

Copyright © Two Journeys Ministry

Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

[www.twojourneys.org](http://www.twojourneys.org)

Please use in accordance with the copyright policy found at [twojourneys.org](http://twojourneys.org)

## **The Purposes of the Parables**

**Matthew 13:1-17**

Central Question: Why did Jesus teach in parables?

### I. Understanding Context

#### A. Larger Context

Focus of the parables: the Kingdom of Heaven

##### 1. An Advancing Kingdom

Kingdom of Heaven is advancing forcefully

Christ proclaimed the Kingdom's coming

***Matthew 4:17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."***

Christ taught the Kingdom's nature: Sermon on the Mount

Christ displayed the Kingdom's power: miracle after miracle

People entering the Kingdom daily

Satan's kingdom being plundered and routed day after day by the Son of God

The Parables were given to reveal the irresistible triumph of the Kingdom

##### 2. A Misunderstood Kingdom

Jews universally expected the Kingdom of God... BUT

They expected it to be a physical, material, military conquest

They could not understand a spiritual kingdom

The Parables were given to explain the true spiritual nature of the Kingdom... to overturn their temporal, physical understanding: Christ's kingdom was within, internal spiritual. The parables would make that clear

### 3. A Rejected Kingdom

From Matthew 11 & 12: people were rejecting this spiritual kingdom

Even John the Baptist: "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

The Jews in Capernaum, Korazin, Bethsaida saw the mighty miracles but shrugged in unbelief and indifference

The Pharisees and Scribes actively opposed Him and plotted to murder Him

Even Christ's own family didn't embrace Him as their Messiah... as the King of the Kingdom of Heaven until later

Since the Kingdom was being rejected, Christ told the parable of the seed and the soils to explain even that key aspect of Kingdom life

#### B. Immediate Context

##### 1. Matthew 13:1-9

***Matthew 13:1-3 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. 2 Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed.***

- a. huge crowds... not only the disciples (as in the Sermon on the Mount)
- b. Jesus teaches in a parable... the seed and the soils. BUT He doesn't explain it at all!!!
- c. concludes with a challenge:

***vs. 9 "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"***

##### 2. Disciples deeply perplexed!!

- a. opportunity to reach the multitudes seemingly wasted
- b. why speak a parable and not explain it? Why KEEP ON doing this?

- c. so they did what any true spiritual beggar disciple should do... they came and asked Christ!!

## II. What is a Parable? Christ's Seven-fold Display of the Kingdom

### A. Parable Defined

#### 1. Greek definition

John MacArthur: "*Parabole* is a compound word made up of a form of the verb *ballo* (to throw, lay, place) and the prefix *para* (meaning alongside of). The idea is that of placing, or laying something alongside of something else for the purpose of comparison. A spiritual or moral truth would often be expressed by laying it alongside, so to speak, a physical example that could be more easily understood... That which was well-known was laid alongside that which was not known or understood in order to explain it."

#### 2. Other definitions

Simon Kistemaker: "A parable is a form of speech, either a story or saying, used to illustrate a point the speaker is trying to make."

Colin Brown: "In the broadest sense a parable is a form of speech used to illustrate and persuade by the help of a picture."

Because God yearns to communicate abstract spiritual concepts to us in ways we can understand, he uses elements of everyday life and common experience to teach us.

For example, when Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You must be born again", he was using a figure of speech whose purpose was to teach Nicodemus how a man must enter the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus had no idea what it meant, saying "How can a man enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered

***John 3:12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?***

Thus a parable is a story which seeks to use common, everyday experience to teach abstract spiritual truth. But the parable must be interpreted properly, or it will seem like nonsense.

#### 3. Common form of Jewish teaching

- a. forty-five times the word "parable" is found in Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
  - b. rabbis were constantly using pithy and noteworthy sayings to illustrate their points
- One rabbi was asked, "How is it that for every moral lesson you have a beautiful story to teach it with?" The rabbi smiled. "To answer that I can tell another story. I was once walking in the woods and saw a boy shooting arrows at targets. There were targets on every tree and each one had an arrow dead center.

'How expert you are!' I said. 'How did you manage so many exactly at the bull's-eye?' 'It's easy,' the boy answered. 'First I shoot the arrow and then I draw the target around it.' I do the same," said the rabbi."

- Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah dissuaded the Jews from revolting against the Romans by telling them the parable of the crane which extracted a thorn from the throat of a lion. When the crane asked for its reward, it was told that it had been sufficiently rewarded in not being eaten when thrust between the lion's jaws. Similarly, the Jews should feel lucky that they had not been annihilated by the Romans.

c. so today preachers study to use parables and illustrations

Spurgeon: "A sermon without an illustration is like a house with out windows. It is more like a prison than a delightful home."

BUT one can carry it too far: Cartoon of a preacher in his study in fervent prayer: "Lord please grant me a sermon to go with this great illustration!!"

4. Parables based on our senses and experiences: our eyes, our ears, our everyday lives

5. Many spoke parables: Jesus perfected them!!

Leon Morris: "To this day his parables are known and loved the world over, but who can name even one parable from his contemporaries?"

