

The Parables of Jesus: Introduction

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Good morning and welcome to our Sunday service for Sunday, April 18th, 2021. My name is Kent Dixon and I'm the lead pastor here at Bramard Baptist Church in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Well, welcome this morning as you're joining us. Welcome, if you're tuning in live this morning on Facebook, or if you're watching or listening later on during the week or at another time, God bless you and welcome here to this safe community, this safe and welcoming community.

Let's acknowledge the fact that certainly in our area there are new restrictions. There are rising variant cases of COVID-19 and we're all, you know, I believe in many ways we probably felt like we were beginning to round the corner.

We were beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel and here we are. So there are new restrictions and challenges for us. But I want to remind us that God is still with us.

God has never left our side and he continues to be with us. God knows when this pandemic will end. He has provided us with science and wisdom and insight and his presence to comfort us.

[1 : 15] And so I encourage all of you to lean into God during this time, especially if you're struggling. Just let him know that you're struggling. He knows. And ask him for your comfort and peace.

And reach out to one another. So many of us feel isolated and yet friendship and family members are only a phone call or a video chat away. So I encourage you to reach out.

Reach out, especially if you're struggling, and reach out with encouragement for others. I encourage you to do that. Speaking of encouraging others and connecting with other people, If you are connected to our church, you'll receive a letter in the mail.

Yes, a letter. How about old school communications, right? Sometimes the old school is the best school. So you may have actually already received your letter. And what this letter will let you know, or has already let you know, Is that we are launching a new care group ministry at our church.

And the letter welcomes you to a local care group in your area, in your geographic area, where you, in the community where you live. So, Braemar folks, watch for that in the mail.

[2 : 23] This letter will explain the program in detail. So I won't go into all the little details of it right now. So watch for that. And certainly call the office or contact the office if you have any questions.

But it's pretty self-explanatory. Care groups are going to bring an exciting culture change to our church, I believe. That will focus on intentionally caring for each other.

And I'm excited to see how God will work for this. God has put this on my heart. And you'll read about that in the letter. And I'm excited to see how God will work through this.

So I encourage you to engage with this when you get that letter. Let's pray. Father God, thank you for the opportunity to come before you in this way.

Thank you for the technology that makes that possible. Lord, we're grateful that no matter what our circumstances may be, you are with us just as we are.

[3 : 21] And just where we are. Lord, we recognize there are needs and cause to celebrate within our church community and within each of our lives. Lord, there's so many needs that go unexpressed.

So many challenges that go unexpressed. And yet you know them, Lord. So we take comfort in the fact that you know and you will act according to the needs in our lives and according to your will.

Lord, remind us that each week we need to pray for the needs of people in our church. There are needs that are shared in the newsletter that goes out every week on Thursdays by email.

Lord, we need to engage with those things. We need to pray for those people who so desperately need support, need your intervention. And Lord, we're also grateful to you for answered prayer.

Lord, we celebrate the answered prayer that happens, that is communicated through that as well. Lord, we recognize that you are at work. You are providing. You are faithful. You are dependable.

[4 : 22] You are constant and consistent. And we love you for that. Father, remind us in every day and in every moment that you will never leave or forsake us.

Those just aren't words, Lord, but they are truth. And we're so grateful for that assurance and that hope. Lord, we're grateful for the gift of your word and the knowledge and truth that are always ready and waiting there for us.

Lord, we're here to worship you. Not only for who you are and what you have done, but also for what you will do, Lord. What you will yet do in our lives and in the world according to your will.

Lord, thank you for the honor of being your people. We ask that you would open our hearts, open our ears, open our minds to what you have for us this morning as we share and explore your word together.

And Lord, we ask all these things in the name of your precious son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Once upon a time, it was the best of times.

[5 : 32] It was the worst of times. Call me Ishmael. A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

In the beginning. You may recognize some of these phrases. Most of them are from works of fiction. And the last one is, of course, from the Bible.

But whether they're fact or fiction, they have something in common. They catch our attention. And they draw us in as the beginning. We recognize them as the beginning of a larger story, a bigger narrative.

I love stories. If you know me, you know that about me. I love to read stories. I love to watch stories unfold at the hands of actors in TV shows or movies.

Or theater, actually. That's my preferred medium. I also love to hear the stories of other people's lives and share highlights of my own story.

[6 : 38] And we can recognize that stories can have several purposes, can't they? They can be intended to merely entertain us, engage our emotions.

They can be used to explain a larger concept or connect us to the world around us. Or they can be used to educate the listener, to teach them something new, or to illustrate a deeper meaning or concept.

And we can also recognize that there are a near limitless list of kinds or types or genres of stories. Stay with me on this part.

And that's not even an exhaustive list.

Although you may feel exhausted having heard it. Why do we love stories so much? Why do we seem to connect with the idea of stories so deeply?

[7 : 59] Well, I believe that just as God created us to be people of, as I said a few sermons ago on Easter Sunday, God created us to be people of joy and celebration.

