

Pt 1 the Purpose of the Parables

by Alan Redpath

Jesus spoke in parables to reveal the secrets of the kingdom of heaven and to lead people into truth, especially for those who rejected him.

Duration: 29:17

Scripture: Matthew 13:3-9, Matthew 13:18-23, Matthew 13:31-33, Matthew 13:44-50

Topics: "Parables"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the parables of Jesus found in Matthew 13. He highlights the first four parables, which depict conflict, failure, and the presence of evil in the world. The preacher emphasizes that the kingdom of God between Jesus' first and second coming is characterized by battle and conflict, with the enemy seemingly winning. However, the preacher also points out that there is hope and progress in the kingdom, as seen in the internal secrets of the kingdom revealed to the disciples. The sermon encourages believers to understand the external facts of the kingdom and to seek the internal secrets of what God is doing in the world.

Transcript

Matthew chapter 13, not the whole of it of course, Matthew 13. That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea, and great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat there. And the whole crowd stood on the beach, and he told them many things in parables, saying, A sower went out to sow, and as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them.

Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell upon thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

Other seeds fell on good soil, and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears let him hear. Then the disciples came and said to him, Why do you speak to them in parables? And he answered them, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

For to him who has will more be given, and he will have abundance. But from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and

hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, You shall indeed hear, but never understand, and you shall indeed see, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their hearts, with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn for me to heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.

Truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. This is the word of the Lord. Would you please keep your Bible open at Matthew chapter 13.

I was asked this term to speak on the parables of our Lord, and I'm happy to do that, but of course I remind you there are 38 of them, and that can't be done in a week. 29 are only in one gospel, and three are in two gospels, and six are in three gospels. But this week we're concentrating on the eight which our Lord told in Matthew chapter 13, because behind these instances and examples of just an earthly story, he's telling us what the Holy Spirit is doing in the world until Jesus himself shall come again.

There's some tremendous teaching in these parables. I hope this morning you won't mind if I just give you a kind of introduction to them. You may find it useful to have your Bible and pencil with you, pen or something, and make notes.

You should wreck your Bible every ten years, mess it up, put all the notes you can in it, and you'll find that helpful to you. And we find the answer to the question that the disciples asked Jesus in verse 10. Why do you speak to them--that's the word which you emphasize, I think--why do you speak to them in parables? Well, let's try and just look at why in a moment.

Because it's quite clear, as you think of the ministry of our Lord and see the setting of all this, he's starting a completely new method in his ministry. He'd already made use of parables, of course. For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount, the man who built his house on a rock, and all the floods came, and it stood its ground.

And he used parables in speaking to the woman of Saneri, talked to her about a well and about a fountain, and the difference between the two, and so on. But now, without exception, he spoke to the people in parables. Look at verse 34.

Without a parable, he said nothing to them. Matthew 13 and verse 34. The disciples noticed this and asked him the question of our text.

Why do you speak to them in parables? Because in verse 11, Jesus' answer, to you it is given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. To you, to them. But, out of eight parables in this chapter, four of them are spoken to the disciples, and four to the crowd.

So there must have been some reason both for teaching the multitude and for teaching the disciples by this method. I don't think we're left to speculate about that, because our Lord gives the answer. An answer which has been so often misrepresented.

If you take a rapid glance with me over this chapter, you'll see that he chooses some of the things that are common in life and experience of those to whom he was talking, to illustrate what he meant. For instance,

you might like to note these. First in verse 3, there's the sower and the seed.

And then, in verse 24, the wheat and the tares. Verse 31, the mustard seed. Verse 33, the leaven.

Verse 44, the treasure in the field. Verse 45, a merchantman seeking pearls. Verse 47, a fisherman and his net.

And verse 52, the householder. All of them pictures of everyday life. And the purpose of a parable is always to aid understanding and never to hinder it.

