

Title: Why Parables?  
Text: Matthew 13.9-17  
Theme: Why Jesus spoke in parables  
Series: Matthew #72  
Prop Stmtnt: The words of Jesus reveal the division in people.

Read Text: Matthew 13.1-17

It is no secret that people love stories. Teachers of all ages know that when they are losing control of a class, or loosing the attention of their audience, that they need to tell a story to get everyone back in the groove. And since parables are little stories, it is easy to assume that Jesus is telling stories because he knows how much people like stories, so he is utilizing a very effective communication strategy in order to connect with his audience. People often say that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Ok. I guess it is, sort of. But, it is SO much more than that. These parables have a context. The context gives them meaning. If you ignore the context, you will never get the meaning. For example, let's say that a husband says to his wife, "*What you just did reminds me so much of your mother.*" What did he mean by that? How is she going to respond to that? How is that going to affect their relationship? You can give your opinion all day long, but unless you know the history of this couple and their relationship with the mother of the wife, you will never know what that statement was intended to mean. A lot of water has gone under their relational bridge and you need to know what that water is. The same thing is true here. Jesus began teaching in parables after a lot of water went under the bridge. Let's review what that water was that has gone under the bridge.

After learning about the origin, the identity and some of the events surrounding the birth of Christ, we learned about the prophet John the Baptist who was preaching about the kingdom of heaven and the fact that it was here, now! Then Jesus shows up publicly and begins to preach the same thing. After successfully defeating Satan's attempt to tempt him, Christ returns to the public scene and begins preaching again, but this time he describes what the kingdom is actually like by describing what the people of the kingdom are like and what life is like in the kingdom. (chapters 5-7)– Then in chapters 8-9, we see the power and the compassion of the King. This sets us up for the second teaching bloc (chapter 10) when Jesus prepares his disciples for the fact that some will accept your words and many will reject you because they reject your words. This very point is now put on display in chapters 11-12 with how people respond to the words and the works of Jesus. In chapter 12, it's like Jesus went back into the stamping plant and said, "You are using the wrong die." In fact, this is what he has been doing all along.

Let me explain it this way. In order to make a car, you have to make the parts. In order to make the parts, you have to have the right dies. A die is the piece of metal over which metal is stamped into a part. In order to build the right dies you have to have good engineers who design them correctly, and craftsmen who build the dies to specification. If the die builder misinterprets the design and builds the wrong die, then the part that is stamped will not be according to specification and it will not fit and if it does not fit, it will not work. The Scribes and Pharisees were reading the Old Testament as the

blueprint. They were misinterpreting the blueprint. Therefore, they were designing the wrong dies, which were forming the wrong parts. What they were calling the people of God did not fit and did not work. Their product was wrong because the parts they were building with were wrong. They were calling their product the people of God or the kingdom of God. They were saying that we are the people of God because we are part of Israel ethnically. They were right in that there are two groups. However, they mislabeled and misunderstood them. They assumed that those who were on the “inside” (in the right group, in God’s group) were those who were identified with Israel through their ethnicity, which was expressed by their adherence to their interpretation of the Old Testament law. Jesus however is preaching a different message.

Do you see what Jesus is doing? He is retooling the entire stamping plant. He is going back to the blueprints and showing them that they are using the wrong dies. All of the dies are supposed to look like him. The entire Old Testament was about him. All of the parts are to be stamped in the image of Jesus. And while there are two groups, the difference between the two is not ethnicity. The difference between the two groups is based on whether or not you respond in faith to the message of Jesus. How do you respond to the words of Jesus? The words of Jesus are designed to cause you to have an encounter with God. In fact, the entire Bible has been recorded, copied and preserved so that by hearing these words, you will encounter God.

We just finished chapter 12 where the Scribes and Pharisees were having a melt down because Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Jesus is trying to tell them that the purpose of the Sabbath was for good, for enjoyment, for rest, for joy because it was a gift from God so that his people would enjoy the fruit of their work AND, so that it would help them ultimately find their rest in Jesus. Salvation is not based on what we do, but it is based on what Jesus did. But, what did they do with the Sabbath law? They made their salvation based on what they did NOT do and completely missed how this was supposed to point them to Jesus. So, Jesus is retooling the stamping plant and they are so incensed, that they accuse him of being in league with Satan. Now you are ready for chapter 13.