But he also hardwired us to be storytellers and story hearers. Can you relate to that personally?

For my whole life, family gatherings have involved sharing stories. Recent stories, funny stories intended to entertain. Likely even embellished stories at times.

The tall tale. But I honestly couldn't imagine my life without stories in some form or another. This morning we're starting a new series on the parables of Jesus.

And as you can tell, we're beginning this week with an introduction. Before we dig into specific parables together in the coming weeks and really unpack those together, it's helpful to set the stage a bit.

[9 : 07] See? Another storytelling expression. Set the stage. Perhaps you've never connected that word parable to the many stories that Jesus told.

Or maybe you've heard the word used in connection with the Bible, but have never really learned what parables actually are. Maybe you've fallen into either of those camps. And maybe you're thinking, sure, I know what that is.

I know what a parable is. It's two male cattle. Well, sorry, that's actually a pair of bulls. But close. One definition tells us that a parable is a succinct didactic story in prose or verse that illustrates one or more instructive lessons or principles.

Maybe that's helpful. That definition continues. A parable differs from a fable in that fables employ animals, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature as characters.

Whereas parables have human characters. So that's definitely one perspective. While Christians may tend to relate the idea of parables solely to the teachings of Jesus, parables were used long before Jesus' earthly ministry.

[10 : 34] These were not something that Jesus created, but certainly something he used better than any other teacher, I would argue. Short parables known in Hebrew as Mashal, singular, or Mashalim, which is plural, can be found throughout the Old Testament in the books of Ezekiel, Judges, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and Isaiah.

And it's interesting to note that parables as we know them, the parables of Jesus in particular, are not found in the New Testament aside from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

And actually there are no parables found in the book of John. So where do we get this English word parable? It's not to male cattle.

The word parable, so you've had your Greek for this morning, or your Hebrew for this morning, and now it's time for your Greek. It comes from two Greek words. Parable parable parable parable parable parable parable parable paramedics.

Parable parable parable paramedics are a branch of the medical profession that is very specific and dedicated to emergent issues.

[12 : 02] so paralegal paramedic working alongside another discipline and the second half comes from the greek word ballo which means to throw or hurl so a parable exists when a story is paraballo thrown alongside another idea thrown alongside another idea to explain it or to clarify it does that make sense have you ever considered just how central a teaching style teaching tool parables were for jesus earthly ministry well if you take a close look at the recorded teaching of jesus in scripture and maybe you're already aware of this you'll recognize that a wide variety of styles jesus used a wide variety of teaching styles they range from the more traditional sermon style and one day we're going to unpack the sermon on the mount jesus greatest one of jesus greatest teaching if not many would argue his greatest teaching it has the lord's prayer and the beatitudes and it's got so much value and depth and breadth and richness in it so the sermon on the mount a traditional sermon style teaching he engaged in debate with religious leaders and then third you'll also come to see sorry you'll also come to see that approximately one third of jesus teaching was done through parables did you ever realize it was that significant a proportion of his teaching certainly his teaching as we have it recorded in scripture jesus is famous for telling parables you can hear people refer to parables in popular culture not even realizing they are the teaching of jesus christ more than 40 parables of various lengths they range from longer stories to even one or two sentences very short more than 40 of various lengths are recorded in matthew mark and luke and remember there are none in the book of john and clearly parables were an important teaching tool for jesus but not everyone got it per se or even understood why he used parables as a teaching method as part of our introduction i want to begin by identifying some things this morning that parables are not for many of us our earliest memories of stories from the bible are things jesus taught but parables are not just children's stories there's a deep and eternal truth included in all of the parables that relates just as deeply to children and in a basic accessible way to children as much as adults if not even more so and the truth that we find in parables is as relevant for us today as it was for the audiences that first heard them second you may have heard the parables described as earthly stories with a heavenly meaning that's a common way of describing parables and i don't believe it's quite that simple i believe that perspective earthly stories with a heavenly meaning suggests that parables are solely intended to reveal truth to explain it in simplistic terms and perhaps even spoon feed truth to people but what if i told you that jesus intentions for teaching with parables was always intended to both reveal

