

Ears to Hear

Getting to the Point of the Parables

1. Painting the Picture

Background and Introduction to the Parables

Mark 4v 1-20

“Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.”

– Matthew 13v 34

Sladebrook Evangelical Church

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Introduction and Aim of this Teaching Series:

It is estimated that in the synoptic Gospels, (Matthew, Mark and Luke) around one third of Jesus' words are found in His parables. If then, we are really interested in understanding Jesus; how He thought and taught, then we would do well to look at these penetrative illustrations more closely.

Yet it is sad to so often hear parables talked about in such a bland and predictable way. Western Christians have not only sought to instantly spiritualise the parables, but to sanitise them also. This is both tragic and ironic. The parables carry force, humour and an uncomfortably subversive message within their short, but devastating storylines.

In order for us not only to understand the parables, but also to hear the heart of Christ's teaching, we must return to Biblical times; unravel our well-worn, but often misinformed opinions and take our place not only within the culture but also the crowds of Jesus' day. Only then can we hope to hear His valiant voice and feel the force of the parables. The aim of this series is just that.

Scripture's message is a timeless one, yet its voice is all but lost if we simply jump to our own cultural conclusions and force the parables to fit our own situation. Only a rigorous, prayerful approach can yield the rich rewards contained within the parables: We must ask what was going on in Israel at the time of Christ, socially, spiritually and economically? The answers to these and other questions help us to contextualise the rather lurid backdrops that Jesus paints as He makes His parabolic points. Why Jesus spoke in such memorable ways is intriguing and of great importance to us all. There are lessons to learn and lives to be touched for the cause of Christ and the parables point the way He would have us go.

This series finds its title from the words of Christ Himself: If we truly have "ears to hear," we will approach these studies with humility, diligence and an expectancy that the parables of Jesus might leap of the sacred page and into our hearts, not simply so we get the point, but rather that we might also go on to live in the light of the lessons they so vividly teach us.

Do you have ears to hear? Then get into the point of the parables!

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear..." - Luke 8v 8

Preparation for studying the Parables:

1. **Read the Parable.** It is always essential to read and re-read God's Word. We will always fail to hear God's voice if we are not prepared to take the time, make the space and meditate on the Scriptures until we have at least understood what we have read. As Paul says, *"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope."* – Romans 15v 4
2. **Remember to Pray.** Psalm 119v 130 says *"The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple."* Before and after each study pray that God's Word will be clear and that His Holy Spirit will illuminate its pages, revealing truths that will challenge our hearts to change.
3. **Respond in Practice.** Don't just read the Word, respond to it! One of the greatest scandals the parables exposed was the people's seeming ambivalence to the Word of God. Ask questions of yourself, be honest, even ruthless. Read and pray yes, but expect change from yourself and invite the Holy Spirit to help bring necessary change.

Each week – Getting to the Point of the Parables:

A simple way of studying parables could include these 3 questions:

Look at the Picture in the Parable: What is Jesus describing?

Listen to the Punch line of the Parable: What is Jesus saying?

Learn from the Purpose of the Parable: What is Jesus expecting?

Painting the Picture: Background and Introduction to the Parables

Jesus did much of His teaching in parables. These tales of familiar characters and activities were a popular way for ancient rabbis to hold an audience's attention while illustrating an important point.

Parables appear in both the Old and New Testaments but are more easily recognizable in the ministry of Jesus. After many rejected Jesus as Messiah and questioned who He really was, He used parables, explaining to His disciples that those who sought God would discover the deeper meaning of the parables, while the truth would be hidden from the hard of heart.

1. Parables help us to understand Jesus:

Because Jesus puts so much emphasis on parabolic teaching, we discover much about Him by careful study of the parables.

2. Parables help us to understand Scripture:

The parables have a key role in revealing much about Scripture's great themes and God's ultimate purpose for us in Christ.

3. Parables help us to understand ourselves:

The Parables pack a punch! Never intended to be simply stories with significance, they expose the heart and challenge the listener to respond.

Read: Mark 4v 1-20

- *The Sower: the One who brings the Word – v3*
- *The Seed: the Word that speaks to the Heart – v14*
- *The Soil: the Heart's response to the Word – v5-8*

Ears to Hear?

- **Notice *when* Jesus started to speak in parables: Mark 3v 21-22**
Do you reject the miracle ministry of Jesus, or seek the truth of God?
- **Notice *who* Jesus spoke to in parables: Mark 4v 1-2 (Matthew 13v 34)**
Do you have a personal relationship with Christ, or are you just a face in the crowd?
- **Notice *why* Jesus spoke in parables: Mark 4v 12 (Isaiah 6v 9-10)**
Do you listen for the still small voice of God, or are you shut down to the Holy Spirit?