

#208 “Why Jesus Spoke In Parables”
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When Jesus addressed the crowds of people following Him, He always spoke in parables (Matthew 13:34). Mark 4:33-34 says, “With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.” Psalm 78:2 prophesied that Jesus would speak in parables as Jesus explained in Matthew 13:35. Jesus also quoted from Isaiah 6:9-10 in Matthew 13:14-15, saying, “In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.’” The crowds to whom Jesus spoke were not interested in the truth, for they had closed their eyes, as the passage states. This is a willful choosing to love the world and its ways rather than to seek out the eternal truths of God. Even having Jesus in their midst, they were still unable and unwilling to hear, their consciences being defiled by their own selfish lusts. The people were not intellectually too stupid to understand the parables. Certainly, they grasped that the kingdom of heaven was valuable like a treasure or that Jesus differentiated between seeds that took root and bore fruit and those which did not. The issue was that they had no interest in the kingdom of heaven of which Jesus spoke. It didn’t matter if He hadn’t spoken in parables. They weren’t going to believe no matter what. The crowds didn’t approach Jesus and ask for clarification or to learn more. Certainly, they didn’t repent and seek to follow Him. The Pharisees understood that Jesus was speaking negatively of them in the parables, but they refused to worship Jesus (Matthew 21:45). The parables, therefore, were simultaneously an invitation to the kingdom of heaven and a condemnation that the hearers weren’t going to respond in faith. It was evidence of God’s foreknowledge and of Jesus’ ability to read the hearts and minds of those listening. He knew who would respond, and thus He chose disciples who would believe, except for Judas, of course, who had other purposes which God foreordained.

Jesus never turned away those who came seeking repentance and forgiveness, but it was typically only the ill, the disabled, the scorned, and the rejected who sought eternal life. The crowds followed not because they wanted to enter the spiritual kingdom but because they were interested in other things, such as the miracles, the food, the feeling of something “big” happening, or a misplaced hope of Jesus setting up an earthly kingdom. The disciples, on the other hand, were interested in the truth, and they frequently asked Jesus to explain the parables to them (Mark 7:17, Luke 8:9), which He did, for He knew that they had open hearts and minds.

In the latter part of the Old Testament, God spoke to Israel through prophets, visions, and parables. When Ezekiel spoke to the Jews concerning the judgments of God, they

mocked Him. Ezekiel 20:49 says, “Then I said, ‘Ah Lord GOD! They are saying of me, “Is he not just speaking parables?”’” In other words, the people didn’t take Ezekiel seriously concerning the judgment and exile about to come, but they brushed off what he was saying as mere stories, myths, and fables. This is exactly what the people would have done had Jesus spoken plainly to them. They would have found any excuse to ignore the truth and to pursue their own selfish agendas. It didn’t matter if He had spoken through signs, visions, parables, or in plain language. Those who had no heart to hear weren’t going to hear whatsoever. In contrast, those who approached Him individually with repentant hearts were always forgiven in plain language. God will always draw near to those who draw near to Him. Those who choose to keep God at a distance or who view Him as a sort of religious mythological figure will remain without understanding or spiritual sight.

Luke 8:10 reminds us who have believed that we should thank God for working in our hearts and convicting us of sin. Jesus said to His disciples, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” Matthew 13:12 adds, “For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.” In other words, Jesus grants understanding to those who have hearts willing to receive. Those hearts are only willing, let us remember, because of God’s grace. This meeting of God’s grace with the opening of our minds, the humbling of our hearts, and the surrendering of our wills is the mystery of the kingdom of heaven, of which our Lord speaks. We who know Jesus and who have responded in faith are blessed because we see with spiritual perception and hear with spiritual understanding (Matthew 13:16). Our salvation should always be cause for gratitude before our Lord.

Many people today have also closed their eyes and covered their ears. The creation and their consciences testify to the majesty and wonder of God, but they refuse to acknowledge Him, thank Him, and worship Him. Our calling is to scatter the seed of the gospel everywhere so that all can know and so that all can see and hear. Twelve responded to Jesus’ message, and the kingdom has continued to grow ever since. Let us go forth, making the gospel as plain as it can be, opening the Scripture with people, praying that they would have eyes to see and ears to hear.