



## *"The Purpose of the Parables"*

**Matthew 13:10-17**

**Sermon Date: February 26, 2012**

### **Prayer:**

Give thanks to God for revealing Himself to us in His Word. Unending are the truths and delights that it contains. In your time of prayer this week, echo the words of the Psalmist, "Deal bountifully with your servant, that I may live and keep your word. Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. I am a sojourner on the earth; hide not your commandments from me!" (Psalm 119:17-19). Give thanks to the Father for salvation, for sanctification, and for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Pray that you will never take for granted the gift of His Word, nor the ability to understand it as the Holy Spirit illuminates it for you.

### **Review:**

Last week we began to study chapter 13 of Matthew, a chapter full of parables. In order to understand these parables, we need to first understand what a parable is. According to Simon Kistemaker, parables are "stories and examples from the world in which Jesus lived, and they are told in order to convey a spiritual truth by means of a single point of comparison." That is exactly what we saw in Jesus' first parable in chapter 13. Jesus used the real life scenario of a sower who sows his seed onto soils of various conditions, something they would have been very familiar with in that day and age, to convey the spiritual truth that the gospel will be responded to in various ways. There are those whose response to hearing the gospel will be marked by understanding and obedience (the good soil). And there are those who will hear the good news of Jesus Christ and outright reject it, or receive it with joy initially but fall away from it due to persecution or worldly pursuits (hard, shallow, and thorny soil). This parable was told by Jesus to convict those who would listen, while at the same time confound those who would not. It is to the purpose of the parables, in general, that we turn our attention this week.

### **Scripture:**

<sup>10</sup> Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. <sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

“ ‘ You will indeed hear but never understand,  
and you will indeed see but never perceive. ”

<sup>15</sup> For this people's heart has grown dull,  
and with their ears they can barely hear,  
and their eyes they have closed,  
lest they should see with their eyes  
and hear with their ears  
and understand with their heart  
and turn, and I would heal them. ’

<sup>16</sup> But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. <sup>17</sup> For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

## **Handling the Word:**

1. What are some aspects of parables that made them such effective teaching tools in Jesus' ministry? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages to reading the parables of Jesus today versus hearing them from Jesus' own mouth as the disciples did?
  
2. What has transpired in chapters 11 and 12 of Matthew that would lead Jesus to begin speaking in parables? How does Jesus' first parable told in Matthew 13:3-9 serve to connect those events to His teaching in our passage this week?
  
3. Read the parallel passages in Mark 4:10-12 and Luke 8:9-10, and write down some of the specific wording that is different. What insight do the wording differences give us into our passage in Matthew?
  
4. Read this week's passage several times and try to identify what the central theme of the passage is.

## **Understanding and Applying:**

1. Jesus is asked by the disciples in verse 10, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” He responds by giving them two purposes for the parables in the remainder of the passage. What are the two purposes that Jesus puts forth?
2. How do Jesus’ words in Scripture still serve the same two purposes today (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)?
3. When Jesus says in verse 11, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.” Who are the “you” and the “them” referring to? What is it that differentiates these two groups of people?
4. The ability for the disciples to hear, know, and understand the “secrets of the kingdom” was something that was “given” to them. Do you see your ability to hear, know, and understand truths about the kingdom of God as a gift from Him that was “given” to you? Is it possible for someone to understand these things based purely on their own intellect (Romans 3:9-18)? Why or why not?
5. What role does the Holy Spirit play in the revealing of the “secrets of the kingdom of heaven” to the disciples and, ultimately, to all who come to faith in Him (1 Corinthians 2:9-16, John 16:5-15)?

6. Many of the people in the crowds surrounding Jesus were charged with the indictment of physically seeing and hearing Jesus, but not truly hearing and seeing Him (v.13). Jesus then says that the prophecy found in Isaiah 6:9-10 was fulfilled in them (v. 14-15). Read Isaiah 5 and 6, then list out the parallels between the Jews of Isaiah's era and those who were being condemned by Jesus in His own day (See also John 12:36b-43 and Acts 28:23-28).
  
7. Just as the truth about the kingdom was seemingly impossible for many in Jesus' day to hear and understand due to their sinful and hardened hearts (v. 13), so too it is often physically heard by many today yet few understand it. What does this tell us about our role in evangelism versus the Holy Spirit's role in evangelism?
  
8. In verses 16 and 17, Jesus tells the disciples that they are blessed because they see and understand those things which "many prophets and righteous people longed to see...and did not see it, and to hear...and did not hear." What did the disciples have the privilege of hearing and seeing that the prophets of old longed to see and hear but did not have the joy of doing so (John 8:56, Hebrews 11:13, 39, 1 Peter 1:10-12)? Furthermore, what do we have the blessing and privilege of possessing today that the disciples did not have in their day, and what responsibility comes with that privilege (2 Timothy 3:14-17)?
  
9. In what ways does Matthew 13:10-17 both serve as a warning and as an encouragement?

*"The sun which melts the wax hardens the clay; and the word which opens the hearts of some to receive Christ confirms others in their rebellion, rejection and unbelief."  
Iain Campbell*