

Stage IV. The Great Galilean Ministry

G . The Second Tour of Galilee

6. The Reason Jesus Began to Use Parables (#092)

Base Text: MT 13.10-17 (Parallel Texts: MK 4.10-12; LK 8.9-10)

10 ^MWhen they were alone, ^{MT}the disciples ^Mwho were traveling with Jesus along with the twelve ^{MT}came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

11 He replied, "*Because the experiential knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given permanently to you, but not to them.* ^M*For those on the outside, everything is now expressed in parables.*

12 ^{MT}*"Whoever is in possession of knowledge will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have experiential knowledge, even the information they have will be taken from them.* ^M*Otherwise they would turn to me, and they would be forgiven.* 13 ^{MT}*This is why I speak to them in parables: "THOUGH SEEING, THEY DO NOT SEE; THOUGH HEARING, THEY DO NOT HEAR OR UNDERSTAND.* (Jer. 5.21)

14 *"The prophecy of Isaiah is being actively fulfilled in them:*

'YOU WILL BE EVER HEARING BUT NEVER UNDERSTANDING;

YOU WILL BE EVER SEEING BUT NEVER PERCEIVING.

15 *FOR THIS PEOPLE'S HEART HAS BECOME CALLOUSED;*

THEY HARDLY HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES.

OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS,

UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEARTS AND TURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.' (Isaiah 6.9-10)

16 *"But blessed are your eyes because they are seeing, and your ears because they are hearing.* 17 *For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you are seeing, but did not see it, and to hear what you are hearing, but did not hear it."*

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *the words of Jesus are italicized in red*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	Somewhere in Galilee, In a Home Near the Sea of Galilee
Timeline	May (Month Sixteen)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage IV: The Great Galilean Ministry
	G. The 2 nd Tour of Galilee
Title	6. The Reason Jesus Began To Use Parables

COMMENT:

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In today's reading we see that the parables had a different role and purpose in the ministry of Jesus than we might think. We first noted this in our comments at the beginning of this second tour of Galilee. Because parables constituted a significant portion of the content of Jesus' teaching, we will take some time now to further consider their intended function.

Jesus was the greatest communicator of all time--no question about that. And, his parables have come down through time as memorable stories that are still relevant and powerful, in this or any age. But they were not his, nor his disciple's preferred mode of communication.

Remember that Jesus did not speak in parables from the beginning of his ministry. When he first began to use them in this scene, his disciples were shocked, not understanding why he did it. As soon as they were alone with him they asked: "*Why do you speak to the people in parables?*" It made no sense to them. So why did Jesus switch to using parables, rather than direct discourse in speaking to the crowds?

The context is crucial here. The Pharisees had just publicly accused Jesus of being demon possessed, and ministering by the power of the Devil. They asked for "signs" to verify that he was the Messiah, when he had just performed a miracle in their presence that they attributed to the Devil himself. These scribes and Pharisees were following Jesus around on his second tour of Galilee in the large crowds, and fermenting confusion and doubt concerning him among the people. They were trying to turn the tide of public opinion against him. The arrival of Jesus' mother and brothers just moments before to take him home, for fear that he had lost his mind, underscored the impact of the Pharisee's mud-slinging accusations among the people.

Have you ever tried to speak to religious people who hate you, and believe you are an agent of the Devil?

Such people will not listen with an open mind to anything you have to say. This is exactly what Jesus described in his reply to the disciple's question. Isaiah prophesied about people who heard sounds in their ears, but had no comprehension in their minds and hearts of the meaning of what they heard--precisely what the Jewish leadership was doing. The crowds were beginning to do the same. So Jesus went to Plan B: he began to speak in stories that indirectly communicated his message.

Parables were short, memorable tales that addressed Jesus' listeners through their role in the story. Each parable had one main point that applied to directly to Jesus' listeners, which snuck up on them at the end, as they realized the tale was actually about them. At the end of the story (sometimes during the telling of it) the listener should suddenly realize: "*Oh! He is actually talking about me!*" Good parables make a powerful main point in an interesting, indirect manner.

So parables allowed Jesus to speak to, and against his enemies without addressing them directly. It was a brilliant form of coded communication that allowed Jesus the only kind of hearing that he could have in that kind of hostile situation. Jesus started using them when the circumstances required it. But it was not his preferred way of preaching and teaching.

These "main-point" parables were specifically designed for those who were not believers--those on the outside of fellowship with him. He continued to explain the parables privately in direct discourse with his own disciples, and speak to them without using parables.

We should also note that there is a difference between a parable and storytelling illustration. Jesus constantly used many different kinds of illustrative material in his speaking. These illustrations gave vivid visual or logical expressions to the ideas he was simultaneously expressing in words. All illustrations do this, and Jesus was the Master of using them. Parables were stories told to make one main point apply to his listeners, without stating that point in any other way. Illustrations explain another point that is being made, and do not stand alone in communication, while parables stand alone as a unit of thought, and make their own point.

Jesus spoke at the end of the reading of the tremendous blessing that the disciples had received, because they were hearing and seeing Jesus directly, as he revealed himself to them in word and deed. They did not need parables, for they were on the inside of Jesus' personal instruction and knowledge. This personal knowledge of

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the Messiah was something that all of the prophets and God-seeking believers under the old covenant longed for, but never experienced.

We have knowledge and revelation through Jesus, as written in the gospels, that is so much more than Moses, David, Isaiah, Elijah, or Jeremiah ever knew or could even imagine. This is another reason why the “least” disciple in the new covenant has so much more than the greatest saints in the old covenant. We are blessed beyond belief.

APPLICATION:

Jesus was both brilliant, and courageous in continuing to reach out to his enemies with his message by using parables. His unconditional love shines so brightly here. He could have just written them off, refusing to speak any further to any of them. That would have been more than justified. But he chose to continue to reach out to them with his message, even when he knew how hard their hearts were against him, and his message. What amazing love is that?

We too must not give up in communicating the good news to people who refuse to hear it. We must be willing to make every effort to enable them to understand and respond to the message, no matter how much their previous rejection of it should disqualify them from another hearing. That is God's kind of love. It must be ours, too.

Is there anyone you have given up on, and stopped sharing Jesus' message with? How can you continue to reach out them in God's love?