

***MATTHEW 13:1-17 LET THE PARABLES BEGIN! – THE HEART THAT WANTS TO HEAR***

The confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders has finally come to a head. Jesus left nothing to ambiguity when He told the Pharisees that whoever obeyed the will of the Father were His brothers and sisters. Jesus threw down the gauntlet. He told them to get in or get out. There was no middle ground. You cannot be neutral with Jesus. You are either for Him or against Him. We have no trouble imagining where at least most of the leadership stood. They were against Him from the outset, for the most part. But what are we to think regarding the crowds?

To this point, massive crowds have followed Jesus. The throngs are made up of an eclectic lot. There are some who hang on His every word. There are some there out of curiosity, wanting to see the miracles or get a sardine sandwich. And there are some there just to heckle and entrap Him as are the Pharisees. But they have all followed Him around and heard His invitation to the kingdom. Will they follow the lead of the disciples or yield to the leadership? Whatever the case, they have had ample time to make a decision and Jesus will test their responsiveness.

While testing the crowds, Jesus will also instruct the disciples about the manifestation of the kingdom of Heaven. All along many were expecting Jesus to establish the throne of David in Israel, but Jesus continually directed them to first attend to their hearts. Entrance to the kingdom occurs with the establishment of God's righteousness in the heart of a believer, which results in becoming a disciple of Jesus. This is much different than anyone had anticipated, even to his disciples. So now Jesus will clarify what the kingdom is like at this point in the plan of God. To do this, (test the crowds and instruct the disciples) Jesus will use parables. This is a form of teaching that by its very nature has a way of thinning the herd of hearers.

Up to this point Jesus has been between the house (probably that of Peter and Andrew in Capernaum) and the synagogue. Now He leaves those confines and walks the short distance to the Sea of Galilee, where He sits and crowds once again gather.

- Sitting was the customary position of one teaching.
- The customary site is a cove where acoustic testing has shown that a very large crowd would be able to hear a man in a boat as they sat on the hill surrounding the cove.
- Jesus then began to teach:

*1 On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. 2 And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.*

*3 Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. 5 Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. 6 But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. 7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. 8 But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"*

*The Purpose of Parables*

*10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"*

*11 He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12 For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 13 Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:*

*'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,  
And seeing you will see and not perceive;*

*15 For the hearts of this people have grown dull.*

*Their ears are hard of hearing,*

*And their eyes they have closed,*

*Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,*

*Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,*

*So that I should heal them.'*

*16 But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; 17 for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.*

What is a parable and why use them?

**"Preaching a parable is a novice preacher's dream but often an experienced preacher's nightmare." Thomas O. Long**

The Greek and Hebrew equivalents each translated "parable" are *parabole'* and

*masal*. They refer to a broad cross section of metaphorical and analogical speech. In short they were allegorical stories, which were meant to communicate a truth, but only to those who really wanted to understand them. They painted a word picture that was easy to remember simply because of the allegory and story. This was a familiar rabbinic tool on those days.

- Hansel and Gretel

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The disciples, knowing the purpose of parables, asked Jesus why He would use such a method. Why would He make things harder on the crowd? We may ask the same question today. Jesus answered the disciples straightway.

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It has been given to you to know the "mysteries" of the kingdom of Heaven.

- **Mysteries – Gr. Mysteria – secrets.** This draws on a Semitic background that speaks of an eschatological secret passed on in veiled speech to God's chosen.
- **The term is found explicitly in Daniel 2:18-19.**
- **Also compare with Job 15:8;Ps. 25:14;Prov. 3:32.**

The Jews had long looked for the Messianic Kingdom, but they believed it would be manifested in a different way at this time. Jesus has told them that it was

present, but not in its fully manifested power.

**“The mystery is a new disclosure of God’s purpose for the establishment of his kingdom. The new truth, now given to men and women by revelation in the person and mission of Jesus, is that the Kingdom that is to come finally in apocalyptic power, as foreseen in Daniel, has in fact entered into the world in advance in a hidden form to work secretly within and among humans.”**

**George Ladd**

Once again, the way the kingdom has arrived is not as many had anticipated. The majority of them are disappointed about this. But Jesus refuses to let them define His work and the will of God.

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It has been given to the disciples, but not to many of the masses. Why? Whoever has the ability to understand will be able to understand more, but to those who don’t, even what understanding they have will be taken away.