It's always to aid understanding and never to hinder it. Yet, I have heard it said, and taught, indeed, from pulpits, that our Lord uses this method because he wanted to hide the truth from those who rejected it. Well, that's contrary to any conception of the whole purpose of the ministry of Jesus.

The parable veils the truth, but only that people may grasp it. If you hold a piece of dark glass up to the sun, you veil the sun. But, without the glass, you couldn't even look at it.

Light which isn't veiled could blind. Veiling the light gives the opportunity of vision. I love that verse in 1 Corinthians chapter 13.

I'm giving it to you in the Living Bible, verse 22. Listen. We can see and understand only a little about God now, as if we were peering at his reflection in a poor mirror.

But, someday, we're going to see him in his completeness, face to face. Not now. Now, all that I know is hazy and blurred.

But then, I will see everything clearly. Just as clearly as God sees into my heart. I think that's terrific.

The prospect of heaven, glorious. But, my problem is getting there. I won't expand on that.

But, the fact is, all we see is hazy and blurred. And, so often, we just don't understand what God is doing with us and in us. And, many situations are beyond grasping.

But then, we shall see clearly and understand fully, just as clearly as he looks into our heart right now. What a tremendous comfort that is. Light, veiled, gives an opportunity of vision.

And, I notice that at this point in the ministry of Jesus, he was really having the pressure put on him, increasingly. You don't have trouble to look this up, but you might just note the verses. They were challenging his claim to forgive sin, chapter 9, then verse 3. They challenged him because he ate with sinners, and criticized him for it, chapter 9, verse 11.

They faced him with his attitude to the Lord's day, chapter 12, and verse 2. And, just at that moment, when things were really toughening up, Jesus turned to this new method, and listened to his explanation. Because, to you, it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom, but to them, it has not been given, verse 11. If he had only had said that, and nothing more, I'd have understood him to mean, wouldn't you, that he was compelled to speak in parables, so they should not know the truth.

And, I've been very perplexed. But, he didn't stop there. Verse 12, to him who has, more will be given, and you have abundance.

But, from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. You notice the contrast, which that verse explains. To you, it has been given.

To them, it has not been given. To him who has, more will be given. He's saying, quite clearly, that it's been given to the disciple to know the mysteries of the kingdom, because of something they possessed.

Listen again. To them who has not, even what he has will be taken away. He says that it was not given to the crowd to know the mysteries of the kingdom, because of something they lacked.

What was it, do you think, that the disciples had, and the crowd hadn't? What was the difference between those disciples and the crowd who stood there? Wasn't it one very simple thing, that the disciples had received Jesus as king, and by reason of their attitude toward him, and their relationship with him, they were able to receive the secrets of the kingdom? Certain people had received Jesus, and a whole crowd had said, nothing doing. To those who received him, secrets of the kingdom were given. To those who rejected him, these messages couldn't be given.

Therefore, those who denied Jesus, the Lord gives pictures, the parable, to lead them on to the truth. Because of their dullness, and their disobedience, their disloyalty to the Lord, Jesus spoke to them in parables. You know, a school teacher will often arrest a class with a story.

And here's the great teacher talking in parables. Not that people might not understand, but in order to help them to do so. If I could say it this way, I would say that the parable is therefore a method of love, of grace, tenderness, to meet the desperate need of the people who rejected the authority of Christ.

Jesus is very, very reluctant to give up his search for men who refuse him. What a comfort that is to know. He never wants to give up.

It's the outcome of the grief of a broken heart over the hardness of the hearts of these people. And the Lord, who daily prays for us in heaven, knows what tears are, and knows how to weep over lost souls. And I don't think, though I can't substantiate this altogether, but I don't think Jesus ever gives a convert to anybody unless, if, if, if, they can't live without, if they can live without them.

I've said that very clumsily. God never gives a convert if I can live without him. If I'm happy to go on in Christian life and never see anybody want to him, all right, I'll never see a convert.

