

The Purpose of Parables

Mark 4:10-12

Pastor James Barbouletos, August 12, 2018

Look with me to Mark chapter 4. I know we did our reading in verse 10, but I'd like to read ... Let's back up and begin our reading in verse 1 just to get a little bit of a context of what's going on. I know it's hard just jumping right in the middle of a book. And so, let's begin and backup into verse 1 of Mark chapter 4. Mark 4:1, Mark writes.

1 Again He [being Jesus] began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in on it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. 2 And He was teaching them many things in parables, and in His teaching, He said to them: 3 "Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 And the other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." 9 And He said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

10 And when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parables. 11 And He said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, 12 so that 'they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.'"

As we begin, let's bow together in a word of prayer. Lord, this is Your Word. We thank you Lord, for giving it to us. For, as Your Word says, in it is contained all that we need for life and godliness. I pray Lord, that You would bless the preaching of Your Word. Lord, I pray for all who are listening that they would hear and receive Your Word gladly and know how to apply it to their life for Your glory. We pray that You would be glorified in all things in Jesus' name, amen.

Well, beginning in Mark chapter 4, we find Jesus in a familiar place. He is preaching and He is teaching. And Mark notes that He is around the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee was a great place to preach because oftentimes when Jesus would go into the towns, the towns would get crowded. He'd be in a house and the house would get packed. He would go out into the streets, and the marketplaces would get packed. And so, He would often leave and go to the Sea of Galilee because it formed an excellent amphitheatre. Hundreds or even thousands of people could gather. It would be so crowded that He Himself would get onto a boat, and He would preach so that many could hear Him, and that He could preach freely. And so, this is what we see.

Mark notes that Jesus goes and that there is a very large crowd that has been gathered about Him. We're not told how long the Lord preached from the boat, but it is clear that it has been a full day rich of instruction and teaching. And Mark - he records the parable of the sower, but it is likely that He, Jesus preached many different parables that day. Because Mark says that He taught them many things in parables.

So, this is just the one that Mark records, but it is likely that He taught them over and over and over again in parables. And at the very end in verse 9, seemingly to close His teaching as He often does, the Lord Jesus says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

It had been a busy day in fact, for the Lord. Earlier, Mark records that the Lord had an interaction with the Pharisees, and they were grappling about where Jesus' authority came from. They were arguing that it came from Satan. He was arguing it came from God. And so, it had been a busy day for Jesus and His disciples.

But at the end, as He says, "He who has an ear, let him hear." I can't help but wonder if this struck His disciples. You know, they're hearing and they're supposed to be the inner circle and they must've thought, "You know, what does this mean? Why is Jesus teaching this way? Why doesn't He just teach plainly?"

So, they go home and they enter a house as they often did. Later that evening when they're alone with the Lord, they ask Him. Verse 10, it says, "And when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about parables." Mark here notes also that it's not just the 12 disciples, it's a group of also close followers. So, there's a group with them together.

So, they ask Him about it, and they often did that. This was a common thing where Jesus would teach during the day, and if there were things that they didn't understand, in the evening, they'd say, "Lord, explain this to us," and He always did. Basically, they ask Him two main questions that we see. The first is, "Lord, why do you teach in parables?" And the second is, "What does the parable of the sower mean?" That's not recorded, but it's by implication in verse 13. Because then He says, "You don't understand this parable. If you don't understand the parable of the sower, how are you going to understand any of the other parables?" And so, He goes on to explain it.

But for our purposes this morning, we're just going to focus on the first question that they ask Him. Which is, "Why does the Lord teach in parables?" What is the purpose of parables? What do they mean for us as Christians in 2018?

Well, first, it's good to define our terms. What is a parable in the first place? Many of you know this, but we often don't use the word "parable" in our vernacular, I mean, I don't know how often in Canada. If you walk around saying, "Oh, I was considering this parable" and using that term, and we don't use it very often. So, what is a parable? Usually, the only time you use the word is in a church setting or a Bible study.

Well, a parable is simply this. It's a short story using common everyday circumstances or examples which illustrate a deeper spiritual truth. A parable is a short story using everyday

examples or circumstances to illustrate a deeper spiritual truth. And parables were a very common way of teaching in the ancient Near East and even the Far East. And we see examples of parables being used both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. So, Jesus teaching in parables wasn't some radical thing, some innovative way of teaching. It was a common way to teach.

