

# A Primer On Parables

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Preacher: Mike Salvati

[0:00] A funny thing happened a couple weeks ago. It was our last big snow. And I have a pickup truck, which I love driving around in. I just drive around in it. But I also have a snowblower. And when I can make those two come together, put the snowblower in the back of the pickup truck, I love it.

So I cleared my snow around my house, loaded up the snowblower in the back of my pickup truck, closed the back gate, and I was going to come over here to the church just to make sure that if I could help out anyway, and it had already been cleared.

But I'm pulling out. I've got my truck in four-wheel drive. I punch it a little bit. And I look up in the rearview mirror, and do you know what I see? I see my snowblower rolling off the back of my pickup truck.

Apparently, the gate hadn't closed sufficiently because of snow. And so I watched the snowblower roll off and then do about a three-foot bounce and fall back down.

I stopped. I rushed out. I ran up to my snowblower, which was on its side, looking dead. What am I going to do? I reached down, pumped the primer.

[1:11] Are you going to be okay? Pull that cord. That thing was ready to roar. It needs a lot of work done to it. But the engine was working great.

This morning, I don't want to punch the engine and drop you off the back of the gate. I want to prime your pump. I want your heart to be primed to receive the parables of Matthew 13.

And so this morning, we're going to take some time to take a look at these eight parables together. Parables about the kingdom of heaven. And if I can remind you what the kingdom of heaven is, the kingdom of heaven is a way of talking about the saving reign of God.

God being present and rescuing sinners to himself. And the saving reign of God was inaugurated at the first coming of Jesus. And it will culminate in the second coming of Jesus.

But this morning, I'm going to look at these eight parables in Matthew 13. And we're going to see each one reveals some aspect of the kingdom of heaven. Something about the saving reign of God.

[2:24] And in order for you to fully appreciate each parable, you need to see how they're all functioning together as a whole. Matthew 13, 1-53 is one extended teaching of Jesus.

It's all to be taken together. And so what makes this teaching unique is that Jesus teaches in parables. That's why it's commonly known as the parabolic discourse.

And personally, I just like saying parabolic. I love the way that comes off my tongue. Parabolic. This parabolic discourse is one of five extended teachings throughout the Gospel of Matthew that culminate in the climax of Matthew.

And that is the death and resurrection of Jesus. But this morning, I want to prime your heart for these parables of the kingdom. And so this morning, five primers.

You ready? Number one, a parable is a kind of tool. Primer number two, parables have a dual purpose.

[3:38] Primer number three, the parables have an interwoven theme. That makes it a beautiful tapestry. Primer number four, and this is the one that I think you're going to be amazed by.

There is a very carefully constructed design here. These parables are working together. And primer number five, these parables point to a common focal point.

And his name is Jesus. So primer number one, a parable is a kind of tool. What's your favorite tool that you have?

Is it your phone? Is it Google? The remote control to your TV? I was given a cordless drill by my mother-in-law about 10, 15 years ago.

And I love that thing. That thing gets a lot done. I've got an axe. I love my axe. I would carry it around my back if I could. But I think it would raise too many questions. And so I don't.

[4:48] A buddy of mine let me use his chainsaw. It's called a Husqvarna chainsaw. It is awesome. I would use it. It would blow all this kind of wood chips all over the place.

I would smell like chainsaw exhaust and sweat. And all that, all coming together, wood chips, exhaust, sweat. Oh, man, it smelled so good. But I have actually coined the fragrance.

It's a cologne. It's called Weekend Warrior. What's your favorite tool?

Jesus was a carpenter. I'm sure he had a favorite tool. But when it comes to teaching, one of Jesus' favorite tools was the parable. A parable is simply a way to communicate truth.

It's a teaching tool. And another thing you need to know about a parable, not only is it a teaching tool, it's a teaching tool that communicates truth through comparison.

[5:57] It's a very effective way to communicate spiritual truth, and it does so through a comparison to everyday activity.

And so if you took a look at the eight parables in Matthew 13, the parable of the sower, you see this very visible presentation Jesus puts in your mind. He paints a picture in your mind to make a point. And so the parable of the sower is chapter 13, 3 through 9, and we see this sower throwing seed, and it's being received by four different kinds of soils.

It's like you're there. You can imagine it. Very vivid. It's a comparison. The parable of the weeds in chapter 13, 24 through 30, that's the second parable.

Weeds and wheat growing up together. It's like you're there. The parable of the mustard seed in chapter 13, 31 through 32.

