

Theme: Jesus often taught in parables to uncover the surprising mystery of God's Kingdom to those who would listen carefully and humbly respond, but the same parables hardened and judged those who refused to listen and receive His Word.

I. Intro - The Value of Fiction Writings

- A. I love and read all types of writing
- B. Fiction can help us to see life from a new perspective
- C. We will be looking at some of Jesus' parables
- D. Why does He teach in parables so much?

II. Jesus the Teacher

- A. Jesus is back outside the city near the lake
Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. Mark 4:1
 - 1. Jesus is 'again' back out by the lake
 - 2. Once again, a massive crowd gathers
 - 3. Just as in Mark 3:9, Jesus gets in a boat to teach
 - 4. Some scholars think this is the area now known as The Bay of Parables or the Cove of the Sower
 - a. It is a large natural amphitheater near Capernaum
 - b. Modern testing shows one can easily speak to thousands in this location with no modern amplification
 - c. One archaeologist estimated up to 10-15 thousand people could fit in this area
 - d. For photos and audio go to <https://www.bibleplaces.com/coveofsower/>

B. Mark's sample of Jesus' teaching

He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: Mark 4:2

- 1. Mark has mentioned Jesus teaching many times, but this is the first major example of Jesus' teaching
 - a. διδάσκω (teach) 35x in Mark; mainly about Jesus
 - b. κηρύσσω (preach) 15x in Mark; mainly about Jesus
 - c. Jesus is referred to as "Teacher" (4:38; 5:35; etc.)
- 2. Mark 4 and 13 are the two teaching blocks in Mark
- 3. Mark gives a sample of the 'many things' He taught
- 4. In the coming weeks we will look at the content of the teachings in Mark 4, but today we will consider Jesus' method of teaching - parables

C. Jesus is especially associated with teaching by parable

He taught them many things **by parables**, and in his teaching said: Mark 4:2

- 1. He had already used parables (see Mark 3:23)
- 2. This whole chapter is parables from this period
- 3. Others had used parables, but they are especially related to Jesus because He taught in them so often and was the Master Teacher of parabolic form
- 4. Some scholars count 60 parables in the Gospels
- 5. If we want to understand Jesus' teaching, we must learn how to understand His parables

III. Understanding The Parables of Jesus

A. A parable is a story/saying that compares two things

1. παραβολή is from παραβάλλω - to throw alongside
2. The main idea is to compare two things
3. The Hebrew word is חֲשֵׁב - proverb; parable
4. A parable is a way of using a brief saying or story to compare and contrast two things so as to help the listener understand something in a new way.
5. In Jesus' teaching, they usually refer to a familiar part of creation to help explain a spiritual reality.
6. This is yet another reminder of the close link between God's work in creation and redemption, the material and the spiritual, the body and the soul. We are NOT Gnostics! (AfterHours for more on this!)

B. Parables are NOT allegories

1. Some in the history of the church tried to find meaning in every detail, but this is not how to understand them.
2. Parables are generally making one or a few key points and the focus should be on that - not allegorizing every detail.

C. The main subject of the parables is the Kingdom of God

He told them, "The **secret of the kingdom of God** has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables Mark 4:11

He also said, "**This is what the kingdom of God is like.** A man scatters seed on the ground...³⁰ Again he said, "**What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?** Mark 4:26, 30

1. Jesus tells them He is giving them the secret/mystery of the Kingdom of God
2. Jesus often directly introduced parables this way
3. Also see Matthew 13:44; 13:45; 13:47; Luke 13:20
4. But even other parables are usually centered on the Kingdom of God
5. Remember that Mark has already told us the summary of Jesus' preaching and teaching is the Gospel of the Kingdom
After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" Mark 1:14-15
6. When we read parables our first instinct should be to expect that they will teach us something about the Kingdom of God. There are exceptions such as the parable of the unjust judge and the Good Samaritan, but we should always look to see what a parable might teach us about the Kingdom of God first.
7. The parables also often teach us something unexpected or surprising about God's Kingdom
He told them, "The **secret of the kingdom of God** has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables" Mark 4:11
 - a. Secret - μυστήριον - mystery
 - b. This referred to something that was unexpected and surprising.
 - c. Jesus often uses parables to help us understand the surprising nature of the Kingdom of God.

