

## **Once upon a time...**

We all love a good story, don't we?

Jesus was the greatest storyteller when he walked with his disciples. He taught many things in what we call parables, which are simple stories that reveal a deeper meaning. Jesus spoke in parables not simply to teach moral lessons in a way people would remember but to reveal the kingdom of heaven. There are multiple layers to every parable that Jesus taught, but each one shows us something about God's character and our own hardened, sinful human nature.

Thirty-five percent of the content in the synoptic Gospels is the parables that Jesus told. If parables were Jesus' primary teaching method, then they should be very important for us to study.

## **What is a Parable?**

The word parable means "to set alongside". A parable is a story that is set alongside a timeless truth to reinforce or to clarify a certain truth.

Dr/ Albert Mohler defines a parable as, "*Surprising stories and word pictures drawn from the familiar, that powerfully reveal to us the unfamiliar*".

God uses this concept throughout the Bible. Sometimes God uses historical accounts to stand as a standard to reveal His character and nature. In the Old Testament, God frequently referred to himself as, "*I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt*". The Egypt deliverance was their great story.

The books of Esther and Ruth reveal aspects of the nature of God and the Gospel.

The prophets were sometimes called upon to act out the message in sometimes uncomfortable ways, providing a visual parable if you will (look at Jeremiah and Hosea for example).

Job is a true story that has become a parable for the sovereignty of God.

Our creator knows our mind is wired for story because He created it that way. Our creator came, teaching in parables 2000 years ago, and they still speak to us today.

## **Truth Obscured**

When Jesus first taught the parables to the original audience, they were obscure; his listeners didn't grasp the true meaning of what Jesus was saying.

The disciples asked Jesus in Matthew 13 verse 10, "*Why do you speak to them in parables?*" They noticed that Jesus was not explaining the parables to the people.

Jesus answered 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.*"

Why would Jesus intentionally obscure truth from the very people he came to save? The disciples and the people thought they knew who Jesus was. They were expecting a messiah who would overthrow the Roman empire and re-establish the great nation of Israel. The disciples were trying to

help Jesus create a following by revealing who he was, or at least who they thought he was. Why was Jesus hiding the truth in stories?

While Jesus explained the parables to his inner circle, he was really speaking to the church that would be birthed after his ascension. The parables are for us, revealing truths about the Kingdom of Heaven.

In verse 12, Jesus explains that there are two kinds of people, those who hear and understand, and those who hear and do not understand.

### **Truth Revealed**

What makes the difference? The key is the Holy Spirit, the revealer of truth. The parables are not just informative stories; they are crucial for the believer to grasp and to apply leading to a harvest of righteousness. It is our privilege to mine them in order to grow in wisdom and sanctification.

Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah in verses 14-15, quoting Isaiah 6 which includes the prophet's commissioning. God responds to Isaiah's willingness by telling him that He is sending the prophet to a people who have dull hearts, blind eyes, and deaf ears.

All followers of Jesus have been commissioned by him to go and proclaim the Gospel (see Matthew 28:19-20). Just like Isaiah, we will have some people who hear and are saved and others who hear but reject the Gospel, facing an eternity separated from God.

So why do some people receive the Gospel and others reject it? What makes the human heart receptive? Can we soften our own hearts (see Jeremiah 17:9)?

This is a complex paradox that theologians have wrestled with for centuries. On the one hand we have the absolute sovereignty of God and on the other hand we have the responsibility of the hearer to respond.

In verse 16 Jesus tells his disciples, "*But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.*"

Jesus didn't say, "you see and hear because you are smarter, or special in some way." The disciples weren't chosen because they had superior people skills or IQ. No, they were blessed by God to have Jesus explain the parables to them.

We know from Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit, that when we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are blessed to be able to understand the truths of God's Word.

### **Truth Told**

Along with the sovereignty of God and the gift of the Holy Spirit bringing revelation, we have what we call the doctrine of election. Why does the Bible teach that there are some who are chosen and others not? From Abraham to the writings of Paul and the book of Revelation, we see that God elects His people.

Our calling as followers of Jesus is not to try to determine who the elect are and aren't but to proclaim the Gospel. We sow the seeds of the Gospel, but the Holy Spirit is the one that brings new

life, winning souls for the Kingdom of Heaven. The more we share the Gospel, the more of the elect we find!

The Gospel is the one true story that makes every parable understandable. It is the one truth that reveals all other truths that Jesus taught.

***Are you seeing? Are you hearing? Are you understanding? Who will you tell?***