

The Purpose Of The Parables

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Preacher: David Moser

[0 : 00] We're going to look at the piece of scripture that we skipped last week. We looked at the parable of the sowers. Last week we began a sermon series in the parables, the spiritual stories that Jesus told.

! Or at least it's not what I would expect.

Matthew chapter 13, verse 10. Then the disciples came and said to him, Why do you speak to them in parables? And he answered them, To you it has been given, to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

For the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance. But for 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.

[1 : 12] And you will indeed see, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear. And their eyes they have closed. Lest they could see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart.

And turn, and I would heal them. But blessed are you, for they see, for you see. And your ears, for they hear. For truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous people long to see what you see, and did not see it.

And to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. Let's pray. Amen. Lord, as we approach these challenging words, I pray that you would give us ears that hear, and eyes that see, and hearts that understand, for our everlasting joy.

And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Public speaking 101. What is it? Tell them a story.

Right? All the public speaking gurus say, tell them a story. Why? Well, first, it immediately captures people's attention. They want to know how the story ends. When you say, once upon a time, you want to know how happily ever after occurs.

[2 : 33] Secondly, it tends to illustrate a point really well. You can tell it in a story, and that latches into people's minds. And people remember the story.

Many of you have probably sat through boring history classes, but have you ever had a history teacher who was a great storyteller? You didn't even need to study for the test, did you? Because you remember the story. I remember I was in high school, and a preacher was preaching.

In Acts chapter 2, he told a story that helped me see clearly what Peter's sermon was about. And I remember that story to this day.

So if that's why public speakers tell stories, why does Jesus say the opposite? He says, I'm telling stories to obscure, not to enlighten.

That's a really hard saying. But I think if we dig into it, this passage is going to fuel our joy in ways that might surprise us.

[3 : 43] Verse 12. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance. But for the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

That doesn't sound very loving, does it? It sounds like the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. But that's not quite what Jesus is saying. From the very beginning of his ministry, clarity has been an integral part of his teaching.

The Sermon on the Mount, chapters 5 to 7, some of the clearest teaching you'll ever hear. His signs and wonders in chapters 8 and 9 are a clear demonstration of who he is.

In chapter 10, he gives his disciples the same goal, travel and clearly teach the word of the kingdom. Clarity is not something that he avoids. But after all this clear teaching, all these clear demonstrations, who he is, how do people react?

Matthew chapter 12, verse 38. Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him saying, Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you. As if he hadn't been doing that his entire ministry. [4 : 59] They rejected everything he said and everything he's done. But, not everyone. There are some at the end of chapter 12 who are following him.

And as we saw last week, he calls those people family. My brother, my sister, my mother. And so, when Jesus says in verse 12, 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. He's not saying that God is a mean-spirited grouch. He's saying, Your posture towards me, it's going to determine your relationship with me.

You're going to get what you pursue. We see that in all of life, don't we? Think of fitness.

Those people who train their bodies well, they're always exercising, always eating kale. Their bodies crave more exercise. And salmon, I guess.

[6 : 05] My sister runs marathons. We had a conversation a few years ago where she asked me, You know, Dave, you're just sitting on the couch all day. Don't your muscles ache for exercise?

She can't go a day without running, basically. Her legs just scream for it. I said, You know, your legs run every day, so they crave that. But I sit on the couch every day, so I crave potato chips.

Or ice cream. When you pursue something, you get more of that thing. Fitness leads to more fitness. The couch leads to potato chips. And that's true for your body. Those are true for your mind. I'm weird. I like school. Sorry. Why, though? Because I'm a lifelong learner. I'm always reading. I'm always reading something.

I don't learn for class. I learn for fun. And so the more I learn, the more I see there is to learn, the more that I read more stuff. So if you trap me in a room, I will just whip out my phone and start reading something.

[7 : 07] Like, I won't be fazed by that. And it doesn't even really matter what the topic is. I mean, I have favorite topics, like, you know, the Bible, stuff like that. But I also read current events and cooking.

And I don't cook. My wife probably thinks that's ridiculous. But my love of learning leads to more learning. So I can write a paper for seminary. I can explain to you why gas is \$2 a gallon right now. And I can peel a potato faster than you. Fitness leads to more fitness. Couch leads to potato chips. Learning leads to more learning.

whatever you seek out, it leads to an always increasing affinity for that thing. It applies to your body. It applies to your mind. It also applies to your heart. Have you ever started watching a violent TV show? At first, it shocks you. But after a time, it kind of stops doing that.