Although parables often made it easy for the common person to understand, by common I don't mean simple. I just mean you don't need a PhD, you don't need to be an elite scholar to figure it out. A parable was so that your farmers or merchants or businessmen could understand spiritual truth simply. Parables made it easy, but they could also be very mysterious unless you understood its meaning. Unless the meaning was unlocked, then sometimes it could be a mystery, a puzzle.

So, they ask Him, “What does it mean?” Because the disciples knew that Jesus’ teaching was very important and they wanted to understand it. They wanted to understand it, but also, they understood and recognized that many of the people on the shore wouldn't have understood it. I mean, they didn't consider themselves to be the best of the best, but they'd spent the most time with Jesus. And so, they may have been thinking, “You know, if we're not getting it, how is everyone else getting it? And why is Jesus teaching this way?” And so, sometime later, maybe they're sitting by the fire or eating, they say, “Lord, why do You teach in parables anyway?”

In His response, the Lord gives four reasons. Scripture provides us with four reasons. So, this morning we'll look at four particular purposes of why Jesus taught in parables. Four particular purposes why Jesus taught in parables.

The first one is this: Jesus taught in parables to give divine instruction. Jesus taught in parables to give divine instruction. He answers their question in verse 11. He says, “To you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God.” The primary reason that Jesus spoke in parables was to give us divine instruction, and Jesus could do that because He's the Son of God. So, He has the ability to give us direct divine instruction; to give His followers instruction about the Kingdom of God and what it was like. And this is what parables did. They explained spiritual truths in a common way so that everybody could understand. It wasn't just for the elite scholars, it was for the everyday man, because that's what God wants. He wants all people to be able to understand the truths of the Kingdom of God clearly.

So, the Lord tells them, “To you has been given the secrets.” And the Greek word for secret is *mysterion*. And it's where we get our English word “mystery”, *mysterion* - mystery. In fact, some of your versions may translate this term “mystery”. But the Greek doesn't really reflect the same idea of mystery as maybe you and I understand in the English. You know, when we think of the word mystery, we think of some sort of riddle or problem that you have to kind of piece clues together to figure out. Or maybe something that is impossible to understand. And so, we say it's a mystery. “I don't know what happened to it. It's a mystery. We can't figure it out.” You piece clues together.

In fact, when my newest daughter was born in February, kind of as a gift, I bought my older daughters some Nancy Drew mystery books. I don't know if you remember those classics.

They're great. And so, we enjoyed reading them. Step by step Nancy Drew, she pieces the clues together, one place and finds another clue somewhere else. And then finally pieces this mystery together to figure out the puzzle.

Well, that's how we understand mystery, but this is not what Jesus' meaning is here. Really, *mysterion*, a better way to understand it is "secret". It means "to reveal something that was previously unknown but now is being revealed". It's something that even with all the different clues, you couldn't have figured out unless it was told to you.

To help understand this, one scholar writes this:

Although some translate *mysterion* as "mystery", it does not mean that it is inherently hard to understand. It is better translated "secret" since it is always used to describe privileged information that is not hard to grasp after it has been explained. The word denotes content or information which has not been known before, but which has now been revealed to a specific group. In Scripture, this word denotes the secret thoughts, plans and dispensations of God that are hidden from human reason and must be revealed to those in whom they are intended. The secret is proclaimed to all, but only those who have faith can really understand it.

So, Jesus is saying, it's not about piecing clues together to try to figure it out; you listen to one parable here and take a clue and then later on you'll hear another parable, and take that clue, and then ultimately be able to figure out the mystery. What He's telling them is, "I teach in parables to reveal to you divine instruction about the Kingdom of God, new information that you've never heard before that I am telling you."

I think a good illustration of this is seen in the book of Daniel when King Nebuchadnezzar has his dream. You know that story. He has his dream and there's a big statue and he doesn't know what it means, and he's really troubled by it. And so, he calls in all of his guys and the satraps and all the enchanters and all those things and tells them the dream. And they have no idea. They can't figure it out. And then he knows about this man named Daniel who is a servant of the Lord and that he's able to interpret dreams.

So, he calls him in, and he wants him to figure out "What is this mystery? What is this secret of my dream?" And I'll just read it to you. You don't need to turn there. This is in Daniel 2. Daniel stands before King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel records:

26 The king said to Daniel, whose name was Belshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?" 27 And Daniel answered the king and said, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians or astrologers can show the king the mystery that the king has asked, 28 but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and visions of your head as you lay in bed are these:"

And he goes on to explain. In other words, "This is just a secret that's been revealed to you King Nebuchadnezzar. You couldn't have pieced this together. It's no surprise to me that all of your

best scholars and religious thinkers couldn't figure it out, because this is something new. God has revealed something to you, and I'm not smart enough to figure it out. The only way I can tell you is because God has revealed the secret to me.”

