

## Mt 13:10-15: The parables: do you get it?

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Meditations on the parables #1

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### Matthew 13:10-15: Why Jesus speaks in parables

*The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.*

*Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.*

*This is why I speak to them in parables:*

*"Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.*

*In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:*

*"You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.*

*For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them."*

Speakers often use stories and illustrations to make it easier to understand their message. We tend to think that this is the reason why Jesus spoke in parables.

Then it comes as a shock to hear Jesus saying: "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them."

Apparently some will get it and others won't.

So... is the message of the kingdom only for insiders?

You can get this impression when you visit a church where people speak their own jargon, a language you don't understand. You may think they want to keep it for themselves. As an outsider you don't feel welcome and included.

Jesus is not suggesting any of this. The message of the kingdom comes to everybody, not a select group. But what does he mean by these words?

Most of his parables are about the kingdom of heaven. What is this kingdom all about?

Jesus is God's son who came to earth to reclaim the territory occupied by the devil. By tempting people to commit sin and disobey God, Satan had gained possession of the world. Sin is everywhere and death is its consequence.

The current condition of the world is a far cry from what God had intended when he created it.

People reject his reign, ignore his laws, destroy other people's lives and exploit the earth for their own gain.

Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God. This means that he opens the door for sinners to return to God. His kingdom is everywhere where people begin to obey God's will.

Jesus calls it a secret: the kingdom is hidden, a mysterious thing in this world.

In the Old Testament, God had shown what his kingdom was supposed to be. He set Israel apart and gave them his laws. When they listened to him they would be blessed and live good lives. Later God gave them kings to rule over them. However, the kings themselves did not always listen to God. They served idols, gods that did not really exist but were only the imagination of the nations around Israel.

The nation of Israel showed the contours of what was coming. God was going to send a person who would set his people free and exercise his rule over them. A king would lead the people in the right way and establish God's kingdom.

Jesus presented himself as a king: with power and authority. His authority showed in his teaching and his power in the miracles he performed. He made it known that he was the promised Messiah, the one appointed and anointed by God to save his people.

Jesus saves sinners by calling them to enter his kingdom and live under his rule. To everyone who enters and confesses their sins he promises forgiveness.

Because the world is dominated by sin, the kingdom is ignored and reviled by many. Most people don't want to submit to a higher authority and balk at the thought of a God who claims their allegiance. Maybe you, too, think there is nothing wrong with you. Then the kingdom is a mystery to you. You will feel you don't need it, it is nonsense, and you can't see it anyway! This happens when you have been in the dark too long: your eyes can't bear the bright light. You squint your eyes and cannot distinguish the beautiful colors of the rainbow.

The kingdom is a secret, a mystery for sinners, unless God intervenes. You need something to understand it: God needs to open your heart and mind.

But you may ask: doesn't this mean that some get it and others won't, and you just can't do anything about it? Is it only for a select few?

We can understand Jesus' words in this passage when we realize that he spoke these words only after an extended period of preaching. In the meantime people in the audience had showed their colors. Some were impressed and began to pay attention. Others shrugged and turned away, thinking Jesus was a charlatan, a pretender; someone who thought too highly of himself. 'His healings were impressive, but he should not get any ideas! This whole thing about being the Son of God was nonsense', they thought.

During the three years Jesus was preaching in Israel two groups of people began to emerge. The way people responded to Jesus' preaching showed to which group they belonged.

The words Jesus spoke are a quote from the book of Isaiah.

This prophet faced a similar situation: God had been sending prophets for many centuries, in order to remind his people of the covenant relationship with him. He had announced that punishment would follow: he would send them into exile because they had disobeyed him and been unfaithful to him by worshiping false gods.

After many years of warnings God sent Isaiah to announce that the exile would come soon. God told Isaiah in advance not to expect a positive response from the people. This was not because his words were difficult to understand. On the contrary, when you read the book of Isaiah it is hard to miss the gospel that God would set his people free after the exile. The reason was the condition of the people's hearts: they continued to reject God's word and his claim on their lives. They had hardened their hearts and closed their ears for God's words.

When Jesus quotes from Isaiah the people should have paid attention and heeded the warning. This was serious! Had the exile not happened to their forefathers, exactly as God had announced?