[7:02] The parable of the leaven in 13, 33. It's like when I hear Jesus saying that, I imagine a lady just kneading dough and kneading leaven through a lump of dough.

Very visible. But they're there to make a comparison. You go on to the hidden treasure in the pearl of great price. The hidden treasure in 1344. Can you not imagine a guy digging in the middle of a field?

I'm like there. The parable of the net. Fishermen getting this huge catch of mixed fish together.

That's 1347 through 58. And the last parable, of course, is the parable of the master of the house.

That's in 1352 where this guy comes out and out of his treasure shares new and old things.

Each is very vivid. And each is making a comparison. So what a parable does is it teaches truth through a comparison. Jesus is going to point us to an everyday experience we all deal with and make a spiritual connection to it.

[8:18] Jesus is absolutely brilliant. Now, a parable is a teaching tool that makes a comparison in order to communicate truth, but it also provokes a response.

You just can't read it and kind of like, well, I'm going to move on. It provokes a response. And it's not just these parables in Matthew 13, but in Matthew 18, there's the parable of the unforgiving servant.

It's an extended parable. And you can't help, but when you get done reading, you're like, am I

forgiving everybody the way I'm supposed to be forgiving everybody? It provokes a response.

Or the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. Am I faithfully stewarding what God has entrusted to me?

And am I doing that in a way that when He comes back, He will be pleased? You see, parables are very vivid, but they're designed to provoke a response from us.

[9:19] And so when you read the parable of the sowers and you learn about all these kind of different soils, you find yourself asking the question, well, what kind of soil is my heart? That's the right response.

If you read the parable of the hidden treasure and you see this guy who stumbles across this treasure hidden in a field and you see his response that in joy, he sells everything that he has to buy it.

You find yourself asking the question, am I responding that way to the kingdom of heaven? Do I have that kind of joy? Very effective teaching tool.

And so a parable is a kind of teaching tool that compares everyday events to make a spiritual connection to a spiritual truth and it's designed to elicit a response.

And Jesus used parables like no other before or after. You can even say that Jesus was the prince of parables. He's that good.

[10:21] So primer number one, parables are a kind of a tool. Primer number two, a parable has a dual purpose.

Think vertical blinds. I'll come back to it. Remember, Matthew 13 is coming after a couple chapters dealing with people's responses to Jesus.

Remember in John chapter 11, John the Baptist sends his disciples to Jesus and basically asks him, hey, are you the one? Are you the Christ? And Jesus responds to John's disciples.

He says, well, let's see here. The deaf hear. The blind receive their sight. The dead are raised. The poor have the gospel preached to them.

You go tell John that I'm the one. But John the Baptist was somewhat undecided. And then what we see throughout the gospels too are those who are decidedly followers of Jesus.

[11:25] His disciples. But we also see people who are decidedly against Jesus. They have rejected Jesus as the Christ, the son of man, the son of David.

In chapter 12, we see the conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees, the religious establishment of the day. There were some significant tensions rising. And for the rest of the gospel of Matthew, all the way up to chapter 26 and 27, there is going to be this rising tension between Jesus and the religious establishment.

We're kind of left asking this question though as we're reading through the gospel of Matthew. Why doesn't everybody see Jesus for who he really is? For us, it's kind of clear.

We see Jesus to be the Messiah. The one long anticipated. The King of Kings. The Lord of Lords who has come. Why isn't everybody seeing Jesus that way?

Why are some people rejecting Jesus as the Messiah? We see that happening in Kenosha. Not everybody sees Jesus for who he claimed to be.

[12:39] What's up with that? Well, Matthew is helping us come to grips even here in Matthew 13. He's helping us come to grips with the fact that not everybody is going to become a Christian.

They're not going to receive Jesus as God's promised Messiah. Not everyone in this city is going to joyfully bow their knee to Jesus as their Savior and King.

Why not? Well, Jesus helps us understand that in Matthew 13. Right after he speaks the parable of the sower, his disciples in chapter 13, verse 10, if you want to look there with me, his disciples notice something.

They notice that Jesus is speaking only in parables to the crowds. It's a change of his method. Why do you speak to them in parables? This was new to them.

And so they're like, what's going on here? Why are you just speaking to the crowds in parables?

And then in verse 12, Jesus answers them. He says, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

[13:54] For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

Indeed, in their case, the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says, you will indeed hear, but never understand, and you will indeed see, but never perceive. Jesus is explaining to them why not everybody is bowing their knee to him as the king.

Jesus is saying something very significant here. The parables serve a purpose, but it reveals something about those who hear the parables.

Would you just turn back in your Bible to Matthew 11, verse 25? In verses 20 through 24, Jesus has just pronounced woe to Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, these cities in the greater Galilee and Metroplex that Jesus has been doing all sorts of kind of miraculous works, and what Jesus says, woe to you, because you've seen the works, but you've not believed, you've not repented.

And so they essentially rejected him for being the king. And so what we see in verses 25 through 27 is a little bit of an explanation.

[15:36] At that time, Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.

We're starting to get the sense of the purpose of parables. The purpose of parables are twofold. They hide and they reveal. And so what Jesus is saying here is those who have eyes to see the parables and what they mean, that's been revealed to them by God.

That's God's grace. It's God's grace that you can see the meaning of a parable. It's His kindness to you. But what we also see here is that God holds us, everyone accountable for their hearts.

Jesus is very clear that saying He chooses whom He will reveal God's saving reign to.

[17:01] And what that goes to is it goes to the depth of our spiritual depravity. We are unable to see God unless God by His grace reveals Himself to us. That's the extent of our sinfulness.

So Jesus speaks in parables to the crowds as a way of hiding the kingdom from the proud and revealing the kingdom to the humble. It's a dual purpose.

You know what vertical blinds are? Come with me. Let's say that this window right here has a set of vertical blinds.

You know, long, about three inches wide. If I had a cord right here, I could make the vertical blinds dance back and forth. You know what I'm talking about? Well, let's say that we have a vertical blind right here and I pull the cord and I set it at about 45 degrees.

So if I'm standing here, what am I looking at? I'm looking at the broad side of the shade. Will I be able to see through the window? I won't be.

[18:10] It's, the window's been hidden to me. But for those of you who are sitting over there, if the blind was set at 45 degrees, would you be able to see out the window?

You would be able to see out the window. And so a parable functions like a vertical blind. For those who have hearts that are hard towards Jesus, the parable will keep them from seeing the truth of the kingdom that the parable teaches.

But for those people who have tender hearts towards Jesus, humble hearts towards Jesus, the parable is open to them so that they can see the truth of the kingdom that it conveys.

A parable has a two, has a double purpose. To hide the truth of the kingdom from those who have hard hearts Jesus is not going to throw his pearl unto swine.

But he is also, it serves to help those with tender hearts to see the truth of the kingdom that Jesus intends. How do you respond to something like that?

[19:26] Well, for those of us who have been given eyes to see and ears to hear Jesus and what he means, look at chapter 13, verse 16.

He says to his disciples, but blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear.

Blessed are you, brother and sister in Christ, for God in his grace has given you eyes to see and ears to hear.

And it also gives us something to remember because when we're talking to others about Jesus, our confidence is not in our ability to make a compelling case about Jesus, but our confidence is in God's grace to give people eyes to see and ears to hear so that they would eventually understand who Jesus is and what he's done.

So this is primer two. The parables have a dual purpose. You've got to be thinking vertical blinds. Primer three. The parables share common interwoven themes.

I'm a fan of the antique roadshow. I could binge for far too long on antique roadshows. But there was this one antique roadshow where someone brought in this ancient Native American tapestry.

[20:43] And they had it up somehow hanging on this kind of nice woodwork. And it was, the wovenness to it, the design was so intricate and lovely.

These parables have interwoven themes to them. And let me just identify some of them for you. There's a theme of the proclamation of the kingdom.

We see that in the parable of the sower. The sower throws the seed. And at the very last parable, the parable of the master of the house who brings out of his treasure both new and old.

That's a reference to Jesus fulfilling the Old Testament. It is making God's word known.

Proclamation of the kingdom. Another interwoven theme is the different responses to the message of the kingdom.

The parable of the sower, you have four different responses. You have wheat and you have weeds. You have different kinds of fish that are all caught together in one big net. Then they're sorted out good and bad.

[21:58] You have the hiddenness of the kingdom. The parable of the mustard seed. It is so small you can barely see it. Leaven goes unseen. The hidden treasure, the pearl of great price is rare.

You just don't see those around. There's the interwoven theme of hiddenness of the kingdom, but it doesn't stay hidden. It grows. And so the theme of the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven is that it starts small and unseen and surprise, it grows into something impressive.

There's another theme of that those of the kingdom of God are in close proximity to those who are in the kingdom of Satan in this world. We see it in the wheat and the tares growing up together, separated at harvest.

We see it in the parable of the net when all these fish are caught together at the same time then are eventually separated. There's also the interwoven theme of final judgment.