In fact, the word “secret” here in the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, it's *mysterion*, it's the same word. So, basically all it is, is this new information about the Kingdom of God that's been revealed. This is what the Lord is telling His disciples. The reason He taught in parables was to reveal to them previously unknown truths about God and His kingdom.

Now, what is the secret that the Lord is referring to? Well, many people have guessed about the secret. Some have speculated that the secret of the Kingdom of God is that the Messiah was going to be a lowly person and humble, or that He was going to usher in some secret kingdom; that it wasn't going to be a political kingdom, that it was going to be a religious kingdom in the beginning.

But the Lord doesn't tell us the specific secret. And basically, I'm inclined to think that it's basically all of the information given to us in all the parables. I mean, what do we learn? When you read Scripture, what is the truth that the parables convey? All sorts of things. The parables of Christ tell us why people really believe in the Gospel, why people don't believe in the Gospel. They teach us the value of the Kingdom of God, and they teach us about the costs of true discipleship that believers are willing to pay to enter. They tell us about the foolishness of the world and the coming destruction of all who reject Christ and many, many other things.

These are secret things that weren't revealed in the past, but that Jesus revealed to us through parables. And that's why it's so important for us to study the parables because they tell us about the Kingdom of God. It's important for us. God has given them to us to reveal instruction about His kingdom, and His character and what is required of you and I as His followers.

All this reveals the secret of the kingdom. And then Jesus closes and He says, “For he who has ears to hear, let him hear. Let him understand the truths of the Kingdom which I've just given.” So, Jesus tells them, “To you it's been given to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of God.” In other words, “You didn't figure this out by yourself. You didn't obtain some sort of deeper knowledge on your own so that you could figure these out. This information is being given to you.”

The same is true for all of us. It's not as if you're a Christian and you understand the truths of parables, you did so because you're really that wise and really that smart. I mean it's just because through the enlightening of the Holy Spirit we are able to understand the truths of God's kingdom.

Those who understand and believe the truths of the parable, they're like that prisoner who was in the cave who was freed. He didn't free himself, he was freed and brought out into the light. And then as he went out in the light, he started to see things for what they really were. He started to see things in the light, and things started to make sense to him. He started to see real objects and why they were, and why they cast the shadows that they did.

As believers, we didn't free ourselves, we were freed by God. We were freed from the domain of darkness and brought and transferred to the Kingdom of Light, of His glorious Son. And so, now we see things for what they really are and we understand them. You no longer see things in shadows. And the truths of the parables teach us these things. You understand the meaning of life now. You understand why the world is the way it is and what it means to know God, and what it means to live a life that He delights in, and that pleases Him.

You used to think you understood. Before you were a believer, you used to think you had it all figured out and you classified all the different aspects of life. But now, you realize that you were just deceived in darkness, and you didn't really understand it all back then. And when you're first saved or when you know, when you're a new believer, it can take time for your heart to gain understanding. It takes time. Just like the man coming out of the cave, it took his eyes some time to adjust and to figure things out. You're not going to understand things at first. In fact, you can spend a whole lifetime examining the Scriptures and still learning and growing. You don't understand things instantly or perfectly.

I mean here, even the disciples who have been with Christ for over a year now, they still don't get it. So, clearly, they're still learning and growing. But the longer they and the longer you purpose to spend time in the light of God's Word, the more you will see things clearly and rejoice in the hope that you have. The more your spiritual eyes will adjust to the truths of God's Word, and the truths of the Kingdom of God which are given for your instruction. And in fact, the more you see them, the more you're going to stand resolved in your faith that these things are true, especially when you look back at your former life and your understanding.

Moreover, you would never go back into that cave. Once you understand what life is all about in the Kingdom of God and what the Lord was teaching, you would never go back into the darkness. In fact, you have a profound desire to go back and tell your friends about the light, to get out of the cave because they don't understand life for what it really means. You beg them to join you, to come into the light. Jesus says, "The first particular purpose of why I teach in parables is to teach truths about the Kingdom of God, to give you divine instruction about what God's kingdom is like on earth and in heaven."