Jesus' teaching in parables is also a response to the condition of the hearts of his audience. They had heard his preaching. They had seen his miracles and were excited. However, they did not accept his claims that he was the Son of God and they did not believe in him. Their leaders accused him of performing miracles by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. He was branded as a false prophet who led people away from God. Many had made a decision against him.

When you read or listen to the parables you need to realize that you face the same decision. How do you respond to Jesus? You have to make a decision concerning him: do you believe he is the Son of God and the only savior, and do you commit your life to him? Or do you consider him a great moral teacher and nothing more? Do you regard his teaching with the attitude of 'no strings attached', not realizing that Jesus demands a decision? Do you see him as the 'sweet Jesus' and not as the king who calls you to his service?

The only way to enter the kingdom of God and receive his blessing is to respond to Jesus with faith. Faith means that you accept his claims, trust in him as your only savior, and obey his will as your king.

In Jesus' teaching God's appeal comes to you: 'Come into my kingdom. Let go of your selfish heart, stop following your own desires. Quit living life on your terms and submit to me. I am your creator, you are living in my world. You can't ignore me, go your own way, and expect to get away with it.'

Many people want God to bless them and think that he smiles on them as long as they live decent lives and commit no big crimes. However, they never go to him in repentance, acknowledging that they were wrong to follow their own will and desires and refused to live in God's kingdom. They forget that God gives his blessing only to those in his kingdom, who listen to Him and believe in his Son Jesus Christ. Healing and life is for believers in Jesus.

In this second stage of his teaching Jesus excluded unbelievers from understanding his parables and receiving the blessings of his kingdom. At the same time he gave a tremendous promise to believers:

*"The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you; Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance."*

His disciples believed in him with a humble attitude, and followed him. They had faith and had received forgiveness and entrance to the kingdom of heaven. They would only receive more. The parables would reveal the kingdom to them in a richer way.

Clearly, how you respond to Jesus determines what you get out of the parables. You can compare them to a house which remains closed and unfamiliar to you if you remain outside and only drive by in your car. But if you stop and enter you will discover what is inside. You can explore all the rooms and make yourself at home. The kingdom opens itself to you.

However, if you look down on the kingdom you will not receive anything. Real estate mogul Donald Trump once said: "Religion is a waste of time. It produces nothing for me." Ted Turner said: "Christianity is a religion for losers."

They make a huge mistake. Because of their attitude they remain outside of God's kingdom. It remains a mystery to them. They don't value it because they don't believe.

"Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him".

If you admire Jesus now, I would encourage you to pray to God and take the leap of faith. Trust in Jesus and ask him to reveal the secrets of the kingdom to you.

If you don't take that step you will lose even what you have now: your interest in Jesus' moral teaching, your sense of spirituality, and the little need for God you may feel now - it will all diminish if you don't commit yourself to Jesus. God will take it away.

Many who regarded Jesus as one of the options and who keep him at arm's length have found out that the Bible began to mean less and less to them. They didn't want to take things too literally and threw more and more things overboard. Other things became more urgent and other books provided them with the wisdom they were looking for. They began to find Bible-believing Christians old-fashioned.

The parables are not in themselves obscure. They are a door to the kingdom. But if you lack the key the door will remain closed to you. You will become irritated by some things Jesus says. His claims sound demanding, you'd like to keep your freedom. You can't understand why he calls the kingdom the greatest treasure. You will find his warnings about the coming judgment intimidating, a ploy to make you go to church. When parables offend you, you will dismiss them and will not be able to understand what Jesus is talking about.

What will you get out of the parables? I pray that you will get more, that you will grow in insight into the secrets of the kingdom.

Whether the parables open the door for you or close it in your face depends on whether you believe in Jesus Christ, value forgiveness, and acknowledge that you need a savior.

If you have this attitude you are blessed! You will be eager to hear more and you will discover more about the kingdom. Jesus will impress on you how essential it is. You will learn to value it, rejoice in its treasures, and prepare for its final coming. Congratulations if you believe in Jesus: you are a citizen of God's kingdom!

Take care how you listen.

Believe in Jesus and commit yourself to him, and you will profit from his parables. You will grow in insight, become excited about his kingdom, and begin looking forward to his return.

Your life will change and you will become more motivated to live for God and find joy and satisfaction in it.

You will feel like stepping into a vault full of treasures. You become so enraptured by everything around you that you begin opening one drawer after another, and you'll find that the next discovery is even more beautiful than the previous one.

Listen in faith and you will get it. The kingdom of God will be yours.