

Parabolas and Parables

The words “parable” and “parabola” both come from the same Greek root word which gives the sense of something being cast or thrown alongside something else. So a parabola is a curved line that bends around a fixed point without ever touching the point directly; the parabola’s very identity depends on that point, and knowing enough about the parabola will allow a person to identify the point itself.

A parable is a story that uses imagery and metaphor in order to make a point that is not explicitly identified in the story itself. If you know enough about the story, you can determine the point being made by that story as well. When Jesus spoke in parables, he often explained them soon after so those who heard would know enough about the story as to get the point. Our study this week will show that God has promised us a way to get the point too. He has given us the Holy Spirit to guide us in discovering who God is and what our relationship with him should be.

Monday – Parabolic

“With a tale truly he comes unto you, with a tale which holds children from play, and old men from the chimney corner.” Sir Philip Sidney, 16th c. English poet

1. Please read Mark 4:1-8 (focusing on verses 1-2a). From what you know about Jesus and about the people in that area, why do you think they were so eager to hear him teach?

Text Insight: Just as Jesus spoke in parables, the crowd on the beach formed a sort of parabola around him. They formed a line related to the point of Jesus’ presence in the boat, but never touched that point directly.

2. In John 14:25-27, what promise did Jesus give those who belong to him regarding the ability to remember and understand his teachings?

Making it Personal: Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in understanding all that Jesus has taught us.

Tuesday – Turn and Be Forgiven

“To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.” C.S. Lewis, 20th c. Anglo-Irish writer

1. Please read Mark 4:10-12. What do you think Jesus’ followers were feeling when they asked him to explain things further?
2. Now read Isaiah 6:9-13. How does this passage (from which Jesus quoted) give hope for understanding?
3. What further assurance do you find in Isaiah 32:1-4 about God’s plans for his people to know him?

Digging Deeper: Read Isaiah 35:1-10 and describe what God ultimately offers those who turn to him.

Wednesday – Full Disclosure

“Education is that which discloses to the wise and disguises from the foolish their lack of understanding.” Ambrose Bierce, 19th-20th c. American writer

1. Please read Mark 4:21-24. Why did Jesus teach? What should you do with your knowledge of God?
2. Compare verse 24 with Proverbs 11:1. What spiritual context does Jesus give to honest dealings?

Digging Deeper: Read Isaiah 43:8-13, and compare verses 11-12 with Mark 4:11 & 22. What truth about God has been “hidden” that Jesus has come to reveal and proclaim?

Thursday – All They Could Stand

“The golden rule for understanding in spiritual matters is not intellect, but obedience.” Oswald Chambers, 19th-20th c. Scottish pastor

1. Please read Mark 4:33-34. What assurance do you find in verse 33? In verse 34?
2. Take a look at John 16:12-15. How did Jesus provide for our own understanding of his teachings?
3. Compare John 16:12 with Isaiah 55:8-9 and Proverbs 3:5-6, and describe what this tells you about God and about yourself.

Making it Personal: Do you appreciate all God has revealed to you about himself, even if there are things you know you still don’t understand? Seek his ways always and trust him to guide you along.

Friday – Hearing Aid

“They never would hear, but turn the deaf ear, as a matter they had no concern in.” Jonathan Swift, 17th-18th c. Anglo-Irish writer

1. Please read Acts 7:51. What is the real problem of not being able to hear God?

Text Insight: Circumcision was used as a figure of speech to mean cutting away whatever interferes with the ability to hear and follow God. (See, e.g., Leviticus 26:41, Deuteronomy 10:16 & 30:6, Jeremiah 4:4 & 9:26.)

2. Now look at Psalm 40:5-6. What understanding did the psalmist have about God? Who gave him the ability to have that understanding?
3. What is one purpose of being able to hear God according to Isaiah 50:4-5?

Making it Personal: Do you have anything that interferes with your ability to hear and follow God? Pray for him to cut it away and give you ears to hear and a heart to follow him.

For the Weekend: Read Revelation 2:1-3:22. What types of commendations and criticism does Jesus have for each of the seven churches? What is promised to those who are able to hear “what the Spirit says to the churches”? Why do you think we are told to listen to what is said to *all* the churches?