

**AGAPE HOUSE OF WORSHIP
WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY**

Study Series: Speaking in Parables
Lesson 1: Introduction of the Parables of Jesus

Wednesday, February 8th, 2023.
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The Teaching Ministry of Jesus

Jesus was called many different titles in the Bible (Prophet, Son of Man, Son of God, Son of David, Redeemer). Still, of all of them, the most prominent was Teacher. In fact, of the 90 times Jesus was addressed directly in the gospels, 60 times he was called Teacher. His earthly ministry is significant for many reasons, especially for His prolific teaching about the kingdom of God. The Gospels present Jesus as a teacher par excellence. His method and style of teaching were radically different. Jesus captured the listeners' interest, made the content relevant, and employed a learning process that engaged the learner with contemporary concerns and Scripture. In fact, many people who reject the Christian faith still have great respect for Jesus as a wise, virtuous, and gifted Teacher. Here are a few testimonies about the teaching ministry of Jesus.

- Nicodemus called him Rabi and a teacher who has come from God. John 3:1-2
- It was recorded that several times people were amazed at his teaching – Matthew 7:28-29, Mark 1:27
- Jesus himself acknowledged his title as a teacher. In John 13:13 he said, *“You call me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am.”*

The Use of Parables in the Bible

One of the marks of the teaching of Jesus was his use of parables. The use of parables was not entirely unique to Jesus. Parables were a common form of teaching in Judaism. They played a role in the traditions and teachings of the Rabbis in Jesus' day. The Pharisees used parables to explain or illustrate the meaning of the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament. Though parables are rare in the Old Testament, they are still significant.

After David's sin with Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan confronted the king with a parable. (2 Samuel 12:1-13). David responded to the parable with outrage, not realizing that he was the perpetrator of the crime in the parable. Nathan's parable was an effective teaching tool in a moment of crisis.

The Use of Parables by Jesus

It has been said that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. A parable is a teaching tool and one that Jesus used often. The Lord Jesus frequently used parables to illustrate profound, divine truths. Stories such as these are easily remembered, the characters bold, and the symbolism rich in meaning. It has been said that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

Question: What is your favorite Parable and why?

Why Did Jesus Teach in Parable?

Though Jesus used parables in a unique way, he did not simply use parables to illustrate previous revelation; He used them to give new revelation. Jesus' parables were short, ranging from a single verse (Matt. 13:33) to a couple of dozen (Luke 15:11-32). They all used everyday examples and were relatable stories to those who heard them. And they had a truth that Jesus was attempting to get across to those he was teaching.

Before a certain point in His ministry, Jesus had employed many graphic analogies using everyday things familiar to everyone (salt, bread, sheep, etc.), and their meaning was reasonably clear in the context of His teaching. Parables required more explanation, and at one point in His ministry, Jesus began to teach using parables exclusively.

The first time Jesus used parables was in the Parable of the Sower. Surprisingly before He interpreted this parable, He drew His disciples away from the crowd. This must have aroused the disciples' curiosity as they said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

“And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” “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. (Matthew 13:10-17)

From this point on in Jesus' ministry, he began to speak in parables. The question is why Jesus would let most people wonder about the meaning of His parables. Jesus provided two surprising reasons:

- 1. Reason 1: To Teach His Disciples:** The first reason that Jesus gave for using parables was to impart "the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" to his disciples.
- 2. Reason 2: To Prevent Understanding by Others:** More challenging to understand is the second reason Jesus gave for teaching in parables. Jesus taught in parables to keep some people from understanding what he was teaching.

His use of parables served to divide his listeners into two groups: his disciples, and everyone else. His disciples would be able to learn from them. But to those who were not his disciples, their meaning was obscure. By using parables, his disciples would be enriched, but others would be further impoverished.

Question: What do you think of Reason #2?

How to Understand the Parables

The parables of Jesus are some of the best known and most loved parts of the Scriptures. However, they have suffered from a history of misinterpretation in the church, particularly because of the debate over whether parables should be allegorized.

The standard principles of exegesis (interpretation of scripture) should also be used for interpreting the parables. It is essential to ask what the parable meant to the original listeners of Jesus and the original readers of the Gospels. These principles are particularly appropriate to the parables, which contain a complete story with characters and a plot.

1. Look at the parable in its proper context: what led to the parable? Was it a question, a problem to solve, or an issue to resolve? For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan is a response to a question. Luke 10:25-37
2. Know that parables usually have one central point: Parables are not allegories. An allegory is a more detailed story in which all, or nearly all, of the details, have significance in the message of the story. On the other hand, parables contain a central message; there is no need to read into every element of the parable.
3. Parables are not secret codes; they focus on telling people about the nature of the kingdom of God.
4. Remember the cultural gap: Some images and metaphors have rich meanings to people in Jesus' time that are not as easy to recognize for those living in the 21st century. The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)) makes much more sense when one understands the Jewish marriage customs present at the time of Jesus.
5. Some of the parables were already interpreted by Jesus; no need to add to the interpretation. For example, the parable of the Sower (Matthew 13: 1-9) was later explained by Jesus Matthew 13:18-23.