

Why Parables?

We have over the last two years or so been looking at the life and teachings of Jesus. Since the middle of September we've been looking at some of the Parables of Jesus, particularly those regarding the Kingdom of God.

Jesus used many different ways of teaching, but parables are his most famous way of teaching. They account for over 1/3 of what Jesus taught.

Today, we are not going to look at a particular parable, but look at why Jesus taught in parables.

About two thirds of the world's population are oral learners. They can't, won't or don't learn through reading and writing. The printed page does not shape their thinking to any significant degree. Their cultural perspective is primarily oral and event-oriented.

The primary way Em and I teach Zachary and Joseph is by storytelling.

The bible is God's story, and it is full of amazing accounts of what happened since the creation of the world, and the bible is full of parables.

Parables are found throughout the bible particularly in the Old Testament Prophets and Proverbs and in the New Testament with Jesus teaching and we can be sure that the early church leaders used parables to teach people about Jesus, and the Kingdom of God.

Parables are not only confined to the Bible. There are volumes and volumes of rabbinical writings that have survived to this day, these attest that parables were very much used to teach. Teachers who were the best story tellers had the most followers.

Jesus was the master story teller, when he taught he used the language of the common folk. Though he was literate and had mastered the Hebrew language he taught in Aramaic, the dialect of ordinary people.

The vast majority of those listening would have been illiterate, but even those who were literate found themselves captivated by his stories.

DO WE SPEAK IN LANGUAGE PEOPLE UNDERSTAND?

Parables revealed the realities of the Kingdom of God to those whose heart were open.

Many were designed to get to the heart and expose sin so that God may change hearts.

Jesus stories are timeless, probably the most famous stories in the history of the world, even those who don't know Jesus or anything of Christianity have heard of the Good Samaritan or prodigal son.

But what really happens when people listen to a parable?

Parables are simple stories that are memorable and on the surface easy to understand. Listening to a parable the hearers would have related to what Jesus was saying but Jesus didn't speak in parables to make teaching plain. Parables were about heart change, and as a result Jesus parables often veiled and hid the truth rather than obviously reveal it. We know this, because the disciples often asked Jesus what a parable meant. A great example is in Matt 13.

9 Whoever has ears, let them hear."

10 The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

11 He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 12 Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables:

"Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

15 For this people's heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.'

16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.

17 For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

Eh, I thought it was supposed to be easy to understand?

The truth is not everyone wanted or wants to hear the teaching of Jesus and what he has to say.

Parables are like a double edge sword.

One of the reasons parables are told is to reveal the mysteries to you and to those who have ears to hear, to those who do not have the illumination of the Holy Spirit the parable conceals the truth as we see in the passage from Isaiah that Jesus quotes earlier.

God basically says: If you don't want to hear I will close your ears, if you don't want to see my glory I will conceal it from you.

Parables no matter whether you heard the spiritual truth behind them, were memorable.

Jesus words did not always change people, some were annoyed, others comforted. They were designed not to be clear to all. "Whoever has ears let him hear."

Parables illustrate and illuminate biblical truth to those who are ready to hear it. The Greek word for Parable is Parabolé, which literally means placing beside, or something that comes alongside. It is an analogy, or a parallel, a bridge from the familiar to the unknown.

Jesus is teaching through simple stories the wonder and mysteries of the Kingdom of God.

Do we use parables to illustrate and help illuminate truth? This is the way prophetic pictures often work. We have a picture, and God uses it to illustrate a truth. Some people get it, others don't. The main thing from a picture or parable is to determine what God is saying.

As I said earlier parables often reveal sin or something in us that God wants to change in line with his will and plan.

Sometimes parables or stories are more powerful than speaking directly, and they can help keep relationships intact. If you tell something that they are sinning directly it could harm your relationship, but check out what Nathan does when he wants to tell his King, David that he has done wrong.

2 Samuel 12

Nathan Rebukes David

1 The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. 2 The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, 3 but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

4 "Now a traveller came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveller who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

5 David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! 6 He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

7 Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

Parables are powerful, David knew exactly the truth in this story that Nathan made up to get a truth across to David.

Parables can be more direct than directly speaking the truth. They enable the hearer to determine the truth rather than try and tell them it.

When listening to a parable we can best be served by figuring out; "which character am I?" we can then receive transformation rather than just information.

How do we read parables now?

1. Context.. Who was Jesus speaking to and what are the principles we can take from them?

We need to realise to whom Jesus was speaking, what would it have meant to them, how can we apply those principles to our lives?

2. Who told the parable? We are not the author?

Also, in our culture we read our experiences and thoughts into what the author wrote. We mustn't do this no matter what we read. We must glean what the author is wanting to tell and the truths that they want to impart.

3. What does the parable teach about God and his Kingdom?

Jesus teaches the big concepts of the Kingdom of God with little parables and stories. So as we read parables we learn about his Kingdom, and about Jesus as King.

4. What question does it answer?

22 Parables begin with a question, to understand the parable we have to determine what the question is, whether expressly stated or inferred in the story.

5. What action does Jesus expect from me/us?

As I said earlier parables are about transformation not information. Transformation is an action. If God speaks to us through parable, or any other teaching. It is just nice information unless we do something with it and are transformed.

Parables require some kind of response.

What can we learn from the things we have looked at today, what practical tips can we take home?

1. Jesus used the style of communication of the time.

Do we use language that people can understand today? Do we speak christianese? Do we use current methods of communication well?

Do we use parables or stories, they are still just as powerful as they were 2000 years ago. (dad in Moldova)

2. Not everybody responded positively.

If they didn't always respond to Jesus positively with changed hearts, we can expect the same. This didn't stop Jesus telling stories or teaching. He wanted as many as possible to hear the truths of the Kingdom

3. God determines who will understand about his Kingdom by his Holy Spirit.

Phew... the pressure is off!! As Andy Robinson said so brilliantly a couple of weeks ago. We can't fix anyone! It is only the work of God the Holy Spirit that can change people.

Parables are spectacular, wonderful ways of teaching the truth of God, his Kingdom and how to live lives following Him.

It is no surprise that Jesus used this form of teaching.

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