The parable of the weeds ends in judgment. The parable of the net ends in sorting. A reference to judgment. And then there's the theme of the incredible value of the kingdom.

[23:10] Of course, the hidden treasure should come to your mind. The pearl of great price. But even in the parable of the sower, the good soil yields a wonderful yield.

A valuable yield. All these themes are woven together in this rich tapestry of parables that make up 13. It's all connected.

It's a detailed tapestry of themes related to the kingdom of heaven. The saving reign of God. That's primer three.

Primer four. These parables share a common, carefully crafted design. Now, notice, I'm not sure if you're aware of this, but the first four parables, Jesus speaks to the crowds on a beach.

Would you look at verses one and two? 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.

[24:24] So the first four parables is Jesus preaching to crowds, those who aren't following him yet, on a beach. That's the first four. And then the last four, Jesus moves from the beach to a house and moves from talking to a crowd to talking to his disciples.

And you see that in verse 36. Then he left the crowds and went into the house and his disciples came to him saying, explain to us the parable of the weeds. And from there, he goes on to share four more parables.

So, do you know what just happened? There's a very subtle division in Matthew chapter 13 that divides these eight parables into two groups of four.

It's kind of like a butterfly. You know, have you ever seen a butterfly flutter? We're going to be seeing him in a little bit. I can't wait. But when a butterfly flies, you see the symmetrical wings, right? Matthew is setting up a symmetry that we're going to, he's going to help us to see in a little bit. But a butterfly's wings support its body.

[25:32] That's where all the action is going on. There's another aspect of design here that you may not have noticed. The first parable, the parable of the sower, and the last parable, the parable of the master of the house, they have introductions to the parables that are different than the middle six.

The middle six parables all start with something like the kingdom of heaven may be compared to, the kingdom of heaven is like, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven.

But the first parable and the last parable don't start that way. But they're about the kingdom of heaven. So what Matthew does by doing that is helps you to say this parable is this beginning, this parable is the end, all these parables are to be taken together even though four is on one side and four is on the other.

Do you, you're starting to see that Matthew's actually crafted this chapter very carefully? Now, there's still another design to this passage.

And I'm guessing that when you walked into this room this morning and if you've read Matthew chapter 13 before, I'm guessing you weren't aware of what is going on below the surface.

[26:51] this. And I want to show it to you because it's striking when you see it because it is so elaborate. It's called a chiasm.

And it's carefully crafted chiasm. Now, you might say, chiasm, what is that? It sounds like some condition. Chiasm is taken, is from a Greek letter X, chi.

And what you need to note about the letter chi is its form. It has two strokes and there is an intersection in the middle. Do you see it? Why don't you hold up your hands right now and go like this, make an X with your fingers and say, chiasm.

And just say parabolic because it's so fun to say. So, in Matthew 13, 1 through 53, there is a chiasm and it's easier to show you it than to try to explain it.

So, I've asked Andy to put it up on the screen. You guys ready? Follow with me. I think you'll be encouraged. This chiasm begins with Jesus' arrival in Matthew 13, 1 through 2.

[28:03] Why don't you throw it up there? Is it up there? Sorry about the size. It's the only way to squish it all on one screen. One screen.

Jesus arrives. He shows up. And the next part, progression of this chiasm is the parable of the sower. So, that's number two.

And the parable of the sower is about the word of the kingdom being received. Remember the four different soils. The next progression of the chiasm is in chapter 13, verses 10 through 17.

There's a Q&A.; The disciples ask Jesus about parables. Why are you speaking in parables? And then Jesus explains them by pointing to Isaiah 6.

The chiasm progresses even more in chapter 13, 18 through 23. The explanation of the parable of the sower. Jesus explains what the soils represent.

[29:02] That's number four. And then the fifth point on the progression is the parable of the weeds. And that's chapter 13 through 24 through 30. People are the wheat in the weeds.

Judgment is the harvest. And then He moves into a pair of parables. They're like kissing cousins. This pair kind of runs together. The first parable is the parable of the mustard seed.

It's a shorter parable and it's about the kingdom of God growing. That's 31 and 32. But its kissing cousin is chapter 13, verse 33.

The parable of the leaven. And that too is about the kingdom of heaven spreading. And so they're different but they're to go together. And that brings us to the intersection of the chiasm.

The very point. And the point of it, I'll come back to it in a little bit, but it's Jesus is the fulfiller. And that we see that in chapter 13, 34 through 43.

[30:02] So that's the intersection. But now we're going to reverse our direction. Okay? And here's where I want you to see the balance because it's beautiful. So from Jesus the fulfiller, there's the parable of the hidden treasure.