But He continues and He gives another purpose for parables. The first is to give divine instruction. The second reason Jesus taught in parables, was a form of divine judgment. Jesus taught in parables as a form of judgment to nonbelievers. If the concept of a secret kingdom knowledge struck the disciples, this idea that Jesus was teaching in parables to judge the people would have shocked them even more so. That's what He says in verse 11, "To you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything is in parables." Why? "So that 'they may indeed see, but not perceive, and they may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.'"

In other words, "I teach in parables," Jesus says, "So that some of you will understand the Kingdom of God and know it better. But I also teach in parables so that others won't understand and will continue in their unbelief."

It seems strange, but to give evidence for what He's saying, He quotes Scripture. He quotes Isaiah 6:9. And this was a well-known passage to the Jews. In fact, the New Testament quotes this very passage five times. So, it was a commonly understood passage from the Prophet Isaiah. So, to understand what Jesus is saying and how He's applying it to this passage, it's good to understand why Isaiah wrote it so that we see the parallel between what Jesus is saying and what Isaiah was saying.

But during the Ministry of Isaiah, it was a very dark time (if you may recall in the life of Israel). They had given themselves over to idolatry and to sin, and the people of Israel were constantly ignoring the message of the prophets that God had sent. He kept sending them prophet after prophet, warning them that judgment was coming and that they needed to repent and turn. And they continued to refuse to do so. In fact, oftentimes, they just sinned all the more.

And so, finally, when we get to Isaiah, His warnings of judgment didn't penetrate their heart. And in fact, their hearts were seared so that they no longer had the ability to understand and respond to God's Word. They were spiritually dead. And so, God said, "Alright, judgment is coming to you because of your hardness of heart." God allowed them to harden their own hearts to the point that they were not even able to repent.

As a result, judgment was unavoidable, because that's what happens to sinners, is judgment. And physical judgment came to them first, and it was through Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar came and conquered them and brought them into captivity.

So, Jesus then takes these truths and applies it to His context. Jesus teaches in parables as a similar form of judgment because of the stubborn unbelief of the Jews who heard Him time and time and time and time again, but didn't repent and didn't change their hearts. He encountered unbelief everywhere He went in Israel, despite all the things He taught. Another pastor writes,

Due to the people's repeated rejection of His clear teaching and undeniable miracles, from this point on, Jesus would frame His teachings in a way they could not understand. Unable to comprehend the truth, they would never return and be forgiven. Thus, they faced God's wrath. Historically, divine judgment came upon the nation of Israel in AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. Eternally, that judgment came when those who had rejected Jesus died and were cast into the everlasting torments of hell.

It was the same in Isaiah's day. He kept warning them and telling them and telling them, but they didn't change. And so, destruction came from a foreign nation conquering them. But those who disbelieve, when they die, they also perished spiritually. Because that's what the punishment for sin is. Spiritual death and separation from God. That's what Scripture says; both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The same thing was occurring when Jesus was in ministry. The people rejected His clear teachings. You know, Jesus didn't always teach in parables.

Really, in Mark 4, this is the beginning of when He started to teach in parables because the people were disbelieving Him. He oftentimes, when you begin to read the beginnings of the Gospels, He went into towns and He taught them openly and clearly. We know He went into the synagogues and He expounded Scripture about Himself. And He taught clearly about who He

was, and what He came to do, and what He would accomplish. He taught in the synagogues, and in homes, and in the streets, clearly, openly and plainly. And then He performed miracles to validate that everything He said was true about Himself.

Only somebody that could come from God could do the works that He did. And yet, in spite of all that, the majority of the people didn't believe. They rejected Him time and time again, or they only followed Him around because of what He could give them; food or healing. They didn't really believe that He was the Messiah.

Not only that, the majority of the people, at least the religious believers thought that His power came from Satan. Their hearts were so hard that they wouldn't accept the truth clearly told to them. They'd often challenge Jesus. "If you're the Messiah, just tell us plainly." And He said, "I've told you plainly time and time again and yet, you don't believe My words." And so, now, we see that He turns and He begins to teach in parables as a form of judgment. Their hearts were so hard, they would not accept the truth clearly presented, and so in judgement, the Lord veils the truth in parables. So that seeing they would not perceive and hearing, they wouldn't understand.