[8 : 10] You've become desensitized to violence, murder maybe even. I once knew someone who began playing like an ultra-violent video game. And he realized that he needed to stop when he was at work and was having a conversation with an annoying co-worker.

And the first thing that popped into his mind was to stab him in the throat. Like, that's what it was doing to him. We will get what we pursue. There's violence.

You'll lead to new violence in your heart. And that's how our hearts work. Every time we sin. The first time, it's, you know, just this once. Well, the second time, it's, well, you know, I can do it, but only this far.

After that, you don't even notice it. The poor in holiness get poorer because you will get what you seek.

So we've kind of talked a little bit about where this passage comes in the book of Matthew. But as you saw, there's a quotation to Isaiah 6.

[9 : 19] They map up really, really well. So, Jesus has taught from chapters 4 to 12. He's been rejected by many, but some still sought after him.

And Isaiah 6 is like the exact same situation 600 years earlier in Israel. Before Isaiah's day, God had clearly communicated to his people through his mighty works, through his word, through his prophet, through his king.

But, and that's just like Jesus' ministry. But, in the first five chapters leading up to chapter 6 in Isaiah, God is recounting all the ways that Israel has abandoned him.

and they rejected him. They rejected him, just like they rejected Jesus. Now, in chapter 6, Isaiah gets to see God's glory. Isaiah 6, 1 says, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up and

the train of his robe filled the temple.

Above him stood the seraphim, each had six wings and with two he covered his face and with two he covered his feet and with two he flew. And one called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

[10:31] The whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called and the house was filled with smoke. And then in verse 8 we read this famous line, And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send?

Who will go for us? And I said, Here I am, Lord. Send me. Excellent. Isaiah leaps to the chance to proclaim the message of this glorious God.

And what does the Lord tell him to do? The very next verse, verse 9, And he said, 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. Blind their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed.

Whoa. From the incomparable majesty of God at the beginning of the chapter to send me to blind eyes and deaf ears in very short order.

[11:46] And it's because people had already blinded themselves to God. He's not telling them anything new. That's what we see in Matthew 13.

When Jesus quotes Isaiah 6, the central line of his quote, the line he wants us to focus on, is this. Their eyes, they have closed. They've gotten what they've sought out.

And it wasn't God. See, if you shut yourself down to spiritual truths, well, whatever you seek, you're going to get it.

And if you seek to shut Jesus out, you'll get more of that. And you'll end up being the hard path from verses 4 and 19 that we talked about last week.

that didn't give any room for the word of the kingdom to penetrate. And what little inkling of God you have to reject, the birds will swoop in and devour. How do we shut our eyes?

[12:50] What does that look like? Well, it looks like a lot of things. One pastor, Thomas Hammond, wrote three very helpful things, I think, that I'll recount to you now. We close our eyes first when we sin.

When we sin, Hammond says, our moral nature is deteriorated and made unresponsive to spiritual things.

Sin does not merely plunge a man into external darkness, it fills his inward being with darkness. It deprives him of the capacity to perceive and enjoy spiritual things.

What's he saying? Over time, sin deadens your heart and closes it off to God. And that's exactly what Jesus said.

In John chapter 3, he says this, and this is the judgment. The light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light. Why? Because their works were evil.

[13:54] For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed. Sin keeps us from God. It closes our hearts off to Him.

Secondly, we close our eyes when we focus too much on this world, even the good things in this world. And he continues, it is possible to be enslaved even of that which is lawful and God-ordained.

These duties may so engross a man's thought and energies that in the course of time he becomes indifferent to everything else. The many worlds which lie outside of his own little world are as though they did not exist.

What's he saying? It's one thing to enjoy your hobby or your job. It's another thing for them to become your highest priority.

That too closes your eyes to the things of God. We close our eyes when we sin. We close our eyes when we focus too much on this world. We close our eyes third, when we cherish our doubts, Ammon says.

[15:03] It's easy to get weighed down with the concerns of this world and forget our high identity in Christ. In Philippians 4, Paul instructs us, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

We often choose to focus. Choose to focus. Elsewhere. When seeking to set your mind on the worrisome things of the world will get you more of that.

Now, I'm not saying forget about balancing your checkbook or parenting your child. I'm saying don't let it rule you. If you shut yourself out to spiritual truth by any of these things and many more, you'll get shut out for them.

