

THE PRECIOUS & POWERFUL PARABLES OF JESUS CHRIST (keep it simple)

Student Outline

A teacher with authority

Luke tells us that people were astonished at Jesus's teaching because He taught like someone with authority. This is particularly impressive when you consider the fact that Jesus's teachings and stories were so simple. We often have the mistaken view that the more intelligent and complex an idea sounds, the more impressive it is. Jesus didn't see it that way.

The parables of Jesus made the wisdom of God accessible. His teaching wasn't pretentious or unnecessarily complicated. And because of that, Jesus made the kingdom of God attainable for everyone.

When people talk about the ministry of Jesus, it's easy to focus on his miracles. Jesus performed some amazing feats that the world had never seen (and hasn't seen since). But one of the most exciting things about His ministry was His teaching style.

Jesus taught using parables—simple stories intended to impart a spiritual lesson. He's so identified with this teaching style that Mark's Gospel tells us that "He did not say anything to them without using a parable" (Mark 4:34a).

Fables versus Parables: Fable is a short story—usually with animals as the main characters—that conveys a moral. ... Parable is a short story that teaches a moral or spiritual lesson. Like fable, the parable also tells a simple story. But, whereas fables tend to personify animal characters—often giving the same impression as does an animated cartoon—the typical parable uses human agents.

When asked by the disciples why he used parables, Jesus said that he would fulfill the words of the prophet and reveal the mysteries from the foundation of the world. To conceal truth: Jesus explained, "Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah (6:9-10) is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive'" –Matthew 13:10-17

In the New Testament, 55 parables are included in Luke, Mark and Matthew. The Gospel of Luke contains both the largest total number of parables (24) and eighteen unique parables; the Gospel of Matthew contains (23) parables of which eleven are unique; and the Gospel of Mark contains (8) parables of which two are unique.

When it came to communicating truths about the kingdom of God, Jesus had His work cut out for Him. His time was spent traveling the Judean countryside teaching complicated and abstract truths to simple and largely uneducated people.

This is why He taught in parables so often. These basic stories were easy to understand, remember, and pass on. And when Jesus wasn't using parables, He often taught in metaphors and similes because they were effective at communicating ideas that would have been more difficult to convey.

GET READY AND EXCITED TO STUDY ALL of Jesus's parables from the synoptic Gospels: the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which describe events from a similar point of view, as contrasted with that of John. With each parable, you'll discover answers to:

Where it is located in Scripture?

Who was present for this teaching?

Why it was given?

What is the key verse?

What lesson does the Lord want us to learn from it?

When Jesus taught in parables, He wanted to change the way we understood God, ourselves, and the world. And He wanted this understanding to impact the way we live.

Are there any parables in the Gospel of John?

While the Gospel of John includes allegories (a story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one) like the good shepherd (John 10:1–5) and the childbearing woman (John 16:21), it's surprisingly lacking in parables. But this is likely because John's whole purpose was to prove that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of God and encourage people to believe (John 20:30–31). This goal caused him to focus more on the miraculous nature of Jesus's ministry and the theological implications of His incarnation.

RELAX AND TAKE A DEEP BREATH. THIS WILL BE FUN AND A GREAT BLESSING TO YOUR STUDIES.

The parables from Matthew

Matthew (former tax collector) was particularly focused on convincing the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. One way that he accomplished that goal was by centering his message around Jesus's teachings and how they intersected with Jewish faith and tradition. That's why we find so many parables that are unique to Matthew, like The Unmerciful Servant, The Workers in the Vineyard, and The Ten Virgins.

1. The Parables of New Cloth and New Wineskins

Passage: Matthew 9:16–17, Mark 2:21–22, Luke 5:36–38

Audience: John the Baptist's disciples

Context: John's disciples ask Jesus why the Pharisees fast, but His disciples do not.

Key verse: "No one sews a patch of un-shrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse" (Matthew 9:16).

What's the lesson? The first-century religious establishment had expectations for the Messiah. In their understanding, He would come and build upon the traditions and practices of Judaism. Even John the Baptist's disciples didn't know how to understand why Jesus wasn't adhering to common Jewish observances. Jesus tells them that any attempt to patch up what was lacking in Judaism's traditional expressions of righteousness would only make everything worse. Like a piece of un-shrunk cloth sewn into an old garment or a new wine in an old wineskin, Jesus was bringing something that wouldn't fit into the religious traditions of the time. Not only did the Pharisees question Jesus' participation in this feast with tax collectors and "sinners," but disciples of John the Baptist also came and asked Jesus a question about taking part in such feasts. It was right for John and his disciples to fast, for they were calling people to repentance and to the coming kingdom. But John's disciples asked why Jesus' men were not fasting too.