They don't understand, Jesus says, because lest they turn and be forgiven. Now, you might hear that and you might think, "That's strange. Like why wouldn't they want to believe? Why wouldn't they want to be forgiven? Why wouldn't people want to be spiritually forgiven and be right before God?" Well, it's not the forgiveness that people aren't willing to accept. In fact, even now today, most people assume or hope that when they die, they're going to be forgiven of their sins, and that they're good with God. It's not the forgiveness that they didn't want, it was the turning that they were not willing to do to receive the forgiveness. Everybody wants forgiveness if that's going to mean judgment. People want forgiveness, but what they're not willing to do is to turn, and that is a requirement for forgiveness.

They don't reject forgiveness. They hope they get it, but people love their sin. People don't want to come to God on His terms, they want to come to God on their own terms. And this idea that they are not good enough to go to heaven on their own and that God won't love them, and that they can't just do what's right in their own eyes, this idea that they have to turn from their sin and submit to Christ and become born again and turn from their sin; they're not willing to do that. They don't want to do that. They didn't want to do it in Jesus's day, and I don't know if you've noticed, but they don't want to do it in our day either.

You have to turn from your sin and repent and accept Christ. This is what Jesus says it takes to get forgiveness. It's not a work that you're earning, it's an acknowledgement that you're a sinner and that you need God's grace. This is what it means to turn and be forgiven. And people heard the Gospel and the teachings of parables that are clear, but they don't understand. They don't get it.

I mean, people read Scripture, they hear or at least, they see back then, and in our day, they hear about all the works that Jesus did during His ministry, but they don't perceive or believe. And it's not that they don't understand it, I mean there's plenty of non-Christians that understand parables and maybe could get the truths, but they don't believe that they are true. They don't mean anything to them. They don't perceive, they resist the truth.

This is what Stephen, you remember this, as he stood before the religious Jews in Acts 7, this is what he indicted to the religious Jews back then. He said, “You stiff necked people, uncircumcised in hearts and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.” And that's what was happening in Jesus's time, and in the times of the early church. They kept resisting the clear teaching of the Gospel. And so, because of their hardness of hearts, the Lord tells His disciples, “I teach in parables so that the truth will be veiled to them. It's a judgment to them. They don't want to hear the truth, and so I'll veil the truth in a form of judgment.” And you know parables, they still do the same thing today. It's still a form of divine judgment.

The Apostle Paul understood this well. Because he was dealing with the same thing. He'd preach the Gospel, they wouldn't get it. It seemed like some mystery or they'd mock him. He writes in Second Corinthians 4, “And even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

I mean, if you're a believer, you understand the Gospel's not complicated. It's actually very simple. It pleased God to make it simple. You're a sinner, you can't earn your way. Christ died as an atonement on the cross and was raised again. And so through repentance of faith, you can be saved and reconciled to God. I mean it's pretty simple. It makes sense.

But it's veiled to those who are perishing because they don't want to believe. Those who it's veiled, they're like the prisoners in the allegory of the cave who are still there. And they're in the darkness, and they think they have it all figured out. And so, when their buddy comes and tells them, “Listen, you've misunderstood, life isn't like this. This isn't reality. This is all in shadow. You think it's real, but it's not.” And they resisted and they think he's stupid and blinded by the light outside. And they refused to come out because they're happy in the cave. And they hear the clear message about what life is like in the light, but they utterly reject it.

In fact, they're very hostile into thinking that their way of thinking is wrong. Have you ever interacted with somebody like that? When you share the Gospel with them and you tell them about what life is like, and that there is an absolute truth and good and that their thinking may not be right, how often do they react? Usually, if it's a friend of yours, it might be okay. But if you go out into the street and tell somebody that, oftentimes there's an antagonistic reaction. “Who are you to tell me these things? I think you're the one that is wrong. You're the one that's in the dark.”

They do this because they prefer to live in darkness. And so, the Lord teaches in parables as a form of judgment. The Lord says, “These people are on the outside. To you,” He says to His disciples, “It's been given. That's why you understand it. But to those on the outside I give parables as a form of judgment. Because the only way that they are going to understand is the only way that you were able to understand, if the Holy Spirit changes your heart. It takes out the heart of stone that loves darkness and gives you a heart of flesh. Causing you to be born again, to see things for what they are meant to be.”

This explains why by the way, that two people can read the same parable and come to completely different conclusions, have completely different responses. A believer can read it and be instructed about life and the Kingdom of God and how it applies to you and your family or how you work, but then a nonbeliever can read it and it means nothing to them. They think it's folly, and they think it's silly that you would still read the Bible and go to church. It's because they don't really understand. And it's veiled to them. It's only veiled because of their hardness of heart. To one, the secret of the Kingdom of God has been given through parables and we rejoice in it. But to another, it's been withheld through parables because of the hardness of their heart. See, parables are a form of judgment by God.

