

How (and What) the Parables of Jesus Help Us See

Why Parables?

Lesson 4

The disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” (Matt 13:10)

Seven centuries before Jesus’ disciples asked that question, the prophet Isaiah had an incredible vision. Take the time to read [Isaiah 6](#). It’s just thirteen verses and it will provide valuable context for Jesus’ answer to the “Why parables?” question. **What stands out to you about Isaiah 6?** What’s the problem that’s provoking the LORD’s commissioning of Isaiah?

Before we come back to the “Why parables?” question in [Matthew 13](#), let’s take a few moments to appreciate the context. In [Matthew 4:17](#), Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” He began his most famous sermon ([Matt 5-7](#)) by saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” ([5:3](#)). He draws attention to “the gospel of the kingdom” in a variety of ways in [Matthew 8-10](#). But in [Matthew 11](#), we begin to notice a turning-point:

- John the Baptist asks: “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” ([11:1-6](#))
- Some said of Jesus: “A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” ([11:7-19](#))
- People in Galilean cities saw his mighty works but failed to repent ([11:20-24](#))
- Pharisees and scribes accuse Jesus and conspire against him ([12:1-45](#))
- Jesus’ own family is not sure what to make of him ([12:46-50](#); [John 7:5](#))

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow...” ([13:1-3](#))

After describing how seeds fall along the path, on rocky ground, among thorns, and on good soil—concluding with “He who has ears, let him hear”—the disciples ask, “**Why parables?**” Read his response carefully in [Matthew 13:11-17](#). **In your own words, what is Jesus communicating, and how is his mission tied to Isaiah 6?**

The parables begin to come alive when we look at Jesus’ original audience(s) through his eyes. Some are unwilling to repent. Some are hostile. Some are interested, but confused. Some are struggling with doubt. Some are enthusiastically supportive and ready to follow him wherever he goes. So Jesus tells them “many things in parables.” Why? To conceal his message from those with hard hearts and reveal “the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” to those with open hearts.



For Next Week...

Notice after his parables of the sower, the weeds, the mustard seed, and the leaven, Matthew summarizes:

All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet:

“I will open my mouth in parables;

I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.”

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. (Matt 13:34-36)

This is a reference to [Psalm 78:2](#). **Take the time this week to read Psalm 78 and reflect on its message.** Why might Matthew have found it valuable to draw our attention to this ancient psalm at this point in his gospel?