Something subtle happens here and something dramatic happens here as well. From this point on, Jesus does more teaching outdoors than indoors. Most of Jesus’ teaching up until now has taken place in synagogues and homes, with some of it happening outdoors. From this point on, most of his teaching is done outside, with some of it taking place indoors. The dramatic thing that happens is that Jesus starts teaching in a manner that he has not done before (with the possible exception of 7.24-27) and the disciples are obviously confused. Jesus, without any apparent warning, begins telling parables. Here in chapter 13, Jesus tells a parable in verses 1-9. Then in verses 10-17, Jesus explains why he is now speaking in parables. In verses 18-23, Jesus explains the parable that he gave in verses 1-9, and then from verse 24 on, Jesus gives six more parables. This morning, we are going to look at verses 10-17, where Jesus explains why he suddenly starts teaching in parables and then next week, we will look at the first parable. By the way, he only explains the parables to his disciples (18-23 and 36-43).

## **I. Two Important Statements (9-12)**

### A. He who has ears, let him hear. (9)

Verse 9 is a very important statement that Christ makes. If you can understand this, then the meaning and the purpose of the parables will make sense to you. Jesus said, “He who has ears, let him hear.” He said this before, back in 11.15 and he will say it again in 13.43 and again in Luke 14.35. Then in Revelation 2-3, Jesus says it again, seven times. He says it to each of the churches, to whom the book of Revelation was originally written. When Jesus says this, he is telling us what he told us and he is telling us what he is going to be telling us. There are two types of people who hear the Word of God. There are the people who hear only with their ears, and there are the people who hear with their ears and with their heart. This short statement summarizes his conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount. It’s not those who hear that are his, but those who hear with their hearts, which is evidenced by their faith and their faith-driven obedience.

### B. To the one who has, more will be given... (12)

Jesus says this at least five times. (Matthew 25.29; Mark 4.25; Luke 8.18; 19.26) This is both a promise and a warning. To the one who has (that is hears the Word and believes it and obeys it), more will be given. He will be given more revelation and more understanding. But, to the one who has not, even what he has heard (because he did not believe it and obey it) will be taken away from him. Do you see this now? The parables of Jesus were both blessing and judgment. To those who heard and responded to his Word with faith and obedience, these parables gave them more and more light and understanding about what the true nature of the kingdom was like. But, to those who refused to believe, then these parables were like a dark shadow that crept over their hearts and confused them. So, this statement in verse 12 is:

#### 1) A statement of responsibility

What are you doing with what you have heard? If you only hear with your ears but have folded the arms of your heart in stubbornness to the Word, then there may come a day, when what you have heard, will be gone. At the same time, this is a:

#### 2) A statement of God’s sovereignty

There were many things that Jesus said that were controversial. Many of them were not only controversial then, but they are now. This is one of them. Go back to verses 10-11. Jesus says very clearly, “*To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.*” Jesus is saying that you guys would never have believed on your own. You would never have figured out these things on your own. It has been given to you. Your understanding and acceptance of the words of Jesus are ultimately based upon God’s grace. I think there is a bit of a play on words on the part of Christ. Not only is it a gracious gift to us to know and believe the secrets of the kingdom, but I think that what Jesus is saying is one of those secrets/mysteries.

Jesus preaches the gospel to all. Jesus calls people to believe and holds them responsible if they do not. But, for those who do believe, Jesus clearly says that the reason you believe is not because you are better or smarter, but because it has been given to you to believe. As we sing, “His grace has planned it all, tis mine but to believe.” But even the faith to believe is a gift given from him, so that no one can boast.

## II. One Sobering Truth (13-15)

Jesus builds on his answer to the disciples question (10) by saying (13a) “This is why I speak to them in parables.” I speak to them in parables because they do not see and they do not hear and they do not understand. Here is where the ministry of Christ turns. And to help us know exactly what is happening, he appeals to Isaiah. And I’ve got to tell you, this is incredible! Jesus quotes from the book of Isaiah, but he is not quoting Isaiah. Jesus is quoting from the book of Isaiah. Isaiah recorded these words in chapter 6 when Isaiah was given a vision of the holiness of God. Isaiah then confesses his sins, is pardoned and he is then commissioned to go and preach God’s Word to people who will refuse to listen to him. The voice of the LORD told him to “Go and say to this people: Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their hears, and turn and be healed.” Jesus now says that this prophecy (14) is fulfilled. This is weighty. Listen carefully. When Isaiah was told this, he was warned that his ministry would be met with opposition and unbelief. He even asked, how long he was supposed to do this and he was told to do this until all the people are gone. But, here Jesus says that not only did Isaiah prophesy, but that Isaiah himself was a prophecy. Isaiah pointed to Christ.

