

Parables and Paradox, Matthew ch.13

The hunger for titles and public awards in human life – indeed, in religious life – is quite astonishing. The bragging and exhibitionism that goes on around the rear end of automobiles, the almost routine puffing of credentials and resumes, and much that passes for normal as part of our “self esteem” culture, are part of a life with no sense of our standing in the kingdom of God.
Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*.

Parable. A short allegorical story designed to illustrate or teach some truth, religious principle, or moral lesson.

Jesus’ first series of parables

The opening parable

- The sower and the seed, v.3-9. *He who has ears to hear.*
 - First explanation. The purpose of parables: spoken to the hearts of a “dull” people, v.14-17. _____
 - Second explanation. The sower. _____

The “Kingdom of Heaven” parables

- Wheat and tares in the kingdom, v.24-30.
 - The tares shall remain among the wheat until the harvest. _____
- The mustard seed and the kingdom, v.31-32.
 - It grows unnaturally large. _____
 - The good and bad: though large, the birds of the air nest in it. These birds represent _____
- The leaven in the kingdom, v.33-35.
 - “Leaven,” representing both growth and an inherent corruption. _____
 - *I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world, v.35.* _____
- Explanation of the tares of the field, v.36-43.
 - *Cast into the furnace . . . where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* _____

- Two parables: the kingdom of heaven compared to a hidden treasure and a pearl of great value, v.44-46.
 - Standing in opposition to the first parables, the kingdom from another perspective. _____
- The kingdom compared to a dragnet, v.47-50.
 - Good fish and bad fish, as in wheat and tares. _____
 - And again, weeping and gnashing of teeth. _____

The clarion call to the scribes, to bring forth treasure both from things old and things new, v.52.

- Scribes: grammateus (gr.), those skilled in Jewish law and the interpretation of scripture, and lawyers. _____
- In contrast to the condemnation of scribes. _____

Jesus’ hometown problem, reflecting an even larger problem.

- *Where did this man get this wisdom and power? V.54*

- *A prophet is not without honor except* _____ *v.57.*

So why parables?

- Their characteristics.
 - Fictive illustrations. _____
 - Intentionally vague. _____
 - Reflect a need of human character: to be drawn not pushed into the truth. _____
 - Difficult to create dogma and doctrine from. _____
- Jesus wasn’t being cruel to those who didn’t get it. Rather he was trying to draw in those whose *hearts were dull*, yet who by curiosity would work to understand. _____
 - Even the most sensitive of us resist direct examination of our lives. _____

As one commentary noted, the word “lest” in v.15 should more appropriately be rendered “if perhaps.” And Christ’s reasoning would therefore be “If I speak plainly to these people knowing they are going to reject what I say to them, their understanding of it will increase their guilt. This may be hard to accept for some of the more rigid, yet the Jesus of the gospels never displayed a lack of compassion, and, in fact, was willing to die for the most stubborn of us.