and conceal we'll explore that together in more detail over the course of this series but for now let's consider Jesus' words in Matthew 13 verse 9. Jesus says, "He who has ears, let them hear." Does that strike you as an obvious statement? Wouldn't everyone who heard Jesus teach and preach have been able to hear what he said literally unless they were deaf? Well, we'll look at that a bit more later because not surprisingly there's a deeper meaning there. Third parables are intended to communicate some essential truth to us absolutely; that's true, but they were never intended to be dissected down to the last minute detail. Can you relate to that? Have you ever heard a parable deconstructed if you will down to the very last detail with significance assigned to every possible aspect of it? Well, sometimes every character background detail anything that was mentioned in the parables has been assigned by some scholars a broader deeper larger significance and there was a time when that was a relatively common perspective but over time Bible scholars have come to realize the pendulum has swung in a different direction. They've come to recognize that that was never Jesus' intent or it seems not to have been another important part about the parables of Jesus is that like a fable, I talked to you about fables a little bit ago saying that they can include animals and nature and other things but the parables of Jesus never featured elements of myth or fantasy. They are believable, true to life illustrations and so much so that they could even be true stories and perhaps some of them were rather than purely allegorical. If you've read *Pilgrim's Progress* for example, there's a tongue twister: *Pilgrim's Progress*. *Pilgrim's Progress* is a Christian allegorical story. It is fiction for sure but it is, uh, it has been ascribed many different details so character names and circumstances and events and all sorts of things have a deeper meaning. They are allegorical. They are intended to, uh, have a deeper connection but the stories of Jesus, the parables of Jesus seem to have been just very true to life kinds of stories so we've explored some of the things that parables are not so now then what are they? What can we say that parables are? Well, first the parables of Jesus are intended to reveal spiritual truth. They're intended to reveal things about the character of God and what he values. They're intended to reveal to us what God's kingdom is all about. Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God throughout Scripture throughout his ministry and the parables link us directly into that and we'll explore that more together in the coming weeks as we unpack specific parables more closely. Second and we touched on this briefly already, parables are intended to both reveal and conceal. In Matthew 13 verse 10, Jesus' disciples came right out as many of us would probably want to know and asked him the question. It says in Matthew 13:10,

why do you speak to the people in parables right there they don't understand they're confused in verse 11 jesus replies the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you but not to them 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 and here it is jesus says this is why i speak to them in parables though seeing they do not see though hearing they do not hear or understand interesting isn't it i want you to consider that for a moment have you ever had someone suggest to you that you seem to have selective hearing human beings can be stubborn and prideful and resistant can't we well we may technically hear what someone has said to us we may actually be filtering what we're hearing and deciding what we'll actually listen to what we'll actually receive what we'll actually act upon and what we'll choose to ignore can you relate to that can you see yourself in that are you a selective hearer or someone who filters advice or filters and weighs things before choosing to act or not there is discernment and value and wisdom to that kind of action but there's also stubbornness and pridefulness i believe so we'll explore this idea together more next week as we begin to look at the parables themselves third i'd like you to keep an open mind as we explore the parables of jesus more and more in the coming weeks i want us to be open to the possibility that the parables may be about more than you think or perhaps i want you to be open to the idea that they may be about something somewhat different than what you've always thought and again as i've said this before it's going to be okay we're going to explore the parables in detail and and we're going to to really begin to unpack them and really seek to understand them in the best way that we can as i've personally been reflecting on the parables i can remember singing songs in sunday school when i was little about the wise and foolish builder built his house upon the sand and the rains came down and the floods came up i would sing it but i can't remember the words and i don't want to cause you auditory pain i remember the story of the good samaritan i remember and i have revisited it many times over the years and i remember my initial understanding of it and i and i also realized how my understanding of it has changed and grown over time so there's no question that the parables of jesus resonate with us in different ways at different stages in our lives and as our relationship with jesus grows and deepens as our ears are open to hear more as our minds are open to understand more as we grow and learn and mature we're also going to visit many of these familiar stories and some of them

may be less familiar some of the ones that we we look at together over the coming weeks may be less familiar to you and that's a good thing i'm going to do my best to bundle so we'll look at some familiar things we'll look at themes that are included in jesus parables that have been revealed and then and just really dig into them together so i hope that's enjoyable for you and i hope it's meaningful and you get some get some new insight into jesus teaching because we're going to explore the parables together my friends may god grant us the eyes to see the ears to hear the truth that is found in the parables of jesus as we explore them together amen as we begin to study the teachings of jesus in his parables i believe it's fitting that our benediction comes today comes from romans 11 33 to 36 and romans 11 33 to 36 says to us oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of god oh and how unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out who has known the mind of the lord or who has been his counselor who has ever given to god that god should repay them for from him and through him and for him are all things to him be the glory forever amen i've gotten requests from people at times of gee could we sing one more song at the end and so i'm going to try and accommodate that as much as possible going forward so we are going to sing another song as we close our service we're going to sing i am resolved and this is the the new-ish song that uh that i find so so wonderful just in the words and and the music of it so um this will be uh one of our anthems going forward so be resolved in your uh your trust in god in this time in the uncertain times and days that surround us be um resolved to connect with others to encourage one another and to uh to lift one another up and be a source of joy be a source of be a reminder to people that god is with them god is for them god will protect us god will guide us in the days ahead but my friends after our closing song go in peace go in the peace and confidence that god is with you at all times and in all the circumstances of your life i am resolved enjoy this song and god bless you i am resolved no longer to linger drawn by the world's delights things that are higher things that are nobler these have allured my sight i will hasten to him hasten so glad and free jesus greatest highest i will come to thee i am resolved

to go to the savior leaving my sin and strife he is the true one he is the just one he had the words of life and i will hasten to him hasten so glad i'm free jesus greatest highest i will come to thee care and a that i see