

Sacred Stories: *The Parables of Jesus* ¹
Matthew 13 | *The Purpose of Parables* ²
North Center | June 18, 2023
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Before we get into the parables, I want us to just acknowledge what an incredible gift it is that we have a Father who speaks to us.

1. **We have a Father in Heaven who speaks to us.**

Some of us don't know what it's like to have an earthly father who talks with us.

- *Your father walked out on your family. Your father was too busy or too distracted.*
- *Your father was too sick to engage in meaningful conversations.*
- *You were separated from your father when you were young.*

And you don't know what it feels like to have a father speak life over you...

In **Psalm 68**, we read that God is “**a father of the fatherless**” (**68:5**), and He loves to speak life over His children every time we open His Word.³

Since the beginning of time, our Father has *always* been speaking.

This morning, we sang that “*this is my Father's world...and He speaks to me everywhere.*”

- **In the OT**, we hear God speaking through angelic messengers, prophets, visions, dreams.
- But a dramatic change took place **in the NT**. In the very first two verses in Hebrews, we read that in these last days, God the **Father** has “**spoken to us by His Son**” (*Heb 1:1–2*).

This means that when Jesus speaks, we are hearing the words of our Father “to us”.

As we spend this summer listening to the parables of Jesus, your Father is speaking to you.

Jesus answered them and said, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.”
~ *John 7:16*

In other words, what I am saying to you, your Father in heaven is saying to you.

For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the **Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.**

And I know that His command is everlasting life.

Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the **Father has told Me, so I speak.**⁴

~ *John 12:49–50*

As Jesus speaks, *our Father speaks*. The words of Christ are *the words of God*.⁵

And this truth becomes particularly precious as we listen to the parables – because the parables are stories from your Father *just for you*.

Many people think that Jesus started using parables in His ministry as a creative, literary way of making the truth accessible to everybody. “*Everybody loves a good story, and so (one Jesus figured that out) He **began** using stories so that everybody could really grab ahold of the truth.*”⁶

¹ Sacred: “Connected with God”. Parables have often been described as *an earthly story with a heavenly meaning*.

² Matt 13:10–52; Mark 4:1–34; Luke 8:4–18.

³ His Word is life (Deut 8:1–3; John 6:63; Heb 4:12).

⁴ See also John 5:18–23, 30, 37–43; 6:27, 37–40, 45; 7:16; 8:26–30, 38, 40, 42, 47, 54; 9:4; 10:15, 18, 25, 29, 37–38.

⁵ See John 1:1–4.

⁶ Jesus didn't start speaking in parables until He was into the second half of His ministry (Matt 13:3). Jesus had always used imagery (salt, bread, sheep, lamps, treasure...), but this is not the same as telling stories.

But that's not true. Jesus began to speak in parables as a way for the Father to communicate *specifically* and *exclusively* to His children.

And the disciples came and said to Him,
“*Why do You speak to them in parables?*”
He answered and said to them,
“*Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,
but to them it has not been given.*”
~ *Matthew 13:10–11*

III. It's the difference between reading stories at the local library to all the children in the neighborhood and then reading stories at home just to your children.

Speaking in parables was God's way of addressing a mixed crowd (full of believers and unbelievers) while only communicating truth to His children.

So, the question is, **why** did Jesus begin speaking in parables if He knew that many people wouldn't understand them? If Jesus came to bear witness to the truth (**John 18:37**), **why** would He communicate truth in a way that kept it hidden from people?

His disciples were asking the same question: “*Why do You speak to them in parables?*” (**13:10**).

2. **The Purpose of the Parables**

Two answers:

1. **It was an act of *divine judgment* against those who *rejected* the Word of God.**

Notice that it was on a very particular day when Jesus began to speak to the crowds in parables.

On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea.
And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into the boat and sat;
and the whole multitude stood on the shore.
Then He spoke many things to them in parables...
~ *Matthew 13:1–3*

This chapter begins by saying, “on the same day”.

So, the question is: *the same day as what?*

The answer is: on the same day that the religious leaders accused Jesus of being possessed by demons and in league with Satan (**Matt 12:24**). After all the signs and wonders and miracles and evidence of divine glory that they had witnessed from Christ, their conclusion was that Jesus is evil. Jesus drew a line in the sand that day to show them that they had rejected the Son of God and the Spirit of God (**Matt 12:30–32**). Instead of connecting the ministry of Jesus to the Spirit of God, they connected it to Satan.

