

*A Survey of the Parables of Jesus*  
*Lesson 1 – The Purpose and Place of the Parables of Jesus*  
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**Introduction:** God has chosen to teach us through the spoken and written word.

- A. The ministry of Jesus was about opening hearts through the teaching of God's delivered words. (**Jn 6:44-45**)
  - 1. We can only accept God's ways and seek to stay within them.
  - 2. The wisdom of men will openly declare that God's way is a failure. We need to know that we are men and God is God.
  - 3. God has a purpose and knows exactly how to achieve it! (**Isa 55:6-11**)
- B. We will be learning from Jesus who is the master teacher. (**Isa 50:4-7**)
  - 1. The words of Jesus will be perfect! How will these words be received?
  - 2. The parable is a form of teaching that Jesus used to produce a desired result.

**I. What is a parable?**

A. **Parable** - **parabolh**, , h / j , h ` as a rhetorical figure of speech, setting one thing beside

another to form a comparison or illustration.

- 1. Jesus would use something commonly understood and then “cast beside” a spiritual truth. This would greatly aid in understanding.

“A parable is a story which places one thing beside another for the purposes of teaching or explaining. It is a comparison where the “unknown” (the heavenly or spiritual) is placed alongside the “known” (the earthly or physical). This method of teaching allows one to grasp and accept the “unknown” because one already understands the “known.” – Jeff Smith, The Parables of Jesus Lesson 1.

- 2. A parable is not a myth or fable.
- 3. The Greek word for parable occurs some fifty times in the New Testament, only twice outside the gospels (Heb 9.9; 11.19, where it is translated “figure”)

B. There are varying opinions as to how many parables Jesus taught.

- 1. The longer lists include such illustrations as “the good shepherd” (Jn 10) and the “two builders” (Mt 7.24– 27). The shorter lists exclude them.
- 2. A parable is not a proverb. It is not an allegory.

“Allegories are symbolic stories that use comparisons to teach a specific lesson. While that sounds like a parable, there is one major difference. Every detail in an allegory has meaning...such is not the case in a parable.”

**II. Why did Jesus begin using parables?**

A. Jesus did not begin using parables until near the end of the second year of His ministry. There is one exception. (**Lk 7:41-42**)

- 1. This marks the turn of Jesus' popularity towards rejection.
- 2. Jesus used parables as a means of separating two distinct groups!
- 3. We can learn much about God's purposes in teaching and also why God wrote the Bible as He did! (**1 Cor 1:26-27**)
- 4. Jesus did not cater to the “felt needs” of his audience.

B. Parables accomplished God's purpose to call a certain group. (**Mt 13:11-16**)

1. This sudden change caused the disciples to ask why. (Mt 13:10, 34-35)
2. Men could have criticized Jesus for a lack of clarity. Jesus gave men who heard Him clear reasons to know who He was. (Jn 10:25-26, 37-38; Jn 5:45-47)
3. A brother once rejected a bible teaching because brethren were “inconsistent” in their application of it. On that basis *I must reject the whole Bible!*
4. Parables particularly have the effect of pushing away many while drawing a few closer. As the saying: “The same sun that melts the butter hardens the clay.”

### ***III. How to properly understand a parable***

- A. Study the parable in its *historical context*.
  1. Often Jesus taught parables in response to others. (Lk 10:29-30; 15:1-4)
  2. What would the parable teach the audience Jesus spoke to? Context!
- B. Look for *the principle truth* the parable teaches.
  1. Most parables were intended to make only 1 point not a “doctrinal dissertation!”
  2. Secondary lessons can be learned, but only after the main lesson is determined.
- C. Do not *over analyze* the details of a parable.
  1. Let the context show the purpose of the parable.
  2. We must strictly follow the text unless we be guilty of adding to God’s word.
- D. *Open your heart* to the truth Jesus teaches! (Mk 4:9, 23)

### ***IV. Some lessons to help us be better teachers***

- A. The word of God *does not need our help*. We should only seek to plainly teach it.
  1. We must never think that a rejection is a failure. (2 Cor 2:14-17)
  2. God wants hearts opened so that each individual can see their thoughts and then make a decision. Many will be angry at this. (Heb 4:12; Lk 2:34-35)
- B. Those who “peddle” God’s word *will also change it*.
  1. Do not be envious at churches that have greater numbers because *they limit the teaching of God’s word*.
  2. We must teach that which *prepares men for the judgement*. (1 Thess 2:3-5, 19)

### ***Questions***

1. Why did God choose teaching as the means to reach all men?
2. Why do some men seek other ways to reach men? What will be the result?
3. What is a parable? How does that differ from other kinds of teaching?
4. Why did Jesus wait so long to begin using parables? What did He want to accomplish?
5. How could a man who heard Jesus speak a parable come to know the meaning? Should confusion about a parable cause one to reject Jesus as the Son of God? Why?
6. What are some rules to use in understanding parables?
7. How should we judge when our teaching has been effective?

(Material borrowed and adapted from Paul Earnhart and Jeff Smith)