Thirdly, one of the particular purposes of parables is God giving divine mercy. Divine mercy. The principle of judgment in mind, a third purpose of parables is God was showing divine mercy. Now you might say, "James, wait a minute. I don't get that. I don't get how parables can be divine judgment and mercy at the same time. How does that work? Seems to kind of contradict itself, doesn't it?" No, it doesn't contradict. In fact, the truth compliments itself very well. It shows the graciousness of God, that even as He's judging individuals, He's showing them mercy.

There's actually numerous instances in the New Testament that help illustrate this. In fact, let's look together to Luke chapter 23 just to see an illustration of this. In Luke chapter 23, this is Jesus's trial before Herod. He's already stood before Pilate and then once Pilate found out that Herod was in town, and Herod kind of ruled the area of the Galileans, and he found out Jesus was from Galilee, he sends Him over to Herod. And Herod wanted to see Jesus. So, we see His trial here. We'll begin our reading in verse 8, Luke 23.

Luke writes, "When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see Him, because he had heard about Him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by Him. So, he questioned Him at some length; but He made no answer."

We see that King Herod here is questioning Jesus at some length. All sorts of questions, probably about the Kingdom of God and who He was and why He came, and what His purpose of ministry is, and why did people worship Him and think these things about Him. I'm sure he asked Him about His miracles and what His motives are, and yet, Luke says, Jesus responded how? He said nothing. Didn't even answer Him one word. He just stood there silently.

You might say, why? Why does Jesus do this? He's standing before a king. I mean, this is the opportunity. I mean, if I was in the store and somebody came up to me and says, "What must I do to be saved?" I wouldn't stand there silent. I'd be like, pumped. I'd drop ... "Let's go. Let's grab some Tim Horton's and talk about it." Any excuse to get Tim Horton's great, right? I mean, why does Jesus remain silent here? Here's His chance, and maybe if He can convert this king, many others would have believed through the influence of the king. Why does Jesus not defend Himself?

Well, we know why. Because no matter what Jesus would have said, it wouldn't have mattered. It wouldn't have mattered. Herod had already heard the Gospel numerous times. He was the one that imprisoned John the Baptist as you know. And he had Him in prison likely for about a year

and he visited him often in prison. And John the Baptist would have shared the Gospel with him time and time again. And we know Scripture says that Herod viewed John as a righteous man, and yet he still didn't believe. In fact, in the end, he had him heartlessly murdered as a show and out of fear in his own pride.

The Lord knew Herod's heart. He knew it was hard and unteachable. We knew the Lord knew the hearts of all men. And so, with judgment to Herod, He withholds any answer. He was not worthy to hear the Gospel from the Lord. But in the same way, the Lord Jesus was showing Herod mercy that day, wasn't He? Because He understood that the more Herod knew about the Gospel and the more he rejected, the more he would be accountable to God on Judgment Day and the harsher his punishment would be in hell.

I mean, Scripture is clear that judgment and punishment in hell is not the same for everyone. I'm not sure if you understand that. I mean hell is not just some big fiery pit that everybody who's not a nonbeliever just gets thrown into. It's not that at all. I mean there's images like that in Scripture, but it's a lot more particular. People are judged upon their sin and given perfect justice. People are judged based upon their works, but also how much they know and how they should have known better. And the more somebody knows and still rejects, the harsher the punishment will be.

Because God is a just judge and He will give every person the precise amount of punishment they deserve. Their punishment will perfectly fit their crimes. That's the kind of God we serve; a perfectly just One. So, the more spiritual truth a person hears and knows and still rejects, the more accountable they are to God because of it. In fact, some of you might be like, "Are you sure? That's not how I thought." Well, look with me, actually, we have a little time. So, turn with me just a few chapters back to Luke chapter 12. Because Jesus tells a parable illustrating this truth precisely.

In this context, what He's doing, is He's telling His disciples, "You better be ready. Because I'm going to leave, but I'm going to come back. I'm coming back and I'm coming back at a time that you're not going to expect, so make sure you're doing the things that please God when I return, because that's what a servant should be doing. You never know when the master is going to come back. And so, have your life in order, be serving God in a pleasing way. Be Ready, be prepared."