But if I know something of a broken heart, and the heart of Jesus, who prays and prays on and pleads for lost men, if I pray through tears for souls, then the Lord pours out the blessing. I learned that, I think, from this passage. But something else.

There's what I would call the scope of the parables. We'll see this more clearly through the week, but it tells us the progress of God's kingdom in the age in which we live. Just look at this.

Twice, in verses 39 and verses, verse 49, the Saviour speaks of the end of the world, the close of this age. And every one of these parables, apart from the initial one, the parable of the sower, commences, the kingdom of heaven is like. The kingdom of heaven is like.

So we have eight pictures of the condition that exists in the kingdom between our Lord's first coming and his second. There's sort of God's searchlight on what's going on. And under that title, we're having these lectures this week.

But this I want you to notice this morning. The first four of these parables, that is, the sower and the seed, the wheat and tares and the mustard seed and the leaven, are all spoken to the crowd. And in them, you have the external facts of the kingdom of God, its outward growth and progress in the world.

But notice verse 36. The Lord takes the disciples away from them, the crowd disappears, and he goes into the house. And the second four, the treasure, hid in the field, the merchantmen seeking pearls, the fisherman in his net, the householder, are all spoken to the disciples.

In these, there's the internal secret of the kingdom. Notice that very carefully. External facts, what you'll see all around you, to the crowd.

Internal secrets of what God is doing to the disciple. The kingdom from the divine aspect to the disciples. The kingdom as they would see it in the world, well, the crowd can see that.

And if you take the first four parables, you find antagonism, conflict, failure predominates. In the first parable, the sower and the seed, only 25% of the seeds produce anything. In the second, in the parable of the tares, in verse 25, there is an enemy at work, sowing tares among the wheat.

And you've got the sign of, in verse 32, the third parable, you have the development of worldly power. In the growth of a great big tree, which a mustard tree could never possibly be, a great big tree affording shelter to evil. And in the fourth, in verse 33, you have the leaven of evil, which makes for destruction.

So the picture gives to the crowd of what's going to happen between his first and second coming, is not an age where everything gets better and better. Rather, it's an age characterized by conflict and battle, and it appears that the enemy is winning. The enemy injures the seed through the soil in which it falls.

The enemy sows tares. The mustard seed, contrary to all law, becomes a great big tree and shelters something evil in it. The leaven speaks of corruption, outward failure.

That's the outward scene. A kingdom as the crowd will see it. Something's wrong.

We seem to be losing the battle. You can easily identify with that picture today. But the Lord draws the disciples aside, and he tells them the internal secrets of the kingdom, the working of the king, and everything here is victory, verse 44.

The treasure is found in the field. The field is bought in order to possess the treasure, and the picture is that of the king himself. Verse 46, the pearl of great price is found.

Everything is sold in order to possess it. Now I'm sorry, but in spite of all we sing about, that parable, it isn't the picture of a sinner finding Jesus. The pearl of great price is not Christ.

You don't buy him. You don't purchase him. When you receive Jesus, you receive him as the gift of God.

What's the pearl of great price? You and me. The church. People redeemed by the blood at infinite cost, and to purchase us, Jesus gave up everything in order he might win his people.

He lives us, loves us, you see, like that. And verse 47, the net is cast into the sea. At the end of the age, it's gathered in.

The good separated from the bad. You notice the contrast? To the crowd, outward facts. What's going on apparently? To the disciple, oh, beyond the outward facts, there's an inward victory.

The pearl of great price. And God is gathering out of this world with all its filth and all its sin and all its evil. Something very precious to him.

You and me. Why do you speak to them in parables? Well, it's the picture of 20th century achievement. The word in common use ten years ago was that we live in an age of enlightenment.

Tremendous. But now we live under the threat of momentary destruction. Great achievement, but overshadowed by the fear of total destruction.

That's the explanation of the parable. But look at him, listen to him, Jesus explaining that to the crowd. His love, it's a method of absolute love and pity.