And what little you have, you'll lose. But, that's not where this passage ends. To the one who has more will be given.

And he will have an abundance. When Jesus spoke in parables, spiritually hard people did dismiss them. But, spiritually sensitive people, what did they do?

[16:26] Verse 10. The disciples came to Jesus and they asked him questions. The parables caused true seekers to seek more.

That's exactly what he said would happen. Spiritual seeking, once it gets a glimpse of Jesus, leads to more seeking. In Matthew, chapter 7, Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, Ask, and it will be given you.

Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you for everyone who asks, receive. And the one who seeks, finds. And the one who knocks, it will be opened.

Or which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father, who is in heaven, give good things to those who ask him?

God delights to reveal himself to seekers. He gave us the Bible for just that purpose. We need hearts that seek Jesus.

[17:41] In the weight of glory, G.S. Lewis very likely have heard this. It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak.

We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slump because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

We are far too easily pleased. To the one who has, more will be given.

If you have a heart that seeks God in spirit and in truth, more will be given and you will have an abundance. He will reveal himself to you in his word.

He will be present to you among his people. He will give you a humble heart in prayer. He will show you his mercy as you serve others. He will plant his passions in you as you share the word of his kingdom.

[18:56] To the one who has, more will be given. A heart that seeks God gets God. Jesus continues in verse 16.

But blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see and did not see it and to hear what you hear and did not hear it.

The prophets longed to see God move in power. The prophet that comes to mind is probably Isaiah because he just quoted Isaiah.

Remember, Isaiah was told to preach to deaf ears. How did he respond to that? If you look in Isaiah 6, verse 11, Then I said, Isaiah, How long, O Lord?

Do you feel the longing there? Do you feel the heartbreak? He's standing before God in his majesty and his message is going to fall on deaf ears.

[20:18] The line heavy with sadness. And the Lord's response to Isaiah is even more surprising. Isaiah asked, How long, O Lord?

The Lord said, Until cities lie waste without inhabiting, and houses without people in the land is a desolate waste, and the Lord removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

And though a tenth remain in it, it would be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is spelled. What's the Lord saying to Isaiah?

The people who had sought to shut God out were getting exactly that. That meant they no longer had its protection, so foreign invaders would take them.

But the story doesn't end there. That's not where the Lord leads us. That's not the kind of God we have.

[21 : 20] There's one more line in Isaiah's vision. God finishes his reply. The holy seed, he says, is its stump. If a tenth of Israel was left, it would be burned again.

There would be nothing left. But there would come a holy seed from its stump. from the ashes of Israel would rise one faithful Israelite, one true seeker of God, a son who would hear his father's voice and see his righteous will fulfilled and understand his heart, a son who would make many his brothers and sisters and give them eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to understand.

And with all the other prophets, Isaiah longed for that day. And Jesus says, today is that day. The prophets longed to see what you see and hear what you hear.

So when Jesus says in verse 14, the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, he's not only saying, see they've hardened their hearts, though that's very much part of it. He's also saying, I am the answer to Isaiah's cry, how long, oh Lord?

I am the one the prophets longed for and the world truly needs. I am the resurrection and the life. I've thought long and hard about how to conclude this.

[22 : 59] What do I leave them with? What application am I supposed to give you to take home? Three practical steps to obey this text. Four mindset shifts to think like Jesus.

I think that might be a disservice to you today and to the Lord. See, the whole point of this text is seeking.

In fact, Jesus doesn't make practical applications. He just says, blessed are you because you're seeing these things and you're hearing these things. so that's the test actually, isn't it?

Will you take it upon yourself to seek him out? It will demonstrate what kind of ears you have, what kind of eyes you have, what kind of heart you have.

So today, if Jesus isn't your Lord, will you seek him for the first time? If he is your Lord, will you stop at nothing to crucify the things that pull you away from that proceeding?

[24 : 16] Will you seek him out? Or will you not? You will get what you seek, whether that's Jesus or whether it's something that doesn't last.

he who has ears, let him hear. Let's pray. Lord, you are so good to us.

You bind seekers to your son. so that we might have him forever. Oh, Lord, that is glory beyond what we deserve.

I pray, Lord, that you would give us soft hearts to understand and bright eyes to see and open the ears to hear.

because we are blessed to hear and to see your son revealed in your word. I pray that he would be revealed in our hearts as well.

[25 : 37] Pray these things in Christ's name and for our everlasting joy in you. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.