So, now He's in the middle of telling a parable. And then in verse 43 of Luke 12, Jesus is answering a question from Peter, yet again. And He says,

43 Blessed is the servant whom his master will find doing so when he comes [being faithful when he returns]. 44 Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. 45 But if that servant says to himself, "My master is delayed in coming" and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, 46 the master of that house will come at a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. 47 And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. 48 But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will

receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

What is Jesus talking about here? Well, He's talking about how much you know and how faithful you are directly influences your reward in heaven or your judgment in hell. He says the one who knows and then still rejects, he's put with the unfaithful. In other words, he's really not a believer. He's not a real servant, and he's put among the unfaithful. And he knew all these things of this Kingdom of God and what he should be doing, but he still rejected, that person's going to receive a severe beating because he should've known better.

Yes, there's other servants and they did what was deserving of a beating. (In other words, they're sinners and the wages of sin is death.) But they'll receive a lighter punishment because they didn't have as much information, they didn't hear. Because God is perfectly just and will give everybody perfect justice for their crimes. So, the Lord withholds more information from Herod in mercy because he knows it doesn't matter, and the more information He gives, the more judgment there will be for him for rejecting it.

It's kind of like, you know, I mean for you parents, you understand that there's those days that your kids are just having a rough day. (Maybe they didn't have nap time and it's the end of a long day, and they're just not having it.) They're grumpy, and it's like we've got to get them in bed. Well, if you were to bring them inside and then say, "Okay, but before you go to bed, what I need you to do. is clean up all of your room and then organize your shoes and then make sure your closet's tidy and then wash the dishes and let's go to bed."

I mean, if you were to tell them that, what's going to happen? They're not going to obey. It's going to be worse. And so, then you're either going to have to decide, "Well, am I going to follow through with my instruction or is it ..." I mean, you have to kind of pick and choose. Like, "You know what/ I'm not going to give them any more tasks right now, because I know they're going to disobey, and it's not going to be good for them."

In a sense, you're showing them mercy. "Now would not be a good time for me to ask them to do this. I have the authority to do this, I could. They left their room messy, I could make them do it, but I'm not, because it's going to be another struggle. And then I'm going to have to sit there and discipline them and make them clean it until it gets right."

Well, spiritually speaking, the Lord is looking at Herod as He's seeing the people, as He's preaching in parables, knowing that many of them, no matter what He's been saying, they're not going to believe. And so, He's veiling the truth to show them mercy so that they are held less accountable than they could be. That's how parables are a form of divine judgment, but also of divine mercy. That's how loving our God is. He knows there's enemies who are not going to believe and who hate His guts, but He still shows them mercy.

By teaching in parables, in many regards, Jesus is loving His enemies. And it's a good example for us as well. It was an act of divine mercy veiling the truth. Because those who don't believe, He's sparing them harsher punishment.

Fourthly and finally (and this one's a short one) is this, a particular purpose that Jesus taught in parables was because this was all a part of God's divine plan. Jesus taught in parables to give divine instruction as a form of divine judgment, as a form of divine mercy, but also because it was all a part of divine plan. And to see some final insight with this, turn with me please to Matthew chapter 13. Matthew 13 basically is a parallel account to Mark chapter 4, which we've been reading. But Matthew gives us a little bit further insight that Mark doesn't record.

I'll begin reading in verse 34 of Matthew 13. Matthew writes,

34 All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, He said nothing to them without a parable. 35 This was to fulfill what was spoken by the Prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world."

So, this kind of affirms this idea of the secret. It's not as if these people had to figure out some mystery. Jesus taught in parables to reveal truths that had been hidden from the foundations of the world, but that now God was choosing to reveal so that people would understand His kingdom at the coming of Messiah.

But we see here the reason why Jesus taught in parables was to fulfill Scripture. It was God's plan all along to do this; to give divine instruction, to give divine judgment and mercy. It was all a part of God's plan since the foundation of the world. It was God's plan from the beginning to change hearts of sinners so that people like you and I would believe and understand the secrets of the Kingdom of God revealed in Scripture through Jesus Christ.

It was the plan of God from the beginning that the hardness of men's hearts would blind them to the truth of the Gospel, and that they would reject and crucify His Son. That was the plan from the beginning as well. That was the plan of God that He would show grace to sinners, and open their eyes to the truth. But it was also the plan of God to allow men to reject Him and harden their hearts, so that in the end, He would be glorified by those who were redeemed, but that He would also be glorified by those who reject revealing His justice and His character. God is glorified in it all. And such a plan was established as Matthew says here before the foundation of the world, before the world began.