Jesus answered that the kingdom is like a great feast (cf. Matt. 22:2; Isa. 25:6), in this case a wedding banquet. Since the King was now present, it was inappropriate for Him or His disciples to fast. At a wedding, people are happy and are eating, not mourning or fasting. Jesus did, however, anticipate His rejection for He added that a time would come when the bridegroom would be taken away.

Then He pictured the relationship between His ministry and that of John the Baptist. John was a reformer seeking to bring about repentance among those steeped in the traditions of Judaism. Jesus, however, was not out to patch up an old system, like sewing a new un-shrunk cloth on an old garment, which would then tear, or pouring new wine into old wineskins, which would then burst. His purpose was to bring in something new. He had come to lead a group out of Judaism into the kingdom based on Him and His righteousness. True righteousness is not built on the Law or on Pharisaic traditions.

As the Physician, Jesus came to bring spiritual health to sick sinners. As the Bridegroom, He came to give spiritual joy. The Christian life is a feast, not a funeral. The illustration of the cloth reminds us that He came to bring spiritual wholeness; He did not come to "patch us up" and then let us fall apart. The image of the wineskins teaches that He gives spiritual fullness. Jewish religion was a worn-out wineskin that would burst if filled with the new wine of the Gospel. Jesus did not come to renovate Moses or even mix Law and grace. He came with new life!

2. *The Parable of Salt and Light (the Lamp Stand)*

Passage: Matthew 5:14–16, Mark 4:21–22, Luke 8:16

Audience: A great Galilean and Decapolis(mixed culture) crowd

Context: The sermon on the mount

Key Verse: "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Voice: Aorist imperative, Aorist subjunctive passive, Future passive, Aorist infinitive passive, Present infinitive passive, Present Participle (expresses continuous or repeated action, without implying anything about the time of action), Aorist subjunctive.

What's the lesson? First-century homes in Palestine were modest, and it didn't take much light to illuminate them. People used very small oil lamps which could easily fit under a small bowl. But the idea of lighting a lamp and putting it under a bowl is absurd. Not only would it be a waste of light, but it would also be a waste of oil. Like a lamp, _____

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot (Matthew 5:13). When we think of salt, we tend to think of a fairly cheap spice that we keep on the table next to our pepper. But that's not how the crowd around Jesus would have thought about salt. They would have recognized its two major properties, which are _____.

If we recall our high school science course, we might remember it as the compound sodium chloride. Sodium chloride (chemical formula NaCl), known as table salt, rock salt, sea salt, and the mineral halite, is an ionic compound consisting of cube-shaped crystals composed of the elements sodium and chlorine. It is responsible for the saltiness of the world's oceans. This salt has been of importance since ancient times and has a large and diverse range of uses. One of its largest uses is as an ingredient of salt that humans use in the eating and preparing of foods.

No one in the first century had freezers, so if you wanted to preserve meat, it had to be cured (Curing is actually a general term referring to any process that helps preserve meat. It can mean salting, brining, aging, drying or canning. The goal of all of these processes is to slow spoilage and prevent the growth of microorganisms). Jesus seemed to be telling them that they were to help preserve the world where they lived. But they were also instructed to give it flavor. Salt naturally enhances taste by intensifying certain flavors and decreasing others. Salt has the unique ability to make sweet things seem sweeter and diminish the impact of naturally bitter things. Jesus seemed to be saying that those who were in step with God would make the world a more enjoyable place by enhancing and communicating God's goodness. And, as Jesus pointed out,

Light of the world

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14–16). We have an understanding of light that first-century Jews didn't. For instance, we know that it's because of light that we can see the entire spectrum of colors. We know that sunlight provides the energy needed to sustain life on earth and gives us critical vitamin D. But because most of us have never lived without electric light; we miss Jesus' main point. When we walk into a dark room, we flick a switch and the room is bathed in light. But that wasn't the case for the people Jesus addressed. They lit their homes at night with small oil lamps. The picture of someone lighting a lamp and then putting it under a clay pot would have been humorous to this crowd. The only reason to light a lamp was so you could see, and just like Jesus suggested, you would place that lamp in a place where it could give off as much light as possible. The implication was clear. _____

The evidence of the faithful

The metaphors of salt and light specifically addressed the impact faithfulness should have in the world. It should illuminate and preserve. Like both salt and light, our relationship with God should have an obvious impact on everyone who comes in contact with it. Jesus isn't just calling us to be devoted, He's encouraging us to have an influence everywhere we go.

NOTES:
