

Why did Jesus speak in parables?

When Jesus spoke to the crowds (the group of people who had not yet decided to become his disciples), he shared stories to express symbolically who and what God and his kingdom are like. Most of the time, people didn't completely understand what he was trying to say. This is because the parables that Jesus shared always shocked them. These simple, shocking stories stuck with people. They were hard to forget. As young people, most of us learned these parables growing up. We know the stories before we even read them.

“The disciples approached him and said, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” (Matthew 13:10)

In the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew makes it clear that the parables, at least in this case, are meant for the people who have not become disciples yet. At the beginning of Chapter 13, it is clear that Jesus “sat down by the sea” and spoke to “large crowds” (Mt 13:1-2). The crowds, we can assume, are not yet committed (intentional) disciples.

So, why does Jesus preach in parables?

“Because knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven has been granted to you [the disciples], but to them [the crowds] it has not been granted.” (Mt 13:11)

Jesus didn't “teach” in parables, he “preached” or “proclaimed” in parables. Each parable taught a lesson about the Kingdom of God, which Matthew connects to the act of proclaiming. Teaching, on the other hand, is something Jesus does in the synagogue or in this case to his disciples in private. His disciples receive teaching about **the mysteries of the kingdom**, but the crowds—those in need of evangelization—are taught in parables because presently they “see and hear but do not listen and understand” (Mt 13:13).

In other words, we can't *teach* the unevangelized. (Definition of unevangelized - people who have not been exposed to a particular theology or doctrine and thus have no opportunity to embrace it.)

We can't expect them to understand the mysteries because they are not ready yet. Matthew drives this point home invoking the prophet Isaiah who describes a people who “hardly hear with their ears” and “have closed their eyes” because they do not “see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and be converted and I heal them” (Mt 13:15; Is 6:10).

To be converted, we must first be **healed** by Jesus. But what's next? **Teach** them all there is to know? Not yet. For the lost—those who cannot see or hear yet—they need something different. They need the first **proclamation** (the *kerygma*). They need parables about the kingdom first. They need to understand what the kingdom of God is really all about; otherwise all that religious stuff will just seem like crazy talk.

Watch the Parable of The Prodigal Son. <https://youtu.be/DJgROx4wFKM>

SYMBOLISM LESSON:

Who does the shepherd represent? And the sheep? What is the seed in this story? How about the father? And the sons? And the wedding party guests?

HOW WOULD YOU RELATE TO THIS PARABLE?

- How are you like the . . . in the story?
- Have you ever . . . like this story?
- Is anyone like the . . . in the story?
- Who are they . . . in the story today?
- If you were the . . . in the story, how would you react?