

1.16.11

# THE PURPOSE OF THE PARABLE

MARK 4:10-13

## INTRO

This passage is scandalous to modern American ears. Often, when we as 21st century “evangelicals” look at these verses like these, we frantically start looking for a backdoor so Jesus can escape to avoid appearing monstrous. Why? Jesus didn’t mutter this under his breath as if he were ashamed to say it, in fact in another passage in which we are going to look at today he explodes with praise towards his Father in Heaven for acting like this. This text reveals the disease that we have, namely that we regard men with too high a dignity and God with too low of one. Our fighter verse today instructs us well by telling us to “Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?” God is GOD! Not only does He have the right to act how He acts, but you can be sure that he always acts righteously, and He doesn’t need us to understand how, in order for Him to be vindicated. He is the King. As the Westminster Larger describes, God is infinite in being, glory, blessedness and perfection. He is all sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.<sup>1</sup> We are not any of those things, in fact we are infinitely the opposite of all those things. We are God’s antonym. When Jesus explains the purpose of his parable, he is revealing part of what it means to be God. He’s showing the greatness, and the God-ness of who He is. The only thing that is going to get in our way this morning from hearing Jesus’ words, is a high regard for man and a low regard for our King.

**The Big Idea** is that the purpose of Jesus’ parable is for the paralyzing of some and for the pondering of others.

## OUTLINE

- I. The Paralyzing of Some
- II. The Pondering of Others

## DOCTRINE

### I. The Paralyzing of Some

- A. vs. 10, 11b *“And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. 11 And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables,”*
  1. **Observe three things** that happened here:
    - a. Jesus waited to explain this until they were alone
    - b. Jesus said that *“for those outside everything is in parables”* indicating there is, from his standpoint at least, a separating that is going on.
    - c. This produced no recorded contention. Why? They were being separated since the beginning.--Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau; Jew not Gentile...
- B. vs. 12 *“...so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.”*
  1. **“So that...”** That phrase connects the previous statement to this one. Expond.

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<sup>1</sup> Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 7

- a. Jesus is preventing conversion. Why?
- b. But Jesus, what about
  - i. Your mission to seek and save sinners?
  - ii. Your desire to have all men saved?
  - iii. How can you be a God of love why you are actively hardening hearts and preventing conversion? TO ANSWER THOSE QUESTIONS, WE MUST GO BACK.

### C. The origin of this quote...

1. **The importance of this passage...** direct quote from Isaiah 6
  - a. This is repeated in the first six books of the New Testament.... Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8 give the parallel accounts.
  - b. John 12 quotes it in a different context
  - c. The book of Acts places this quote at a place of prominence as it is the last passage quoted as the curtain closes on the Apostles in chapter 28.
  - d. Lastly, Paul in Romans 11 quotes it in reference to God's purposes for Israel and that of His elect.
  - e. **This passage...** as verse 11 indicates is one of the secrets of the Kingdom of God!
2. **Leading up to the passage...**is accusation after accusation of God's people's flagrant prostituting of themselves after anything but their loving King.
  - a. "I did this, but you responded thus..." "You have despised the Holy One of Israel!"

3. **Enter the throne room--Isaiah's commission...** Isaiah 6 *"In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. 2 Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." 4 And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. 5 Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. 7 He touched my mouth with it and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven." 8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" 9 He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.' 10 "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed." 11 Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered, "Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant, Houses are without people And the land is utterly desolate, 12 "The LORD has removed men far away, And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. 13 "Yet there will be a tenth portion in it, And it will again be subject to burning, Like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump."*

- a. Key things to observe:
  - i. **Who is speaking to Isaiah?...** John 12:41 *"Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him"* So when Jesus is quoting this verse in Mark 4, He was the one who originally spoke the words!
  - ii. His mission--vs. 9-10
  - iii. How long?--vs. 11-12 Until everything is destroyed!
  - iv. The result: Only a holy seed remains. My word will harden some and save others--it never fails.

## D. Objections.

1. When John quotes this verse in John 12:37-41, he says in verse 39 that *"therefore they could not believe"* In other words, God is acting in this way, so that they could not believe. Now this does not lessen the obligation of the listener. Last week's sermon from Pastor Matt illustrated our responsibility: WE MUST LISTEN CAREFULLY. We are commanded to repent and believe. This passage today is demonstrating what part God plays which is the part of revealing truth to those He wills and hiding that same truth from others.
2. But perhaps some of you will say to me: "God hardens those whom he foresees hardening themselves" Let's answer that with a couple illustrations from Scripture.
  - a. Matthew 11:20-24 (This is Jesus right after He gets done praising John the Baptist) *"Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. 21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. 24 But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you."*
    - i. EXPLAIN--if, then...
  - b. Romans 9:11-13 *"though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad--in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls-- 12 she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."*
    - i. EXPLAIN--
    - ii. A. W. Pink says here that this passage *"traces everything back to the sovereign will of the Creator. He loves one and hates another, He exercises mercy toward some and hardens others, without reference to anything save His own sovereign will."*
    - iii. While at the same time he affirms that *"God does not compel the wicked to sin...God only says in effect that awful word, "Let them alone" (Matt 15:14) He needs only to... withhold the influence of saving grace, and apostate man will..., of his own accord, fall by his iniquities. Thus [this] decree... neither interferes with the bent of man's own fallen nature, nor serves to render him the less inexcusable."*

