

Puzzling Parables

Words for the Whys

Part 1 – October 27, 2013

Jesus often taught around the Sea of Galilee. When the crowds got too big, and they pressed in too close, He would simply push off in a boat, and His disciples would paddle Him out into the water to speak. It was a natural auditorium. The people gathered along the shore, and the water helped to carry His voice. But, have you ever wondered why He spoke in so many parables? **If God is going to go to all the trouble to come to Earth to speak to mankind, doesn't it seem like He would just come out and tell us what's on His mind?**

We'll see how Jesus responded to this very question, because the disciples wanted to know too.

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things 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.' But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it." - Matthew 13:1-3; 10-17 NIV



What is it that, when you enter it, it enters you? It's a riddle!

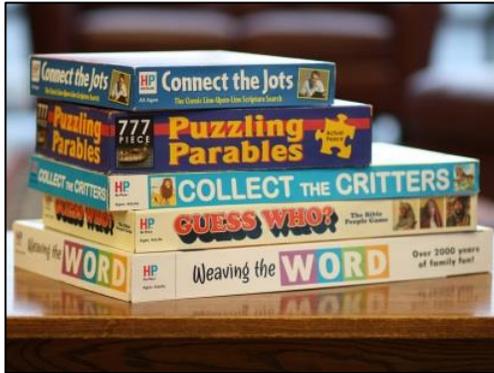
Were you here when I first did the parables? Seem like six years ago? I've redone 14 since then, and saved 16 for our series-of-simultaneous-series. But, the mainstay will be interweaving the stories of the gospels, which we'll dive into next Sunday.

Do you tend to keep Jesus in a box? You *do*. We *all* do. Don't mean to. But, we do. **Like the disciples, we get anxious when He speaks in ways that are unfamiliar or puzzling.** And yet, Jesus said His sheep are led by knowing and following His voice. (John 10:27)



So, **how confident are you that you know His voice? How do you think He sounds?** *That's* your box. And, trying to keep Him in a box is like trying to keep Him in a tomb. Can't be done.

So, with our *five* simultaneous series (btw, there's *five* now), we're going to become like children, and seek, and ask, and knock, and open our eyes, and our ears, and our boxes.

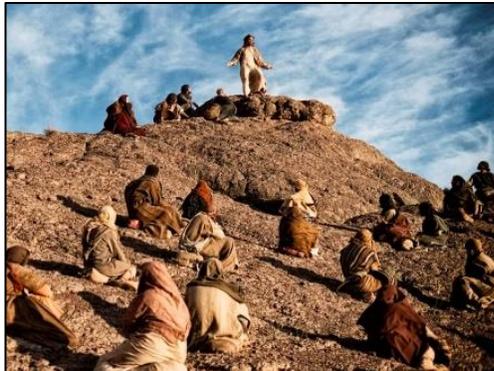


Twice a month I'll send you home with stories to weave together. And, at least once a month, we'll open one of the four top boxes: "**Connect the Jots**" (like we did with the grapes), "**Puzzling Parables**", "**Collect the Critters**" (hunting for the animals Jesus is compared to) and, "**Guess Who?**" (where we'll get to know those who got to know Him). **Do you tend to approach your Bible with duty or delight?** So, what is it that, when you enter *it*, it enters *you*? God's Word! **How would your world change if His Word was truly your delight?**

I don't mean symbolically or theoretically or metaphorically, I mean *actually*, like your favorite game or sport or hobby or show or desert. What if your *greatest joy* was entering His Word?

And, **what if the key was simply letting Him out of your box?** What if you could spend a lifetime being surprised and amazed by Him? You can. **It's all in how we perceive His Word, His voice.**

To the degree you find His Word dull, repetitive, uninteresting, tedious, boring, and blah, you aren't hearing *His* voice. What are you going to do? Close your eyes to it? Or, seek the *real* Him?



Jesus didn't speak the way His *own disciples* thought He should. He was *funny*. Entertaining. Surprising. Shocking. And ... *delightful*.

The large crowd listened to him with delight. - Mark 12:37b NIV

Jesus knew how to capture attention, stir emotion, and leave an impression. So much so, the disciples were *often bothered* by the way He spoke and taught ... and *offended the Pharisees*, who were *all about duty*.

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "**Listen and understand.** [Two very different things] What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.'" Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they **heard this?**" [Without understanding] He replied, ["Yes. I did it on purpose because they're self-righteous." No, wait. That would've been too ... clear] "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit." Peter said, ["Oh, I get it. Their pride has blinded them to the truth of God's grace." No, wait] "Explain the parable to us." "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. - Matthew 15:10-16 NIV

Now who's dull?! Two things especially delighted Him: obedient faith and insightful sparring. Do you know what story follows this?



