

How Jesus Taught

The world generally recognizes Jesus as a "great moral teacher" on a par with Buddha, Confucius and other ancient purveyors of wisdom.

But on closer examination, His teachings are... kinda strange.

Jesus almost never gives a straight answer to a question. He speaks past the person's question to what lies behind it. He "knows what is in man" (**John 2:25**).

Most of His teachings, especially when speaking to large crowds, are in the form of parables. The word "parable" in Greek literally means "to come alongside." Parables, then, were short stories given by Jesus in order "to come alongside" His listeners and to teach an important spiritual truth in terms they would understand.

A parable is similar to an extended metaphor - another interesting word, meaning an image representing something else, from the Greek *metapherō*, "to carry over" or transfer across from one dimension to another.

Aristotle considered metaphor hugely important: "...the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars." [Aristotle, "Poetics," 1459a 3-8]

Both a parable and a metaphor are obscure unless you're able to allow yourself to be "carried across" into that space between the literal and the eternal, where God meets you with truth.

Jesus' parables usually contain hidden truths that are not apparent on the surface of the story.

So why didn't Jesus just say what He meant, plainly?

His disciples wondered that too.

After Jesus told the parable of the sower (cf. **Matthew 13:3–23; Mark 4:2–32; Luke 8:4–15**) and before He explained its meaning, Jesus was asked by His disciples, "Why do You speak to the crowds in parables?"

He explained that His parables were not designed to explain truths, but to HIDE them.

"Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given" (**Matthew 13:11**).

In Luke's version, Jesus adds a quote from Isaiah:

"And Jesus said to the disciples, 'To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the

kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, [so] that, "Seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand"" (**Luke 8:10; Mark 4:11-12**).

Isaiah continues: "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (**Isaiah 6:10**).

Wait - God doesn't want people to understand and be "converted?"

In one way, this describes the blindness God had placed over the Jewish nation that was rejecting Him (**John 12:39-42**), but it also applies generally to unbelievers of any race or nation:

2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 - "...because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

The bottom line is that Adam, or natural man, cannot believe or be converted. Teaching or explaining alone cannot bring an unbeliever to the light of God's Kingdom.

Adam - our old man, our original natural identity - has to DIE on the cross. And humans do not usually receive that idea with open arms.

1 Corinthians 1:18,23 - "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ...but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles."

1 Corinthians 2:14 - "The natural man does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God. For they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."

As Jesus put it in a parable, new wine has to be put in a new wineskin (**Matthew 9:16-17**).

This is why we can neither boast nor take pride in the fact that we believe in Christ. It's not that I was savvy or smart enough to see the truth. It is a miracle, performed by the Holy Spirit. God brought circumstances into my life that pushed me to a place of no options. Then He opened my heart, and spiritually unstopped my ears and opened my eyes to see the cross. It wasn't my doing. It was a gift.

An exchange must take place.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled (*katallasso*) us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (*katallasso*)" (**2 Corinthians 5:18**)

Romans 5:10 - "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled (*katallasso*) to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled (*katallasso*), we shall be saved by His life."

The Greek, *katallasso* means "an exchange." In other words, to be "reconciled" we exchange our life for His as we look to the cross.

At the cross, our sins were imputed to Christ, and His perfect righteousness is imputed to us. He bore our sins; we are clothed in His righteousness. He died in our place, but we also die to self and sin by faith.

Our death is pictured in our baptism. As a new creation, we are now only empowered by His resurrection life and are "raised with Him."

Colossians 2:12 - "And having been buried with Him in baptism, you were raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead."

This is beyond an act of simply understanding a teaching. It's a miracle.

John 14:16-17 - "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you do know Him, for He abides with you and will be in you."