6. A.B. Bruce: Categories of Christ's parables

Roughly one third of all the words spoken by Christ in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are in the form of parables... some scholars count as many as sixty parables

Taken together and interpreted properly they address three major areas:

- 1) The Nature of the Kingdom of Heaven: Instructive
- 2) The Need to Enter the Kingdom of Heaven: Evangelistic
- 3) The Future of the Kingdom of Heaven: Prophetic

B. Parable Displayed: Matthew 13

So far we've defined parable... but maybe it's better simply to put Jesus' parables on display

Morris: "But perhaps we learn best what a parable is by looking at the way Jesus used it rather than by trying to produce a satisfactory definition." Jesus used parables in a more stunning, powerful, provocative way than any other teacher in history.

Let's take a quick survey of the Seven Parables of the Kingdom in Matthew 13

Here in Matthew 13, we have seven instructive parables... other than the first, each one begins with the same phrase

***“The kingdom of heaven is like...”***

The Seed and the Soils (vs. 3-8)

***"A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop-- a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.***

Basic lesson: The Kingdom of heaven advances by people hearing and believing the word of God. Different people receive the word different ways, as is demonstrated by the results in their lives.

The Wheat and the Weeds (vs. 24-30)

***"The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. 27 "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' 28 "'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' 29 "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"***

Basic lesson: The Kingdom of Heaven exists and advances constantly in this world in a complex, mixed situation... enemies who are very hard to tell from friends and friends who are very hard to tell from enemies. Only at the end of the world will this be resolved.

The Mustard Seed (vs. 31-32)

***"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. 32 Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."***

Basic lesson: The Kingdom of heaven starts small and grows constantly until it is immense and imposing.

The Yeast (vs. 33)

***"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."***

Basic lesson: The growth of Kingdom of heaven is hidden and mysterious, but in the end it will permeate the entire world, and each individual believer.

[This is my favorite... he explains all of world history and my own personal salvation in nineteen words!!]

The Treasure Hidden in the Field (vs. 44)

***"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."***

Basic lesson: The Kingdom of heaven is of incredible value, worth everything in your life to obtain. However that value is initially hidden and must be discovered.

The Pearl of Great Value (vs. 45-46)

***"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."***

Same basic lesson: The Kingdom of heaven is of incredible value, worth everything in your life to obtain. However, you must search for it with all your heart.

The Dragnet (vs. 47-50)

***"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 48 When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. 49 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."***

Basic lesson: The Kingdom of heaven will end on Judgment Day in which all people will be divided into two categories. Those who reject the word will suffer eternally in hell.

Summary: So you can see what a parable is... a story using everyday experiences which carries a hidden meaning about spiritual things and must be explained. Once the explanation is understood and accepted, the parable becomes an incredibly clear and memorable teaching tool, permanently engraving truth in the hearts of those who have spiritual ears to hear.

### III. Why Did Christ Teach in Parables?

#### A. To Fulfill Prophecy

##### 1. As quoted by Jesus Himself: Isaiah

***vs. 13-15 This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. 14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "'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.'***

What Isaiah experienced to some level with his people, the Jews, Jesus experienced far more... their hardened hearts could not understand spiritual truth, so God spoke to them differently. More in a moment!!

##### 2. As ascribed by Matthew

***vs. 34-35 Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. 35 So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world."***

##### a. Old Testament prophecy = Psalm 78

***Psalm 78:2 I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old***

##### b. Matthew constantly sees fulfillment of prophecy in everything Jesus did

##### c. the fact that Jesus spoke in parables perfectly fulfilled the entire Old Testament use of proverbs, wise sayings, allegories, metaphors... all the fullness of God's teaching tools in Israel

##### d. it also fulfilled this verbally predictive prophecy from Psalm 78

- e. Psalm 78 recounts the whole history of Israel as a “parable” for future generations to learn from
- f. Christ is the great teacher of the significance of Israel’s history... He is its fulfillment... so is He also the perfect fulfillment of a parable-speaking teacher of Israel

Reason #1: Christ used parables as a direct fulfillment of prophecy... Isaiah 6 and Psalm 78

B. To Conceal and Judge

1. Dig a little deeper into the Isaiah 6 quote

***vs. 13-15 This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. 14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "'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.'***

2. Isaiah’s vision of God and commissioning as a prophet

***Isaiah 6:8-13 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" 9 He said, "Go and tell this people: "'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' 10 Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." 11 Then I said, "For how long, O Lord?" And he answered: "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, 12 until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. 13 And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land."***

- a. Isaiah commissioned to preach a gloomy message that the people of Israel would reject
- b. God had warned them again and again that judgment was coming... but they refused to listen
- c. now he sends them Isaiah



i) first messages they refused to heed or understand

ii) next messages so simple a child could get it... then they mocked him

***Isaiah 28:9-10 "Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast? 10 For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there."***

[Hebrew: "kav lakav, kav lakav, sav lasav, sav lasav" like baby talk; they mocked Isaiah's word!! So God said, "Fine... since you mock the clear presentation of the word, I will now make it even harder for you to understand!]

***Isaiah 28:11 Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people***

[The Babylonians would come and speak gibberish to the Jews and they wouldn't understand a word! But they would get the message... God has judged them!]