**This sounds harsh!!! Why would Jesus want to hide these truths from people? That isn’t nice! That doesn’t sound like the Jesus I know and love!**

So what do we do with this? We will be honest and look at what else Jesus has to say about it.

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Jesus states that seeing, they don't see and hearing they don't hear. What does this mean? Jesus then quotes Isaiah, which is where we will find the reason for this method.

- Isaiah is a book of contrasts. It can quickly move from sin and doom to glory and holiness.
- Many scholars believe that Isaiah chapter 6 recounts Isaiah's call to prophetic ministry.
- This chapter contains the only true vision in the book.

## Isaiah 6

1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. 2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one cried to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
The whole earth is full of His glory!"

4 And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

5 So I said:

"Woe is me, for I am undone!

Because I am a man of unclean lips,

And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;

For my eyes have seen the King,

The Lord of hosts."

**6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth with it, and said:**

**"Behold, this has touched your lips;**

**Your iniquity is taken away,**

**And your sin purged."**

8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:

"Whom shall I send,

And who will go for Us?"

Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

9 And He said, "Go, and tell this people:

'Keep on hearing, but do not understand;

Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'

10 "Make the heart of this people dull,

**And their ears heavy,  
And shut their eyes;  
Lest they see with their eyes,  
And hear with their ears,  
And understand with their heart,  
And return and be healed."**

**11 Then I said, "Lord, how long?"**

**And He answered:**

**"Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant,  
The houses are without a man,  
The land is utterly desolate,**

**12 The Lord has removed men far away,  
And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.**

**13 But yet a tenth will be in it,  
And will return and be for consuming,  
As a terebinth tree or as an oak,  
Whose stump remains when it is cut down.  
So the holy seed shall be its stump."**

- Isaiah was very aware that his sin had been cleansed. He knew he had been in the presence of the Lord. Compare that to the attitude of the people to whom Jesus spoke.
- Just as God did with Pharaoh in Egypt, when people reject His Word, He continues to send it, but instead of enlightening them, it has the opposite effect. It hardens and callouses the heart.
- Isaiah knew that he lived among and ministered to a rebellious people. Even the king, Uzziah had to live with the stigma of leprosy because of his rebellion towards God. It was a bad time in Israel. Can you see the parallels between Isaiah's day and Jesus'?
- The stump – a remnant of the tree left after judgment and desolation. This painted a vivid picture for those listening to Jesus.

Jesus has the ability to see our hearts. That can be scary. Israel had a long history of going through the motions of religion and saying the right things. But their hearts weren't in it. The nation, as a whole, played church. Can you see the parallel to Jesus' day? Can you see the parallel to our day?

Jesus is at the mid-point of His earthly ministry. More and more people have become hostile to His message because they have chosen to re-define it. They are not satisfied with what they are hearing. They have a heart problem, but all they can see are their financial and political problems. To them, these are more

important than the issues of the heart.

### **Can you see the parallels to our day?**

Jesus just got through telling the religious leaders to get in or get out – to make the tree good or make it bad, but get off the fence.

### **Can you see the parallels to our day?**

So Jesus is using parables to separate those who want to hear from those that are just standing around and causing problems. Once again, there is no neutral ground with Jesus.

Those that want to hear and understand will when they search. They will understand when they open their hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit and allow Him to plumb/ plow the depths of their hearts.

- The use of parables forces the issue. Get in or get out!
- There is a cause and effect thing going on here.
- Some don't really want to hear therefore they don't have to hear. They can harden their hearts. It starts a vicious cycle. To those that don't want to hear, their hearts get harder, causing them to hear and understand even less. This causes their hearts to harden even more to the message.
- "Lest" This assures that their free moral agency is left in tact. Jesus won't force them to understand.
- **The crowd mirrors those in Isaiah's day, just as it does in our day.**
- **The disciples don't always understand, but they want to understand. Therefore they will eventually understand.**
- **The disciples will have to redefine what the kingdom is. True disciples change their ideas and worldview to fit the Word of God.**
- **Hangers-on attempt to redefine Jesus and His Word to fit what they want. As we can see, this doesn't work.**

So this is a heart issue. Will we reject the truth? Do we want to understand? Will we take the time to try to understand?

- Summer football camp

Are we willing to allow the Holy Spirit to plumb the depths of our hearts? If so, then we will understand this and even more about the Kingdom of God.

