

## HIS PARABLES

Scripture Lesson: Mark 4:1-34

Text: Psalm 78:2

Songs: "How Majestic Is Your Name;" F24; F38; PH149 1,2,3

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus Our Lord,

People stand amazed as Jesus' miracles; they stand flabbergasted at His parables. The Bible says, "He taught them many things by parables . . . ." (Mark 4:2a) After telling three parables in a row at the end of the Sermon on the Mount the Bible records, "Matthew 7:28,29." As we look at parables tonight, let's follow the same pattern as last time with His miracles: What, Why, Wonderful. Then we should have a clearer picture of our Savior as we see Him as miracle worker and parable teller. During this season of Lent, that is our greatest desire: To know Jesus more personally and intimately.

What is a parable? A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

Jesus would tell a story about something very common that every one of His hearers could understand, and then He would make an eternal application. We read four of them in our Scripture Lesson tonight. Jesus began with farming, went to lighting, then to gardening, and then back to farming. There is not one thing in these earthly stories that any one cannot understand. Yet each teaches us something about the world to come.

The first parable we read is one of the most well known because it deals with how people respond to the message of God's grace and justice. Jesus describes four kinds of listeners to God. In your mind's eye consider a Billy Graham Crusade, or a Promise Keeper's Convention, or a Women of Faith conference. Some go because they desire to gain a greater knowledge of God, but Satan snatches the words away so they return home empty. Take note that Satan is the number one deterrent for people not accepting the word of God. Others hear the word and really get with it. They are energetic and have a deep desire to live for God's glory. They spend so much initial opening energy that they fizzle like a firecracker. Other people begin well and indeed intend to stay focused on Christ, but they cannot stay with it for the long haul of life. They look at Christianity as a sprint rather than a marathon. They lack the endurance to survive as a Christian. As you scan the experiences and people of your life likely you can think of at least one person who fits each category. That is what was so captivating about Christ's parables: Every one could relate to what He was speaking about. Thanks be to God, you and I are by God's grace—and His grace alone!—people of the good soil who able to endure to the end of our lives and enjoy eternity with Jesus, the Parable Teller. We humbly admit we are unable to do this on our own, but God has chosen us to be His people, and that is the only reason we persevere to the end.

The second parable tells about those who are planted in good soil. They should let their light shine. We never put light bulbs on the floor. We get them up so they shed light through the entire room. Again, this is a parable everyone who has ever lived can understand. It means that our mission activity and our support for missionaries who are our light into God's world should be held in high esteem and be on the top of our list. We all have to work at that. Sully church has done well in this area. Let's keep at it.

The gardener is amazed each year what a single seed can produce. Here in central Iowa we grasp this parable well because we know what one tomato plant or one Zucchini seed can produce. Each can fill a section of the garden just by itself. Our fertile soil and favorable growing climate help us understand this parable very well.

There are amazing dimensions to God's kingdom. Jesus tells us about that with the world's smallest seed: The mustard seed. This is a parable we understand a little less because many of us have not seen how small that seed is—nor do we know how large a mustard plant is. Yet we have caught the flavor of Jesus telling parables.

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Now let's ask the question why Jesus taught in parables. We know it was very powerful and effective. We need only to remind ourselves of Jesus' most powerful parable: The parable of the lost or prodigal son. That parable is so vivid many people think it really happened. There is not a parent here tonight who has had a wayward child who does not feel a tug at their heartstrings every time they read it or hear it again. Yes, Jesus did use parables because they were so effective in communicating heavenly truth through earthly stories.

There is a second reason Jesus used parables. When Jesus came to earth He fulfilled everything prophesied and predicated about Him. Matthew reminds the Jewish people and their leaders that the Psalms said Jesus would teach with parables. "Matthew 13:34,35." Matthew quotes our text of the evening, "Psalm 78:2." Psalm 78 is unique in its structure and message. The Psalm has 77 Hebrew lines and 72 numbered verses arranged in seven symmetrical stanzas. Each stanza is the same to stress the contrast between the sin of Israel and the unending mercy of God to His people—mercy made plain by parables and made possible by Jesus' sacrifice for sins. Any one who knew the Old Testament, and the people back then knew it by heart, knew that the Psalms prophesied that the Messiah would teach with parables. Every time Jesus told a parable it was another reminder that He was the Messiah. That is why we sang "My People, Give Ear," a version of Psalm 78.

There is also a third reason Jesus used parables. Like miracles, they are part of His self-disclosure. Listen to the last two verses of our Scripture Lesson. "Mark 4:33,34." Consider Matthew 13 again. Let me pick it up again at verse 36 in The Message. "Matthew 13:36-58." As with miracles, Jesus used parables so the masses could hear His wisdom and be impressed, but only His chosen ones—at this point His disciples—would truly understand their meaning. Jesus used parables so that all people everywhere would know what a great teacher and person He was, but He disguised the deeper meaning of His teachings so that only believers would understand what He was saying. This allowed His disciples to believe deeply in Him, and yet left the multitudes to cry out "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" This also insured that in all the generations that follow there are those like us who know Him as Savior and Lord so we can satisfy God's love, but others who will reject Him to satisfy God's justice. Parables, like miracles, were part of the self-disclosure of Jesus.

One school of sermon making teaches we should ask two questions of every text: So what and now what. So we know what happened when Jesus told parables. Now what does that mean for us? This is what it means for you and me during Lent 2009—and beyond. Three powerful truths come through Jesus' use of parables.

First, we are impressed again with what a wonderful Savior we have. Not only was He willing to be crucified which we celebrate on Good Friday, but He performed miracles that impress us with His Deity and parables that impress us with His humanity. The miracles show that He was the Son of God, and the parables show He was the Son of Man who had such an understanding of everyday life that He could communicate perfectly with people. Like the miracles, the parables give us a wonderful understanding of Jesus.

Second, since the parables touch our lives at such a personal, practical level they help us in the every day situations of life. Is there any one of us who have not been comforted by the parable of Prodigal Son? In every family circle there is a wayward child . . . or brother . . . or aunt . . . or cousin . . . or even a parent. How comforting to know that Jesus' understands the prodigal in all of us, and has His Father standing at the end of the driveway waiting for us to come home to Him! There is nothing more comforting than the parables of Jesus.

Third, the parables allow us to peak into the eternal work of our great God. Since all parables are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning, they tell us a great deal about heaven. In each parable we catch a glimpse of glory. Look at the small stature of Christ's kingdom here on earth, as small as can be, a mustard seed. Then

consider how great the eternal kingdom of God will be. Think of all those short parables Jesus told in Matthew 13 that we read in The Message. With earthly stories Jesus told us that heaven is a treasure, a jewel, a banquet, the owner of a General Store who can put His hands on anything we need right when we need it. And John tells us the Carpenter is preparing a personal home in heaven for us. What could be greater? Praise God for parables!