They didn't want to hear the truth, and so God gave them what they wanted. From that day on, God kept them from hearing the truth. And **how** did He do that? *By speaking to them in stories that they wouldn't understand.*

For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance;
 But whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.
Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see,
 and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.
 And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:⁷
 “Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
 and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull.
 Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed,
 lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
 lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.”
 ~ *Matthew 13:12–15*

Jesus wasn't telling stories because it made the message clearer... **or** because it was more entertaining... **or** because it was a better way to engage His audience... **or** because it made the truth more memorable. He was telling stories to **hide the truth** from those who didn't want to hear it. These stories are a declaration of judgment against the people who rejected Jesus.

From now on, whenever they listened to Jesus speak, they would not be able to hear truth. They had rejected Him to the point where they would no longer be able to see the truth even when the Truth was standing right in front of them.⁸

In **2 Timothy 3**, the apostle Paul talks about people who are “*always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (3:1–9). **Why?** Because, for their entire life, they have continued to “*resist the truth*” (3:8).

This is absolutely haunting – to think that there could come a day when a person is no longer able to hear or see the truth.

Listen to the way Paul describes this in **Romans 1**...

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,
 who **suppress the truth** in unrighteousness,
because what may be *known* of God is manifest in them, for God has *shown* it to them.
For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly *seen*,
 being *understood* by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead,
 so that **they are without excuse**,
Because, although *they knew* God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful,
 but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.
 Professing to be wise, they became fools,
 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man
 – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.
Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts,
 to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who **exchanged the truth of God for the lie**,
 and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.
For this reason God gave them up...
 ~ *Romans 1:18–26*

They *knew*. They *saw*. They *understood*. And instead of treasuring the truth, they *suppressed* it and *exchanged* it for a lie. And so God gave them what they wanted: *no more truth*.⁹

⁷ This prophesy comes from Isaiah 6:9–10.

⁸ John 14:6, “**I am** the way, **the truth**, and the life...”

⁹ Three times this passage describes God giving them up or giving them over (1:24, 26, 28).

It would be very easy to **point at the culture around us** and say, “Look, this is happening everywhere. God has made Himself known (so that people are without excuse), and still they reject the truth to the point that they can’t even hear it anymore. When you speak truth, it sounds to them like *hate*. When you speak truth, it sounds like *foolishness*. When you speak truth, all they hear is *discrimination* and *intolerance* and *moral superiority* and *religious mumbo-jumbo*. For some, it’s as if God has taken away their ability to hear truth.”

And if you think that spiritual blindness & deafness is only a “them” problem, you don’t understand the depths of your own depravity.¹⁰ The Bible looks at the person who “thinks he stands” and says, “take heed lest [you] fall” (1 Cor 10:12).

So, when we read that Jesus spoke in parables as a way of hiding truth from those who didn’t want to hear it anymore, it should bring us to our knees in prayer that God would give us a love for His truth.¹¹

In a few minutes, we are going to close our time together by singing a prayer that God would give us ears to hear and eyes to see and hearts to treasure the truth of His Word...

*Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see Your majestic love and authority
Words of power that can never fail, let their truth prevail over unbelief*

~ Getty¹²

2. It was an act of *targeted grace* toward those who *received* the Word of God.

For those who *rejected* truth, the parables were God’s way of *concealing* truth. But for those who *received* the truth, the parables were God’s gift to *reveal* even more truth.

He answered and said to them,

“Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven... (11)

For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance... (12)

...

Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; (16–17)

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.”¹³

~ *Matthew 13:11–12, 16–17*

This ought to really excite us for the truths that we are going to see through the parables this summer. We get to see things in God’s Word that the prophets could only dream about. **Truth** about a Father’s unwavering love for His children. **Truth** about a King who invited everybody to the wedding celebration of His Son. **Truth** about a treasure more valuable than everything else in the world. **Truth** about a kingdom that grows in supernatural ways. **Truth** about the Gospel of God.

As you listen to the parables of Jesus this summer, it’s as if your Father is holding you on His lap as He tells you the greatest stories in the universe. Stories that are **just for you** - from a Father to His child. Stories of *love & acceptance & forgiveness & hope*. He doesn’t give us these stories because we are better than anybody else. Our Father gives us these stories because He delights in speaking to His children. May we delight to listen and to obey.

¹⁰ The writings of the apostle Paul are helpful in exposing the depths of our depravity (Rom 3:23; 7:18–25; 1 Cor 10:12; 15:10; 1 Tim 1:15).

¹¹ Job 23:12; Psa 19:10; 119:97; Pro 23:23; Jer 15:16; John 17:17.

¹² Keith & Kristyn Getty, *Speak, O Lord*.

¹³ See also Luke 10:23; 1 Cor 2:7.