D. Parables require close listening and thought

Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed...⁹ Then Jesus said, “He who has ears to **hear, let him hear.**”
Mark 4:3, 9

1. Jesus begins and ends with a command to HEAR
2. Some form of the word ‘hear’ occurs 13x in Mark 4!
3. This is the same word used in the Shema
Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.
Deuteronomy 6:4
 - a. $\eta\eta\psi$ and Ἄκουε/Ἀκούετε - “Listen up”!
 - b. Repeated every day by faithful Jews
 - c. This is the foundation of being a follower of Jesus - carefully listening to His Word to us
4. Jesus teaches in parables because they REQUIRE careful listening, consideration, and meditation
5. Those who want to merely “skim” the parables will never understand what Jesus is teaching - or Jesus or His Kingdom!
6. This is NOT about having a great intellect - it is about being open to mull over the parable and then accepting what it teaches.

E. Parables reveal and reinforce the state of the heart

When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him **about the parables.**¹¹ He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside **everything is said in parables**¹² so that, “**they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!**” Mark 4:10–12

1. The disciples ask about the parables (in general)
2. Jesus explains why He uses parables - SO THAT
3. This is a quote from Isaiah 6 - Isiah’s call, the rejection of Israel, the promise of a remnant
4. In both passages, God’s Sovereign Word hardens and judges those who reject it but softens and saves those who humbly receive it.
5. “Welcome back to the most dangerous place in the world!”
6. Jesus often taught in parables to uncover the surprising mystery of God’s Kingdom to those who would listen carefully and humbly respond, but the same parables hardened and judged those who refused to listen and receive His Word.

IV. Applying the Word

A. Do I see the importance of Jesus’ Word?

1. We are flooded with voices, images, & words today
2. Most of it can be safely ignored because it is either trivial or false - we must curate what we choose to hear and give attention to each day
3. Jesus’ Word is not optional - it is essential!
Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. Matt. 7:24–27

4. The King has come, the Kingdom is advancing, and we must hear His words and apply them in humble obedience!
5. Have you heard and responded to the call of the King? Do so today - and find utter joy, meaning, and security - now and forever!

B. Hearing Jesus' Word today

1. Jesus calls us to HEAR His Word
2. This is a call not just for auditory reception but for mental understanding and volitional embrace and submission.
3. This requires deep meditation and reflection rather than a cursory listening
4. Our culture makes this difficult - two great enemies

a. Constant noise and distraction

Music and silence—how I detest them both! How thankful we should be that ever since our Father entered Hell... no square inch of infernal space and no moment of infernal time has been surrendered to either of those abominable forces, but all has been occupied by Noise—Noise, the grand dynamism, the audible expression of all that is exultant, ruthless, and virile—Noise which alone defends us from silly qualms, despairing scruples, and impossible desires. We will make the whole universe a noise in the end. We have already made great strides in this direction as regards the Earth. The melodies and silences of Heaven will be shouted down in the end. But I admit we are not yet loud enough, or anything like it. Research is in progress. CS Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, Letter 22

1. This has only increased from Lewis' day - the demons must be gleeful
2. The constant noise and distraction of phones, media, news, etc make meditation and reflection difficult

3. This “defends us from silly qualms, despairing scruples, and impossible desires” - which we might get if Jesus' Word penetrates deeply into us.
4. Over time this external noise becomes internal noise!

b. We are groomed to live in The Shallows

1. The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing To Our Brains by Nicholas Carr
2. The internet and modern technology have done wonderful things - we are not anti-technology
3. But in this fallen world, every gift and advance has a dark side we must fight against!
4. Our connected world encourages skimming for soundbites and factoids rather than deep plunges of meditation and reflection to learn wisdom.
5. This makes it hard for us to HEAR as Jesus is calling for in His use of parables

5. Both of these issues are why Jesus often withdrew to the ἔρημος (lonely place) to have quiet time for prayer, reflection, and meditation on God's Word.

6. Am I following my Master in this rhythm?

7. Do I have daily and weekly times for quiet, deep hearing of God's Word?

8. I urge all of us - this is as essential for our soul as food, exercise, and rest are for our bodies! We neglect this at our own peril!

C. The Table of the King

1. This Table of the King is a visual parable
2. Our King gave Himself for us!
3. Come and receive from Your King!

The Parables of Jesus

Mark 4:1-12

March 19, 2023

Communion

Acts 20:32

Teaching keywords: Kingdom of God; Word of God; hermeneutics;
meditation and silence

Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Acts 20:32

Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. ² He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: ³ "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.

⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times." ⁹ Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." ¹⁰ When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. ¹¹ He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables ¹² so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!" Mark 4:1-12