

THE USE OF PARABLES BY JESUS: WHY CHRIST USED ILLUSTRATIONS MARK 04:33–34

Introduction

The wisest of all teachers used illustrations; more specifically, He used parables. (See *Parable*, Mk. 4:2). This passage gives three very practical reasons why Jesus used illustrations in His teaching (Mt. 13:10-17).

- I. To illustrate the Word (v. 33).
- II. To teach step by step (v. 33).
- III. To enforce the lesson in private (v. 34).

MARK 04:02 PARABLE (PARABOLE)

Parable literally means placing a thing by the side of something else for the purpose of comparing. The word *comparison* best describes a parable.

1. A parable is a comparison: it is an earthly event pointing out a heavenly truth. It is a comparison between the earth and heaven.
2. A parable is a comparison: the earthly story has to be delved into to discover the heavenly truth. The spiritual point is found only by active thought and effort, by actively *comparing* the physical world with the spiritual world. In fact, the more a man thinks and meditates upon a parable, the more he usually sees of the truth.

Jesus is the *Master User* of the parable. No man ever used the parable so effectively. □

I. Mark 04:33 Parables Used to Illustrate the Word

First, Jesus used parables to illustrate the Word. Note the clause “Jesus spoke the Word to them.” What *word* was preached? What is meant by *the word*?

⇒ It is “the Word of the kingdom” (Mt. 13:19-20, 22-23; see Mk. 4:16, 18, 20; Lk. 8:15).

⇒ It is “the Word of God” (Mk. 7:13; Lk. 3:2; 4:4; 5:1; 8:11, 21; 11:28).

⇒ It is the Word of this “salvation” (Acts 13:26).

⇒ It is simply “the Word” (Gal. 6:6; 2 Tim. 4:2; Jas. 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:2, 8).

⇒ It is “the message [the Word]” (Acts 17:11).

⇒ It is “pure spiritual milk [the Word]” (1 Pet. 2:2).

⇒ It is “the Word of His grace” (Acts 20:32).

⇒ It is “the Word of faith” (Rom. 10:8).

⇒ It is the Word of “reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19).

- => It is “the Word of life” (Phil. 2:16; 1 Jn. 1:1).
- => It is “the Word of truth” (Col. 1:5).
- => It is “the Word of Christ” (Col. 3:16).
- => It is “the trustworthy message [Word]” (Tit. 1:9).
- => It is “the Word of righteousness” or the teaching about righteousness (Heb. 5:13).
- => It is the “Word of exhortation” (Heb. 13:22).
- => It is “the word planted in you” (Jas. 1:21).
- => It is “the word of the prophets made more certain” (2 Pet. 1:19).
- => It is “the Word of my patience” or “my command to endure patiently” (Rev. 3:10).
- => It is called “the Word of their [Christian brothers] testimony” (Rev. 12:11).

Jesus used the parable to illustrate the great truths of the Word. What is there about illustrations or parables that caused Jesus to use them so much?

1. Stories and pictures are more interesting and tend to *draw* a person’s attention more readily.
2. Some believe a person thinks only in pictures; others believe abstract thought apart from pictures is possible. No matter, it is certainly easier to see and remember pictures than statements, principles, rules or dogma.
3. Parables usually require more thought to see the comparison between the story and the truth. Parables are not for the lazy and non-thinking person.

II. *Mark 04:33 Parables Used to Teach Step by Step*

Second, Jesus used parables to teach step by step. He taught the people “as much as they could understand.” This means at least three things.

1. Jesus drew comparisons from the daily life of the people, from things and events with which they were familiar.
2. Jesus spoke in the language of the people, using simple and plain words. He did not seek to show a superiority over the people: a superior education, vocabulary, speaking ability or anything else. He never acted above the people.
3. Jesus taught the people *progressively*. He moved them along step by step “as much as they could understand.” The point of the spiritual truth was not available to all, but the story itself was understandable to all. It could easily be recalled in the future for spiritual growth if the person were stirred to seek for the truth.