Which is a one verse parable kind of like the parable of the leaven. And then with it comes the parable of the great pearl of great value. And the parable of the hidden treasure and the parable of the pearl of great value, they're kissing cousins too.

They're supposed to go together. And so, do you start seeing the balance that's forming here? Well, let's go on. After the parable of the pearl of great value, there's the parable of the net.

People are compared to fish. The judgment is the sorting that goes on. And it parallels the parable of the weeds.

And then Jesus explains the parable of the net. Just like Jesus explained the parable of the sower. And then in number three coming back, there's this Q&A; in verse 51.

[31:13] Instead of the disciples asking Jesus a question about parables, it's Jesus asking his disciples about parables. Do you understand what

I'm saying? And they say, yes!

And from there, Jesus gives the parable of the master of the house in verse 52. And where the parable of the sower was about the word being received, the parable of the master of the house is about the word going out.

He brought out from his treasure things new and old. And then, Jesus departs. 1353. It is balancing Jesus' arrival and 131.

Do you see the chiasm? Do you see the X? Do you see the point? Now, there is beauty to this. Now, if you came into this building this morning and you're like, man, I hope I see a chiasm in Matthew 13 this morning, I would really be surprised by that. But you're going to leave this building and you might find, did you know that there was a chiasm in Matthew 13?

[32:23] And it's beautiful. What it gets at is Matthew, this former tax collector, he was very careful about crafting a structure here that makes a point.

Now, if you're like me who love words and love how words kind of relate to each other, you can just kind of get stuck on the structure of the literature.

But we're not to stay there. We're not just to say, isn't this thing a beautiful thing? It serves a purpose. And so, the fourth primer I wanted to make here, help you anticipate, was this passage, it's carefully crafted.

But the fifth primer is this craftsmanship, it makes a point. Now, if you look up on the screen, did you notice how the shape of the structure is like the pointing of an arrow?

Do you see it? Where is the arrow pointing? It's pointing at the center of the chiasm. And so, Matthew has, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, arranged it this way to call your attention to Jesus.

[33:45] These parables call your attention to Jesus. And so, these parables make a common point. It's all about Jesus. And in verse 34 through 35, Matthew, the narrator, inserts himself, which is an indicator just from the start.

Hey, something going on here. And he says that Jesus speaking parables is the fulfillment of Psalm 78 too. That doesn't happen every day. It's a big claim.

But he doesn't stay there. He goes on to say in verses 36 through 43 is the explanation of the parable of the weeds.

And in that explanation, Jesus references himself as the Son of Man twice. And so, what your attention is called to is nowhere else in Matthew 13 does Jesus refer to himself as the Son of Man. Just here. And Matthew has it here to bring to your mind that Jesus is the focal point of all these parables. They're parables of the kingdom and the kingdom is all about Jesus.

[34:58] He is the great fulfiller. Now, coming back kind of around your ability to understand a parable has everything to do with your posture of heart towards Jesus.

If you're hard-hearted towards Jesus, you're not going to understand His parables. It's the vertical blinds that are going to close out the truth of the kingdom to you. But if you're humble of heart, poor in spirit, His parables will reveal the spiritual truth they convey about the kingdom.

And it's amazing. It's all about Jesus. It's all about His grace. So, in closing, I hope I have primed your pump for the parables.

Remember, a parable is a tool. And it uses comparison to provoke a response. A parable has a dual purpose. Vertical blinds.

Parables have interwoven themes that hold them all together. It's a rich tapestry in Matthew 13. And these parables have a careful design.

[36:03] It's called a chiasm. And of course, these parables make a common point. It's all about Jesus. I hope you've had your pump primed because next week we're going to take a detailed look at the parable of the sower.

Let's pray. God in heaven, we thank you so much for Jesus. We thank you for the Gospel of Matthew. We thank you for our Bibles and the beauty of the literature that is in our hands.

Thank you, God, for this chiasm. Thank you for the loveliness of it. Thank you for these parables.

Thank you, God, that you have given many of us in this room ears to hear and eyes to see.

We are so thankful for that. But God, we're also aware that these parables are all about Jesus. And so, over the next few weeks as we're heading through these parables, God, would you make Jesus clear?

Would you teach us about the kingdom of heaven, the saving reign of God? And God, you would have your way with us with the parables that you would reveal yourself to us, that you would change us, that you would make us a people who are faithful disciples on mission, following after our King, our Savior, Jesus.

[37:27] Thank you for this time together, and we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.