

WHY DID THE LORD TEACH IN PARABLES?

Matthew 13:1-17

Intro: (Read the text.)

Verse 3 tells us that the Lord taught many things in parables. That which followed was the familiar parable of the sower. As the Lord finished it, He said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (v. 9). At that point the disciples asked the Lord, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" And this is followed by some very interesting teaching from our Lord.

Before we get to His answer, let me explain what a parable is.

It is usually a story, a short story, a simple story, which is told to convey some spiritual truth, or principle, or moral lesson (Nelson's Bible Dictionary). The word parable itself means something which is laid side by side with something else. A story is told, or sometimes it is only a statement, or even a word. The story is meant to throw light on some spiritual truth which the Lord, in this case, was teaching to those who had ears to hear. Sometimes, as we learn from Matt. 13:34, 35, it was through parable that the Lord introduced truth which had not been revealed before. That is why the Lord spoke of these parables as parables of "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." A mystery is not something that is any harder to understand than any other spiritual truth, but it is called a mystery because it has not been revealed before.

However, even though the story was a simple one, yet the meaning of it was not always clear even to the disciples. And so we learn later in this chapter that the disciples asked the Lord to explain to them the meaning of the parable of the tares. Previously, without being asked for it, the Lord gave the interpretation of the sower.

We might get the idea from the fact that the parable is often a story that the Lord used parables to simplify the truth so that people would then be understand it. But that was not the case. We always need to remember what the Apostle Paul taught the Corinthian church about learning spiritual truth.

Please turn to 1 Cor. 2:14.

Then look with me at another passage: Eph. 4:17, 18.

No one has the capacity to understand spiritual truth until he or she is born again. And all of us know that even after

that we need help. That is why the Holy Spirit has been given to us. That is why we have teachers. And that is why we search the Scriptures in much the same way that we would study any other subject. But there is this exception: We know that it is the Lord Who teaches us the truth as He wants us to know it.

As evidence of that, we have what the Lord told His disciples as they walked with Him toward the Garden of Gethsemane. Cf. John 16:12-15.

So a parable, a simple, short story in most cases, was not given to simplify the truth so that more people would be able to understand it. It was not like we might try to do with a flannel-graph lesson. Even then we have to recognize that it takes more to get people to understand the truth than just being simple or entertaining. The Lord is not in the entertainment business, and neither are we in the Church. All of us are utterly dependent upon the Lord to teach us the truth of God. All that we know, He has taught us. And what we teach, others will never learn unless God sees fit to make the truth known to them.

The disciples listened, I am sure, intently as the Lord told the story of the sower. They all knew what He was talking about because what the Lord described was known to the people of that day. It does not fit our day; that is the reason we have to have some knowledge of the way they did things in Bible times. After the Lord told the story, He evidently stopped, and the disciples wanted to know why He had stopped. They seemed to recognize that the story would not mean anything to the people without some explanation. Then it was that the Lord gave His explanation as to why He taught in parables.

I. THE LORD'S ANSWER TO THE DISCIPLES QUESTION (Matt. 13:11-13).

He actually had two answers.

- A. It was given to the disciples to know what He was teaching.
- B. It was not given to the multitudes to know what He was teaching.

This is quite different from the idea that we usually have about our Lord's ministry. He said that He was doing two things: (1) He was revealing truth, making it known, because He wanted His disciples to understand it; (2) He was concealing the truth from those to whom it was not given to under-

stand.

Now, from this we see clearly that the decision as to who knows the truth of God rests entirely with the Lord. And therefore, He intended to impress upon His disciples the fact that they should be most grateful for any knowledge they had of the truth of God. They had never heard anything like this from their official Jewish teachers. They knew nothing about the new birth (as Nicodemus showed). And so they had no idea that the knowledge of the truth of God was not really in their hands, but in God's hands.

That expression, "it is given," is most interesting, isn't it? We know that He meant "it is given" by God! The Lord is not dependent upon man's willingness to listen to the truth, nor upon his ability to understand the truth because man has neither of these. He does not want the truth of God, and, when you give it to him, it doesn't make sense to him. So the Lord taught in parables to make this clear especially to His own people.

You can see, I hope, that the Lord was doing more than to explain why He taught in parables. He was seeking to show His disciples how dependent they were upon Him if the people whom they taught and to whom they preached were to be able to understand the truth.

We wonder why people could treat the Lord the way they did, even to crucifying upon the Cross. We should not wonder about that after we hear how the Lord prayed from the Cross. He said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

I called your attention to 1 Cor. 2:14 a moment ago. In that same chapter the Apostle Paul referred to the death of our Lord, and this is what he said:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery,
even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained
before the world unto our glory:

And then listen to the following verse:

**Which none of the princes of this world knew:
for had they known it, they would not have crucified
the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:7, 8).**

The Apostle Paul said what the Lord said. The people who crucified the Lord really didn't know what they were doing. They did not know Who the Lord was. And so they could not have known why He was on earth. Remember that Paul was speaking about the religious leaders of his day as well as the high officials of the Roman government.