Now, there is one more thing that is amazing about this. When Isaiah saw the holiness of God, Isaiah actually saw Jesus in his glory. This is what John told us in John 12.41. So, in other words, although Jesus is quoting from the book of Isaiah, he is quoting the verses where Isaiah has recorded the words of Jesus. Jesus commissions Isaiah to preach the Word to a people who will not hear him and tells him to be faithful at that for the rest of his life. Then Jesus comes to the earth and says, that what Isaiah did pointed to him. He was fulfilling it. Jesus never asks you to do something that he won’t do. But, while that is rather fascinating, and it is, the sobering truth is that you can hear the greatest preacher that has ever spoken and still not believe. Verses 13-15 are a warning, a judgment, even a curse of sorts. Jesus is saying that his preaching has a condemning and judging aspect to it because it confirms what is true about the heart of those who reject him. But, it is not just the words of Jesus that are condemning and judging to the unbeliever, his works are as well. Every time he healed someone or raised someone from the dead, or, most spectacularly, when he arose from the dead, he was condemning those who hated him.

The entire life and ministry of Christ was a double-edged sword. His death on the cross saves every single person who believes on him. His death on the cross also crushed the head of Satan and condemns everyone who, like Satan rejects him. This is why Jesus is the most controversial person ever. He saves and he judges. Therefore, his parables are saving and judging all at the same time.

### III. **One Overwhelming Truth** (16-17)

You believe because he gives you the grace to believe. I don't know all the ways of God. I know that you are responsible for how you respond to the Word of God. And I know that if you respond with faith it is all by his grace. Which means this. If your heart has been made tender to his Word. Accept it now. Believe him now. Do not delay.

#### A. **You have what others don't – by grace.** (16)

There is a clear separation. "But" blessed are your eyes. (In contrast to the curse of those who cannot see.) You see, but you see by grace. Beloved, this one truth ought to absolutely make a wreck out of every single one of us. This truth, rightfully understood removes all basis for boasting, for ever.

#### B. **You understand what others don't – by providence.** (17)

The disciples not only were given the faith to believe, but they had the amazing privilege of actually being with Jesus on this earth. He was, God with us. He was Immanuel. They were right there, seeing with their own eyes, hearing with their own ears, touching him with their own hands. For hundreds of years the prophets wrote of this day that was to come, and it did. Isaiah knew the Messiah would come in power. Isaiah knew the Suffering Servant would care like a shepherd for his people, would heal them, love them and would even die for them. He died believing this and looking forward to this. He died for what he believed in. Isaiah was executed because of his preaching the Word of God. And now these disciples were there with the One whom Isaiah pointed to. There was much given to them and much that was expected. All of this helps us understand why these disciples were so intent on laying down their lives for Christ. It also makes us aware of how serious the betrayal of Judas was. He saw it all. His unbelief is staggering.

To whom much is given, much is required. And what we have, is even more.

Last year in our Thanksgiving Eve service, Bob Humes shared with us that he had a disease that was slowly affecting his kidneys and would someday have to have a kidney transplant. No one in Bob's biological family was able to donate, but two people in his church family volunteered and one was compatible. So, on Wednesday of this week, Linda Herhuth donated one of her kidneys to Bob Humes. The surgeon said that the surgery was a 10 out of a 10. Linda is home and Bob is doing well. I told Bob that I was glad he was getting Linda's kidney, but we probably weren't ready for him to lead the children's choir yet. We really are a family. But, what we looked at last week was not just the blessing of the church family, but we also looked at the reality that there really are two distinct groups.

As a regular part of our life together as a family, we observe the ordinance of communion as we are today. We do this together in obedience to the command from Christ. We do this as a reminder that we are brought together, kept together and bonded together forever

through Christ. We have life together through his death for us. We, together, share in forgiveness that is free and a life that is sustained by the Spirit of God. This is a meal that is shared together in order that we might be reminded that we are the people of God and the family of God.

You are either for Jesus or you are against him. The consequence of being against him is the most serious thing you can ever imagine, but the blessing of being with him, is the most incredible thing you could ever imagine as well.