The parables of Jesus not only instruct us about the kingdom, but they give us hope. Because they remind us that God will fulfill His plan that He has purposed, and that no one can turn it back. God speaks, and who can change His mind? No one.

So, when you read parables, you should consider it with that lens. That as you read the truths of the parables, it is God's word being fulfilled and He is showing you grace by revealing the truths of the kingdom. And they affirm His divine plan. And as you read those words, "He who has an ear, let him hear," seek to understand and rejoice when you do. Because it is God's grace in your life. What does this mean practically?

Just as we close, well, I suppose there's many things we could say, but one word of instruction. It's this: it's not your job to enact divine judgment or mercy. That's not your job. You neither have the capability nor have been given the authority to do so. What I mean by that is some of

you might be thinking, “Well, wait a minute, like I don’t know. I’ve shared the Gospel with my cousin time and time and time and time again, and he continues to reject. So, maybe I should stop because you know, the more he hears about God’s Word, the more judgment he’s going to be and so I should stop.”

Well, that's not your job. You haven't been given the authority to give divine judgment or mercy. What you have been given the authority to, is to proclaim the truths of the kingdom. That is your job, and you should do it day after day after day. And then just trust the Lord to work in His sovereign will, to change the hearts of men as He will.

I mean many of you are in this room, maybe you heard the Gospel once and thought it was silly and would prefer to be in the cave. And then you heard it again and would think that it's crazy and folly and still wanted to be in the cave. And you heard it again and again and again, but then there was that one time when the Lord tugged on your heart or something changed and you know what, you said, “I’ve heard this a bunch, but I never thought of it this way before.” And it was not the first or second or fifth or 50th time you heard, but maybe more. Then finally light dawned. Then you said, “You know what? This is starting to make sense, and the things that I thought used to make sense, they don't now. I was living in darkness.”

It's not our job to discern the hearts of men. God hasn't said, “Listen, I want you to enact divine judgment and mercy.” That's reserved for Him alone. What He says of His followers is go everywhere and proclaim the Gospel, and don't stop until you're dead. Then you can rest. You go out and you proclaim the truths of divine instruction; not of your own words, but the Word of God. Go out and tell people about God's Word, and what He's done. And then if they don't understand, they don't believe, then don't be surprised. You're like, “Okay, you know what? The God of this age has blinded their minds. The truth is being veiled, so I won't be discouraged. I'll just pray all the more and I'll preach all the more until maybe one of these days, this truth is going to penetrate into their heart.”

Maybe that's you here this morning. I've just met a number of you, but I don't know you very well. I don't know where your hearts are with the Lord. Maybe you've attended church your whole life and you've heard the Gospel 50 times, but it hasn't really penetrated into your heart. Well, maybe today's the day you need to say, “You know what? I've been living in a cave. I thought I knew, I thought I could get there in my own way, but I realize I can't. And it's only by God's grace. If I turn and repent that I can receive forgiveness.”

Don't be the people that Jesus was describing. That refused to turn, lest you be forgiven. But today turn and say, “Lord, I'm done resisting. I will accept You.” And for those who believe, you know what? Monday, you go out, share the Gospel and pray and say, “Lord, use me to penetrate dark hearts today.” And if you've shared the Gospel with somebody and been praying for somebody for years, don't grow weary of doing good. Just keep doing it because you never know, their day of salvation may be near. God's in charge of all that. Just be faithful. Amen? All right, let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you Lord that You did indeed teach in parables because they make the truths of Your kingdom so clear and so easy to understand. We thank you

that You have revealed these truths to us. That as we study Your Word, as we read in parables, as we study them, they make vivid Your character and how You work and also what You require of us, Lord, that we would walk in those truths.

I pray that as we read parables, that we glorify You for giving us instruction. But Lord, we also be reminded that there are those who reject You. And I pray that even as we read these parables in Scripture, as we read the Gospel, that they would motivate us to share the truths of Your word to others, those who are lost in darkness. Lord, I pray that You would turn the hearts of many as You have done in the past and are continuing to do this very day. Lord, draw many people to Yourself, to the truth of Your Word. That they would rejoice around the throne with us, around our great Saviour who has given us forgiveness of sins, a new heart with new desires that seeks to obey and love our great God and Saviour.

We praise You Lord, and bless us in these endeavours for Your glory, in Jesus' name, amen.