

INTRO:

Alright friends, come on back...Hope that gave you a chance to connect!...Hey show of hands? Anyone make a New Years resolution this year?...I'll tell ya, I am so bad at resolutions that BEFORE New Years I thought to myself, "*Ya know, I really need to think about this.*" I did!... And then January 2nd...I realized...completely forgot about it. So yeah, crushin' it!...Well whatever your feeling about resolutions, I do wanna invite you to not so much make one, but pursue a specific habit here at the start of the year. Cuz ya know, habits more than resolutions REALLY better promote the change we all want, since habits are what create a new normal for us...and normal is what actually shapes our bodies, budgets, families...and hearts¹

And the habit I wanna invite you to pursue making: *is the habit of investigating what God is really like! What He's really like!* And I mean, what He's like untethered from things you've heard or had passed down to you. What He's like...in His own words! Bc little secret for ya here: When you get to know what God's like, ya end up wanting to be LIKE God...which GOD actually likes/wants for you to be like Christ!

And so to help you do that/as I mentioned for those of you who joined online last Sunday, we're starting a series today, entitled **Upside Down** through what's called Jesus' Kingdom parables - His real-life teachings ABOUT what God's like, BUT which are in some ways *upside down* from the way we normally think about God. So needless to say, these are fun! They're gonna challenge you and encourage you; humble you and at the same time make you feel like your heart is gonna jump out of it's chest with joy.

So without further adieu let's pray and then we'll hear from Jesus' own mouth WHY He taught in parables in the first place. *Let's Pray...Amen!*...Would you follow along as we hear the reading of God's word from **Matthew 13:10-17, 34-35**... **Abby** reads...

TEXT:

Hey, can we thank BOTH **Abby** AND God for the reading of His Word?...So we're talking about WHY Jesus spoke in parables. And it's worthwhile question for two reasons: *First*, cuz Jesus spoke in parables ALOT. Some estimates say He gave nearly 250 of em in the Gospels, such that understanding these is really part-n-parcel with understanding His whole ministry and message...But *Two*, like the Disciples here, I think we too often have a lot of confusion ABOUT Jesus' parables.² Ya know, a lot of people say Jesus used parables simply to illustrate truth. He was after all, the greatest teacher of all time/prolly went to a decent seminary, and so He wanted to make sure everyone understood His message...Only problem with that is it doesn't make a lot of sense of what He says there in **vv.11-12** about giving some people, like His Disciples, clarity, but others confusion. That doesn't sound like a man JUST wanting to elucidate a point.

¹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/unlock-power-family-habits/>

² Mis-understandings adapted from: D. A. Carson, "[The Purpose of the Parables](#)," in *D. A. Carson Sermon Library* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2016), Mt 13:10-35.)

So others say, “No, Jesus used parables/told these stories, cuz He was more about thought-provoking/open-ended ideas rather than narrow-minded propositional truth.” Ever heard this? Jesus as the relatable/authentic Pastor with the oversized hoodie and vintage sneakers, who didn’t wanna offend or judge anyone?... Problem with that is, according to **vv.13-14** here and then down in **vv.34-35**, it seems pretty clear that Jesus WAS communicating hard-n-fast truth, that HE hoped would be, as it says, “*seen, heard, understood*” and “*perceived.*” He WAS revealing grand truth/as He says, “*uttering what had been hidden since the foundation of the world.*” That certainly sounds like the language of objective/propositional truth there!

So still others’ll say, “No, No! The REASON Jesus spoke in parables was to HIDE truth from those who weren’t His followers”/from the “non-elect” as they’re called. And honestly, this one’s the toughest, because at first glance, it does seem plausible, since in **v.15** Jesus, in quoting from **Isaiah** says, “*this people’s heart has grown dull...their ears can barely hear...their eyes they’ve closed, LEST they should see with their eyes...hear with their ears and UNDERSTAND with their heart and turn, and I WOULD heal them.*” Certainly sounds like Jesus saying, “*I gotta keep these people FROM understanding or else I’ll have to save em*” ...But of course, the problem with that is two-fold: First, **Theologically**, it just doesn’t square with Jesus’ heart throughout Scripture. I mean when do we EVER see Jesus NOT wanting people to turn-to and trust Him. Never right? I mean perhaps the most famous verse in all the Bible was uttered by Jesus Himself when He said, “*For God SO loved the world, that he gave his only Son that whoever should believe in Him will not perish but have eternal life.*” If you interpret these parables as devices Jesus uses to keep people FROM receiving His message, ya get theologically sideways real quick! But too **Literarily-speaking**, if you read **v.15** as Jesus saying, “*I gotta keep these people from understanding or else they’ll repent;*” then as they say, you’ve gotten the emFasis all wrong. The way it’s supposed to read is: “*If ONLY these people understood, THEN they’d repent, and I WOULD heal em.*” You see the difference? It’s the difference between Jesus as finger-pointing and rebuffing vs welcoming with open-arms and rewarding!³