And even Paul, when he was speaking of his life before he met the Lord on the road to Damascus, later told Timothy that he had received mercy from God because what he had done against the Church, he had done "ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Tim. 1:13).

So the big problem facing the world is ignorance, ignorance of the truth of God, of the Word of God.

Now let me leave that there for the moment and go back to our text.

The Lord explained why He taught in parables: because He had a twofold purpose--to reveal the truth to some; to conceal the truth from others.

But then He went on to cite an OT illustration of what He was doing. And we see it in:

II. THE MINISTRY OF ISAIAH (Matt. 13:14, 15).

Probably many of us are reading through the prophecy of Isaiah right now, and it is always a blessing. I will have to say that I enjoy the last 27 chapters more than the first 39 chapters, but I do enjoy reading Isaiah's prophecy.

But, you know, Isaiah had one of the most difficult assignments any servant of the Lord can have. And he didn't know what he was getting until after he responded to the Lord's call, and said, "Here am I; send me" (Isa. 6:8).

Read what the Lord said about his ministry here in Matthew 13.

Now I want you to turn with me to Isaiah 6 to see what Isaiah wrote about it about 700 years before the Lord was here on earth. (Read Isa. 6:9-12.)

How would you like a ministry like that? It is no wonder that Isaiah said, "Lord, how long?"

To a certain extent the Lord had the same kind of a ministry.

You see, men pride themselves on what they think that they know. And yet the Bible tells us that in these matters that have to do with God and eternity, they are ignorant. They are dumb. And that makes them do foolish things. And the professing church has given people in the world that God is wringing His hands up in heaven because people generally don't want to hear His Word. However, you don't get that idea from the Bible. God doesn't know what it means to wring

His hands, if you are talking about His anxiety over whether or not anyone is going to turn to Him and believe in Christ. Instead, we see a God Who sovereignly has determined who is going to listen to the truth, and who is going to understand and be saved.

How did the Lord conclude His answer to the disciples' question? Look at Matt. 13:16, 17.

III. THE LORD'S BLESSING UPON THE DISCIPLES (Matt. 13:16, 17).

He was speaking particularly of the unfolding of the Lord's truth which they were receiving which "many prophets and righteous men" in past days wanted to see, but did not see, because they had not yet been revealed.

Do we realize how blessed we are to have a completed Bible? And how blessed we are that God has given us eyes to see the truth and ears to hear it, which means that we have been given the privilege of understanding the truth?

But let me say that the same divine principles apply to the Gospel. The world may turn away from the Gospel as foolishness, and have no time for God, but Isaiah himself gave us some very important truth which gives us hope that the ministry of the Word is not in vain.

Turn back to Isaiah 6. I want you to see the last verse in the chapter, verse 13. (Read, and explain.)

And then turn to the latter part of Isaiah's prophecy, chapter 55, verses 10 and 11. I am so thankful that Isaiah knew what he wrote here and in 6:13 or he would have had no hope whatever that he would see any blessing from God.

Concl: Where does all of this leave us?

It ought to make us realize that the ministry of the Word of God is in the Lord's hand, not ours. We as the Lord's people in this latter part of the twentieth century need to know this truth. And if we do, it is going to effect how we carry on the work that the Lord has given us to do.

Secondly, it ought to make us thankful that the Lord has given us eyes to see and ears to hear. Why He would do this for us, we can only attribute it to the grace of God. But we should praise the Lord every day that we live that He has brought us out of our total ignorance, and opened our eyes to the truth. We don't know anything as well as we ought to know it, but we can say spiritually what the man born blind

said about his physical condition. His words are recorded in John 9:25: "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.

But let me add a third word of application. We don't know when or where or for whom the Lord is still going to open people's eyes to make them see their need of Christ, and to open their ears so that they will listen to the Gospel, the Word of God. God isn't finished working. If He were, we wouldn't be here. There are still people to be reached to whom it has been given by God that they should see what we have seen, and hear what we have heard.

So let us continue to live for the Lord. And let us continue to tell forth the message. The times in which Isaiah lived did not call for any change in the message, or the method of preaching. It called for faithfulness from the prophet to do what the Lord had called him to do, knowing that his work would not, and could not, be in vain.

Parables teach us that we cannot understand the truth, even in its simplest form, without the help of God. Anyone who hears a message like this and does not know the Lord, ought to plead with God for eyes to see, and ears to hear, and a heart to understand.