The parable is the way he leads people into truth. He's not surprised by the outward evidence of sin and failure. He said it would be so.

But he's doing everything he can to win everybody. Hardening of the heart. That was blindness.

Refusing to listen, or if listening, being merely critical. Let me say this to you. Think about it.

Let me think about it again, as I said. Your capacity, anybody's capacity to receive God's truth into your life depends on the surrender of your will. Moral conquest of the will must precede intellectual enlightenment of your mind.

You got that? Let me repeat it. Moral conquest of the will must, must precede intellectual enlightenment of your mind. Capacity to receive God's word into your heart depends on the surrender of your will to Jesus.

I can have as much of God as I want, but I won't get any more. Read verse 15. More or less, that is.

Let me give it to you. I don't know what version you're using. I wish I did.

I've got too many versions. Maybe you use King James, I don't know. How many of you use the King James? One.

Oh, no. Sorry, Pete. How many of you use the revised King James? How many of you use NIV? That's it, there you go.

The not infallible version, I call that. Or, if you like, the nearly indispensable version. I won't have an argument with you about that subject, bless you.

I use the RSV as a rule. I hope we don't have any more, but I'll leave it at that. I might develop it later.

Look at verse 15 here, reading from the RSV. For these people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes, notice this especially, their eyes they have closed lest they should perceive with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn for me to heal them. Notice that word, lest.

The lest is the lest of their attitude. They've done it, they've closed their eyes, they've shut their ears, lest they should hear. It's not the withdrawal of God's mercy.

They've hardened their hearts for fear of being drawn to God. So in a renewed attempt, he spoke to them in parables. How, again I repeat, reluctant is the goodness and mercy and grace of God to give up the struggle for people.

He'll write on and on and on, and he never wants to give in. The lest is not the lest that God has withdrawn forgiveness. No, the lest is deliberate shutting eyes, closing ears, lest they should be drawn to God.

The Lord is fighting through that impossible situation. And so to the disciple, he reveals the inner secrets. For if I'm to serve Jesus for his glory, and if you are in this age in which you live, you've got to understand what God is doing.

He has a broken heart. You won't be able to take it. If our eyes are set on something that you expect of some purpose which isn't God's, an extension for instance of the whole world into a Christian influence until it becomes perfect, you'll get heart sick.

But if I understand his secret purpose, then I know that Jesus is coming back, and Jesus is going to fulfil that. And all God's purpose in us will be fulfilled as we think of the purchase of the pearl and the treasure and the overthrow of the enemy. And in these days of apparent catastrophe, that's what God is doing.

And I want to try and hope and pray that in these few days the Lord will open to us afresh the inner secrets of his kingdom. He can. Listen.

Psalms 35, 14. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. The New English Bible has that.

The Lord confides his purpose to those who fear him. That's a wonderful thing he's prepared to do. Matthew 10, 27.

What I hear in secret, I am to declare on housetops. What God tells me of his secret, I'm to get out where the action is and preach it. Let me tell you this in finishing.

In every arena of battle, there's got to be an altar of worship that he may reveal his secret to you. And that's what I was saying briefly last night, that they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. Above everything else, keep the altar in good repair.

A place where you meet with God alone, that he may speak his secrets to you. And I tell you, you leave Caponry with a heart that's on fire for him. More of that, hoping you'll be able to take it, Monday through Thursday.

And of course, we won't ever get to the end of 38. As you see, we'll possibly get to the end of a few in chapter 13. And then we have another few days later in June.

Meanwhile, K-O-K-D, keep on kicking the devil. And just, hallelujah. Anyway.

Bless you. Let's pray. Lord, speak to me that I may speak in living echoes of thy tone.

And right, Lord, that we may be those whom you can trust with your secret. Whose lives are utterly abandoned to the sovereignty of Jesus. And through whom you can communicate truth and life in the power of the Spirit of God.

Answer prayer, for your name's sake. Amen.

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