3. So Christ's use of unexplained parables an act of judgment on His opponents

4. Division of his hearers: "Inside" vs. "Outside"

***Mark 4:11-12 He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables 12 so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"***

a. strong element of election and choice on God's part

b. God hardens His enemies through these parables

c. the parables served to confirm their hardness all the more

d. the parables are told SO THAT

***"they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"***

e. idea: if Christ had not told parables with no explanation, perhaps they would have turned and been forgiven

f. but instead Christ confirms their hardness by telling parables

g. after listening to these parables, the enemies are in a WORSE way toward Christ... they tended to despise Him all the more

After Jesus taught the magnificent parable of the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep, the crowd was divided specifically over His manner of teaching:

***John 10:20-21 Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?" But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon.***

So, Christ's figurative teaching actually hardened His enemies into even greater disrespect... calling Him demon-possessed and raving mad!

h. as a result, they actually understand even less about God

***vs. 12 Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.***

Summary: Reason #2... Christ told parables to conceal His truth from His enemies as an act of judgment

Amazingly, however, the same parables were a GREAT SOURCE of enlightenment to His disciples

C. To Reveal and Bless

***vs. 10-12 The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" 11 He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 12 Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.***

1. Mystery religions... only the inner circle can know

a. Greek: "mysteria" "knowledge of the mysteries..."

b. ancient world: mystery = sacred spiritual secret known only to initiates, sometimes only known to highest level in the secret society of the religion

MacArthur: The system of mystery religions began in ancient Babylon and spread in various forms to every part of the civilized world. A influential Greek philosophical system of New Testament times was called *Gnosticism*, a name derived from the Greek word *gnosis* which means knowledge. Gnostics considered themselves 'in the know' as far as philosophical matters were concerned."

Progress in the Gnostic system could only be made through acquiring 'keys of knowledge' which opened doors of mystery into ever-higher levels of the religion.

Ancient Egypt: mystery cult of mythical god Osiris and his goddess wife Isis

ISIS was the wife of the god Osiris. When Ra (the sun-god) was raised to the heavens, Osiris took his place as ruler of Earth. However, his brother, Set, killed Osiris. Set was god of evil and had thrown Osiris's body into the

Nile, but **ISIS**, after much difficulty, found it. The jackyl-headed god, Anubis, helped her prepare the corpse for burial. But instead of interring her husband, **ISIS** used her magical powers to bring him back to life. However, he could no longer be ruler of Earth, so he became the lord of the netherworld, where the spirits of the dead go. **ISIS** was not through. She saw to it that her son, **Horus**, overthrew the evil **Set** and regained the throne which had been stolen from his father, **Osiris**. In early Egyptian times, **ISIS** was not an important deity, but later, she became one of the chief gods. After **Alexander The Great** conquered Egypt, the cult of **ISIS** spread to Greece-and even to **Rome** in the first century B.C.

The cult was a mystery religion in which inner members knew the spiritual significance of all the symbolism and rituals

**BUT** in the Bible, mysteries refer to spiritual truth revealed by the Holy God through revelation to His children

To receive this knowledge, you must simply be a disciple of Christ, humble yourself, and ask!!!

This is the one thing Christ's enemies would never do!

2. Christ simply **GAVE** the mysteries to the disciples:

**vs. 11-12 He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 12 *Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.***

They were the spiritual beggars... they were the **BLESSED ONES**

He would make them **RICH** with spiritual knowledge and insight... they would have an abundance

3. Christ Lavished Wisdom on these disciples

**vs. 16-18 *But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 17 For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.***

- a. because they were the humble ones and asked, He would bless their eyes and ears
- b. also because they were His chosen apostles, they were privileged above even the prophets of old
- c. prophets of old **LONGED** to see Christ, and to hear His voice
- d. these men were lavishly blessed

4. Parables **PLUS** personal instruction by God's Son = Blessing

**vs. 18 "*Listen then to what the parable of the sower means***

Once the personal instruction comes, the parable becomes a dazzling source of insight into the Kingdom of Heaven...

A rich store of wisdom in pithy, memorable images engraved into their minds

Summary: Reason #3: Christ taught in parables to reveal spiritual truth and bless His chosen disciples lavishly

D. To Make Spiritual Beggars Ask

1. Basic lesson: be a spiritual beggar... ask and you will receive

***Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the spiritual beggars, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."***

***Matthew 7:7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."***

2. Proudful enemies despise the parables, and the Christ who taught them
3. Humble disciples ask for wisdom and He gives them everything!!

***vs. 36 Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."***

4. Parables are mysterious... they strip us of self-confidence and make us ask

Reason #4: Christ taught in parables to humble us and make us totally dependent on Him for wisdom... to make us spiritual beggars who have to ask Him for everything.

This is the same reason there are difficult teachings and hard doctrines and seemingly insolvable theological puzzles in the Bible... to humble our arrogance and make us like little children

#### IV. Application

- A. Humble Yourself and Ask
- B. Marvel at Christ's Parables and their wisdom
- C. Rejoice at Your Privilege as a Disciple
- D. Learn the Lessons of Each Parable

