECTS** - for example...
 - a. The Parable of the Good Samaritan
 - b. The Parable of the Persistent Widow

IV. How can we understand the parables?

A. THERE ARE TWO EXTREMES TO AVOID...

- 1. Seeking to find some spiritual truth in every little detail
- 2. Saying that there is only ONE spiritual truth in each parable

B. SOME GUIDELINES FOR PROPER INTERPRETATION...

- 1. Learn from the explanations Jesus gave in those parables He explained
 - a. Understanding the parable of the sower helps us to understand other parables - **Mk 4:13**
 - b. Jesus therefore went on to explain that parable...
- 2. Look for the CENTRAL truth of the parable, making sure that any other truths gleaned from the parable are in harmony with it
- 3. Consider carefully the CONTEXT of Jesus words...
 - a. Looking for an introduction or an application which may give insight
 - b. As supplied by either the Lord Himself, or His inspired writers
- 4. Don't use the parables to formulate new doctrine
 - a. Remember, parables were originally told to conceal, so they are not always that clear in their meaning
 - b. Therefore don't try to build a case for a doctrine based solely on a parable

CONCLUSION

- 1. Following these sensible guidelines to interpreting the Parables of Jesus, we can look forward to the joy of understanding more fully "**the mysteries**" or revealed truths of the kingdom of heaven
- 2. As we get into the parables themselves, I hope that we will appreciate how blessed we are to live in an age when people who have a desire to learn about the kingdom can do so:

"But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." - Mt 13:16-17

3. What we are about to study in these parables concern things which Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and many others looked forward to, but did not fully understand in their lifetime!
4. Yet these **"mysteries of the kingdom of heaven"** (Mt 13:11), containing **"things kept secret from the foundation of the world"** (Mt 13:35), are now being made known through the preaching of the gospel of Christ:

"Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began"

"but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith;"

- Ro 16:25-26