It should always be remembered that the lazy and non-thinking person seldom learns or achieves, and the unbeliever never succeeds spiritually. Mathew discusses this in some detail (Mt. 13:10-11; 13:12; 13:13-15).

III. *Mark 04:34 Teaching the Secrets of the Kingdom*

Third, Jesus used parables to enforce the lesson in private. It was now time to give some very special lessons to His close associates, the apostles. They needed to know the *secrets of the kingdom*. It was time to teach the “secrets of the kingdom of heaven” to true disciples. The secrets would be understood by true disciples, but they would be misunderstood by those who deliberately blinded their eyes and deafened their ears.

“The secrets of the kingdom of heaven” cannot be understood without first recognizing Jesus as the Messiah and as the One who brings the Kingdom of Heaven to men.

Thought 1. We should always be concerned over the way the Word is preached and taught and the way people receive the Word. Are they listening and growing, or are they disinterested and stymied?

Thought 2. Note: the same preaching turned some off (the unbelieving crowds) and stirred some to seek more (the believing disciples). There is encouragement here for the preacher and teacher and warning to the unbeliever.

1. Jesus made a very general statement (Mt. 13:11). God gives believers the understanding of spiritual things, the secrets of the Kingdom, but the secrets of the kingdom are not given to unbelievers.

Common sense tells us that God will reveal things to a person who really believes in Him and draws near Him — things that He cannot reveal to a person who ignores, neglects, and cares nothing about God. Therefore, Christ puts it very simply: “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them [unbelievers].” God does not reward unbelief: He rewards belief and trust (Mt. 13:35).

2. There are “secrets” in the kingdom of heaven:

=> the incarnation and virgin birth of Christ (Mt. 1:16; 1:23)

=> the ideal and perfect righteousness of Christ secured by His living a sinless life while on earth (Mt. 5:17-18)

=> the death of Christ on the cross for man (Mt. 27:26-56)

=> the intercessory work of Christ going on right now (Heb. 3:1)

=> the Holy Spirit and His presence in the believer (Jn. 14:16-21)

=> the material world and the spiritual world, or the physical and spiritual dimension of being (Mt. 6:9)

=> man’s sinfulness and his dead spirit due to sin (Rom. 3:9-19; Eph. 2:13)

=> the church, both local and universal, and the mixture of both good and evil in it (Mt. 13:15-2)

=> the future resurrection (1 Cor. 15:51)

=> the destruction and remaking of the heavens and earth into a perfect universe (2 Pet. 3:10-13)

The secrets of heaven have to be revealed by God. Man cannot know them by human reason; they have to be *given*, that is, revealed.

The secrets of heaven are given, revealed to believers only. This is logical, exactly what would be expected, as is mentioned above. The reasons given by Christ explain even more why believers alone see and understand what God reveals (Mt. 13:12-15).

John 14:26 *“But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*

1 John 2:27 *As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit - just as it has taught you, remain in him.*

3. The third reason Christ spoke in parables is that believers receive and are blessed with more. The blessings of God include the greatest possessions imaginable: love, joy, peace, confidence, assurance and eternal security. The blessings of God come from seeing and hearing, that is, from *conversion and spiritual healing*, not from the things that men desire (Jn. 10:10; 14:27; 15:11; 16:33; Phil. 4:6-7).

Acts 3:19 *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

New Testament believers are much more privileged than Old Testament believers because of Christ (2 Cor. 3:6-18; Heb. 1:1-3; 1:4-14; 2:5-13; 2:14-18; 3:1-6; 4:14-16; 5:1-10; 7:1-10; 7:1-24, etc. Hebrews is an epistle which shows the New Testament believers' great privilege in Christ.)

1 Cor 2:9-10 *However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.”*

Col 1:26-27 *The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

1 John 2:20 *But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. ■*