## E. Why?

1. Doesn't 1 Tim 2:4 say that God *"...desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."* Why does he actively harden people, preventing their conversion? Couldn't God have saved everyone?
  - a. YES! Romans 9:19 asks rhetorically *"...who can resist his will?"* NO ONE! If 1 Tim 2:4 was his chief desire, you can be sure that all men would be saved.
2. SO WHY ISN'T THAT HIS CHIEF DESIRE? WHY DOESN'T HE SAVE ALL?
  - a. **1st answer.** Because He's God and He doesn't owe us an answer. When Paul answers the objection *"Why does He still find fault?"* He says...*"But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?"* Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?
  - b. **2nd answer.** BECAUSE His glory is more important than the comfort of human beings!--Isaiah 2:22--There is no higher reason than this! It is infinitely loving for God to demonstrate His greatness with no regard to the cost for creatures that he made and holds right over.
3. Well than why doesn't he withhold birth from some?
  - a. Judas...Matt 26:24 *"The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."*

- b. Notice here that Jesus said it would have been better for Judas. So why did it happen? Answer. BECAUSE His glory is more important to be shown than Judas' lack of existence. God is glorified that Judas did what he did and ended up where he ended up, more so than if he simply would not have existed!
4. This GLORY, is exactly the reason Paul gives for God raising up Pharaoh and hardening his heart...
- a. Romans 9:17 **17** For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "**For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.**"

So it's clear that God paralyzes people ULTIMATELY for His glory. This glory he loves to show to those he is saving, so another way to say this is: he paralyzes for the purpose of fueling the affections of those who would ponder.

## II. The Pondering of Others

A. vs. 11a *And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God..."*

1. Observe...
  - a. To YOU has been **given** this secret. What do we do with secrets?
  - b. *"Assuredly, the thing at which I chiefly aimed...was, that the glory of thy goodness and justice...might shine forth conspicuous, that the virtue and blessings of thy Christ...might be fully displayed. For I thought it impious to leave in obscurity things which we were born to ponder and meditate."* John Calvin
  - c. What is this secret is about that he only gives to his followers? This verse answers by telling us the Kingdom of God. But let's listen to the parallel passage in...
  - d. Matthew 13:16-17 *"But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. 17 For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."*
    - i. What is the significance of saying that we are blessed in what we **see** and **hear**?
    - ii. Answer: We were without eyes and ears and we were given them so that we could drown ourselves in the love of the King!
2. Why have we been given this mystery?
  - a. Negatively OR in other words--don't think it's for this reason...
    - i. Deuteronomy 9:4-6 *"Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. 5 Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. 6 "Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people."* 3x God tells them "not because of your righteousness"
      1. Ponder.. your past hatred towards God, your present disregard for his commands, and your future sin, and God decided to save you anyway!
  - b. Positively--This IS the reason...
    - i. Romans 9:22-24 *"What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to **make known the riches of his glory** for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory-- 24 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?"*

1. Observe here:
  - a. He wanted to show His wrath
  - b. He wanted to make know his power
  - c. He wanted to show His patience
  - d. In order to make known the riches of His glory FOR the the vessels of mercy to see!
    - i. He has done this for our pondering!
      1. On that day...
      2. For all eternity...

3. In case you need permission for praise--LOOK AT JESUS' RESPONSE!!
  - a. Matt 11:25-26 *"At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will."*
    - i. Observe...HowJesus PRAISES GOD for God dealing with men like he does...Ponder: Can you praise God for this way that God deals with men?

- B. vs. 13 And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?
1. J. A. Alexander says in this place *"the words are... to be taken as a concession of the fact that they could not be expected to understand this or other parables,... As if he had said, 'you find that you cannot understand this parable without assistance? How then will you understand the rest unaided?'"*
  2. In other words this is somewhat rhetorical. All human response to these parables are identical! The very thing that is keeping the outsiders on the outside is what would keep us out if Jesus didn't graciously explain all things to us.
  3. He's asking this question to remind them and US of our complete inability apart from him.

## CLOSING

1. Isaiah's advantage over us in receiving this text.--He saw God dealing with the unjust sins of those who are perishing
2. Our advantage over Isaiah in receiving this text.--We see God dealing with the unjust sins of those who are being saved.

### Romans 11:33-36

*"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."*