The [Canaanite] woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. He replied, [“I’m sorry, but I can’t. I have to fulfill my Jewish mission before I can offer myself to gentiles.” No, wait] “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” “Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! [“Forget Jew and Gentile!”] Your request is granted.” – Matthew 15:25-28a NIV

How is that faith? She violated religious law just by entering in and interrupting, and on top of that she *challenges* Him?! No. She requests His help. **He challenges her ... as He does everyone.** But, **she listened, and understood, and accepted His challenge.** And, He was *thrilled!* Because, *that’s hearing His voice!* “Wait, I’m confused.” It’s okay. So was everyone in the room.

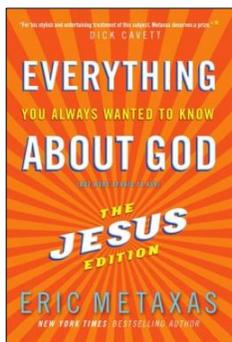
When Jesus spoke, the Pharisees said, “You’re *corrupt.*” The disciples said, “You’re *unclear.*” But, this woman says, “Bread and dogs, eh? Okay then, well, if *I’m* the dog, then *You’re* the Master, and I’m under the table, where’s my crumbs?!” **We want answers. He wants us to deduce and reflect and respond.** “Brilliant! Humble! Faithful! Yes! This gentile woman *gets it!*”



The disciples weren’t sparring as much as scolding. Remember when Peter took Jesus aside to *rebuke* Him? And Jesus said, “Get behind me, Satan!” (Mat 16:22-23) **Good thing we don’t rebuke Jesus, right?** Your mother ever say, “Why are you wearing that?” Your wife ever say, “Why are you wearing that?” Your husband ever say, “Why are you – sure look lovely, dear.” **We often ask ‘why’ as a way to veil our disapproval.** I think there’s a degree of that in our story when ...

The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?” – Matthew 13:10 NIV

I can hear Peter kindly saying, “Why don’t you explain what you’re *trying* to get across, and let *me* speak for you? I kind of have a gift for telling it like it is.” **Which do you do when He appears to be unclear, unloving, or unwise? Do you scold Him for not acting like a loving God with, “Why? Why? Why?” or, accept the challenge and enter into a deeper walk?**



“God is in the business of surprising us. ... We think we know which direction He’s headed, but then He takes a left turn and surprises us. ... We don’t get it until after the fact. ... And it’s a lot like when someone tells a riddle or a joke. We don’t see it coming. But when we hear the answer to the riddle or the punch line to the joke, it makes perfect sense. There’s a surprise factor involved. And a deeply satisfying sense of having our desire for meaning fulfilled. And it always comes out of left field somehow ... that’s the whole point of it.” – Eric Metaxas, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About God*

So, when the disciples asked Jesus *why* He spoke in parables ...

He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to *them*." – Matthew 13:11 NIV

Who's "them"?! And, what are the "secrets of the kingdom"? Pal tells us that ...

... the glorious riches of this mystery ... is Christ in you, the hope of glory. – Colossians 1:27b NIV

Jesus is the secret! He's the mystery they miss out on, why? Jesus said it's because ...

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. – Matthew 13:12 NIV

"Them" are those who *don't have*. Don't have *what*? Eyes that see, ears that hear, and boxes that open! **Parables require pursuit. Jesus is always all about pursuit. So, how are you pursuing 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. **Reading and sparring are two very different things** For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.'" – Matthew 13:13-15a NIV

The great mystery is unavailable to those who take no initiative to open their eyes, their ears, their box, and their Bible. They won't give Jesus a chance to reveal His real self.

"But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear." - Matthew 13:16 NIV

This response is *hilarious* and *amazing*, because, they *don't* see it *or* hear it. They came to Jesus with their half-scolding questions precisely *because* they didn't get it.

But, they came to Him ... sincerely seeking an answer.

And, in His response, you can hear Him saying, "Your eyes *are* blessed, though you have no idea *yet* what they're seeing, just as your ears *are* blessed, though you're completely clueless as to what they're hearing; but, you'll get it."

Jesus was never a question and answer man. He was a question and question man. You see, **you have to grapple if you're gonna grow.**

As you seek and pursue, you'll know when your eyes and ears are truly open, because **when you enter His Word you'll find that you no longer study and examine it, but it studies and examines you.** That's when you *know* He's out of the box!