

8 Reasons Jesus Preached in Parables

Jesus was a master storyteller. He communicated clearly by using many stories, analogies and metaphors.

Parables have been used since ancient times to convey truth in a memorable way. While Jesus didn't invent the parabolic method of teaching, He perfected it.

Herbert Lockyer wrote, "In the entire realm of literature there is no book so rich in its parabolic and allegoric material as the Bible."

The words "parable" and "parables" combined appear 47 times in the Gospels. They come from a Greek word *parabole* (par-ab-ol-ay') meaning, "a similitude, a symbolic, fictitious narrative of common life conveying a moral, an adage, or a proverb." So a parable is:

- A comparison of two seemingly dissimilar objects.
- A short, simple story of common life that conveys a moral lesson or spiritual truth.
- An earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

Parables illustrate the invisible (spiritual) world by using analogies from the visible (natural) world. Scholars differ on the exact number of parables Jesus told. He used over 100 metaphors and told at least 36 actual parables—15 are recorded in Matthew, 6 occur in Mark (4 are repeats) and 35 appear in Luke (16 are repeats, 19 are unique).

Here are eight reasons why Jesus preached in parables:

1. **To fulfill prophecy:** "Jesus said all these things to the crowds in parables. And without a parable He did not

speak to them, to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying: 'I will open My mouth in parables; I will say things which have been kept secret since the foundation of the world' (Matt. 13:34-35). One thousand years before Jesus came, the Psalmist Asaph predicted He would preach in parables (Ps. 78:2-3). Jesus fulfilled every prophecy about His life, ministry, death, burial and Resurrection.

2. **To reveal truth:** "The disciples came and said to Him, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?' He answered them, 'It is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given'" (Matt. 13:10-11). The mysteries of the kingdom are contained in the parables of the kingdom. Eleven parables in Matthew open with the phrase "the kingdom of heaven is like" or "like unto." Jesus' parables contain profound truths (secrets hidden from the foundation of the world). Parables open our eyes to deeper insights into Christ and His kingdom and give us a greater glimpse into the spiritual realm.
3. **To conceal truth:** This sounds contradictory to the previous point, but it's not. Jesus explained, "'Therefore I speak to them in parables: "Because seeing they look, but do not see. And they listen, but they do not hear, neither do they understand." In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says: "By hearing, you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing, you will see and shall not perceive"'" (Matt. 13:13-14). Not everyone was intended to understand Christ's message. He skillfully used parables to throw curve balls and confuse those who were not open to His message. Like the four types of soil in the Parable of the Sower (wayside, stony, thorny, good ground) some people's hearts were not receptive to the seed of His words. Parables have a unique way of withdrawing the light from those who love darkness. They have an element of mystery, forcing the listener to meditate on them to

fully fathom their meaning. The casual listener is left baffled, hearing the superficial story but failing to grasp the underlying truths conveyed. Carnal minds can't comprehend spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14).

4. **To illustrate truth:** Parables provide examples of how truth applies to everyday life. When a lawyer asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" He responded with the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-36). In it, Jesus redefined the term "neighbor" as any person of any race who is in need, not just a person who lives nearby, and He showed how a true neighbor treats others. To illustrate the need for persistence in prayer, Jesus shared the Parable of the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8). His point? If persistence pays with a crooked judge who has no interest in your case, how much more so with the just Judge (God) who has a supreme interest in your case.
5. **To make truth relevant and practical:** Around 25% of the Bible is comprised of precepts, laws and raw truths. The other 75% consists of stories of real people that demonstrate how truth applies to real-life, everyday situations. The stories in the Bible have been preserved for our instruction and inspiration (1 Cor. 10:11). The reason "the common people heard [Jesus] gladly" (Mark 12:37, KJV) was He brought complex, spiritual truth down their level by using terms they could easily relate to. He spoke their lingo when he compared God's kingdom to farming, fishing, cooking, shepherding and agriculture.
6. **To captivate people's attention:** Jesus avoided dry, dull sermons on the nuances of the law. Instead, He told interesting stories that captured people's attention and stirred their imagination. People were "astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22, MEV). When the Pharisees sent soldiers to arrest Him, they returned emptyhanded and said, "No man has ever spoken like this Man!" (John 7:46). Jesus conveyed His message

in a way that fascinated His followers and confounded His critics.

7. **To enable His audience to retain His message:** It's much easier to remember a story than facts, data and boring information. Statistics show that people only remember about 10-20% of what they hear, but about 30-40% of what they hear and see. Parables create mental pictures that help us retain their message. Jesus' parables are still with us 2,000 years later because people were able to recall and record them in detail for our benefit. Great sermons are not the ones with the most information, but the ones people can remember months or years later. Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address was so short (two to three minutes) the photographer didn't have time to set his camera up to take a picture, but millions have memorized his speech. A famous orator, Edward Everett, spoke that day for two hours but few know anything he said. It's not how long you talk; it's how much you say. Jesus spoke volumes with few words.
8. **To expose His enemies' wrong motives:** In the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:1-3, 25-32), Jesus included the "older brother" as a direct rebuke to the Pharisees for their holier-than-thou attitude toward sinners. He used the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:14-15, 19-31) to expose their greed and apathy for the poor. Jesus told the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9-14) to confront the self-righteous and to prove a repentant heart is better than a religious show. In the Parable of the Wicked Husbandman (Mark 12:1-12), Jesus expressed how the religious elite rejected God's messengers and even God's own Son.

Everyone loves stories, right? So, reread Christ's stories and discover their hidden treasures. Kingdom mysteries are buried in the King's parables, and He wants to reveal them to *you*! Grab a shovel and start digging. {eoa}

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