So why then DID Jesus speak in parables? Look in **vv.16-17**. Jesus says, “*blessed are your eyes and ears, for they see and hear.*” And then you see, in saying that, He makes a contrast, not only to, as He says, the “*many prophets and righteous people who longed to see and didn’t,*” but ALSO to those He’s just mentioned in **v.15**, who are in some way deliberately shutting their eyes and ears. **So what He’s saying?** He’s saying, listen, “*My parables are like invitations into the Kingdom/into salvation/the life of Christ, which some respond to and some don’t.*” Cuz think about an invitation. Invitations do two things right? **First**, they announce an upcoming party/in this case the party that is salvation/the Kingdom of God having come with the arrival of King Jesus...But **Then** of course invitations also indicate who’s invited right?/delineate who’s in and gonna enjoy the party or not...Now here’s the key: Ya notice, Jesus makes NO mention of these so-called “invitations” only going out to a select group of people. Actually, He seems to indicate the opposite/that they’ve gone out to everyone. EVERYONE has, as He says, “*been given the secrets of the kingdom,*” which is to say, been made aware of the coming messiah. After all the

³ Phrase taken from <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000517387367>

arrival of a messiah was no secret to these Jews to whom Jesus is speaking. It's just that only SOME, by virtue of having "*open eyes and ears*" have "*been given to KNOW*" the secrets of who that messiah would be and what kind of kingdom He'd bring...In other words, the invitation to salvation/the invitation to have your sins forgiven/be redeemed/justified/brought back into relationship with God and His people/Have God as your Father and the church as your family/be filled with the Spirit and sent out on mission as an ambassador for King Jesus, THAT invitation has gone out in the mail to everyone/landed in everyone's inbox...But unfortunately only SOME RSVP. Only some read rather than mark it as "junk." Only SOME actually take Jesus up on the invite, either because they/WE don't think we need saving/life's pretty good. Or more likely, we do, but we just want a different kind of salvation than what Jesus offers. Want more of a, what I might call, "jet-pack" salvation. Ya know, for Jesus to, not so much make a claim on our lives as our Lord and Savior, but rather just give us a boost in our marriages, families, careers, health, whatever. So not be our Lord and Savior/just be our Lawyer and Shrink - get us out of binds when we need it and help us feel better in the meantime...Incidentally, that's why Jesus talks about "*those who have, being given more*" and "*those who don't, what they do have being taken away.*" Because He's saying, everyone gets the invitation to join this party, which as we saw in our "Truth Myth" series last year, had long-been anticipated throughout the OT. And those who RSVP and reply with their "attendance", they of course get both the invite and the enjoyment of the party. Those who have, they get more. But those who don't RSVP/who mark the email as junk, they forfeit their invitation altogether. What they did have/the invitation, is taken away!

So ya see? Jesus's parables aren't to illustrate or hide truth. Nor are they just to make people think. No! They're to make us choose. Choose whether He and His kingdom, which we're gonna see described throughout these parables, is one we want or not. Make us choose, as my sermon title says, whether you're an "*innie or an outie*" - whether you're drawing near-to and being transformed by the message of Christ...or in some way walking away-from Christ. Cuz at the end of the day and contrary to all the political, social, racial, even religious groups into which WE like to put people - in the economy of Jesus' kingdom, there's only two groups of people: Those sitting with and getting more of Jesus and those walking away from or just holding Jesus at arm's length. THAT'S what these parables are about.

APPLICATION:

So...what can we make of this for us today? **3 Things.** Write these down, as we'll come back to em throughout this series: ***First, Jesus's parables remind you that trust is the basis by which we interact with God.*** See, while Jesus' parables were all-inclusive invitations, they were nevertheless demanded a response. You can't sit the fence with these/with the Gospel. As the old proverb says, "*Man who sits thy fence, splits thy pants.*"...Cuz see, while the Gospel IS incredibly inclusive in the sense that ALL are invited/Jesus died for the WHOLE world: jew/gentile, old/young, rich/poor, black/white, male/female, educated/uneducated, you name it; it's also incredibly EXclusive. A response of faith in Christ is required for both salvation and sanctification. As ***Acts 4:12*** says respectively, "*there's salvation in no one (but Christ)...there's no other name under heaven given...by which we must be saved.*" It's exclusive! And I know people object to this all the time/maybe you cringe a little bit at the thought of saying there's only

one way to God. But understand, everything's exclusive. EVERY religion, every tradition, creed, philosophy, morality, way of living, or just understanding of life...it's ALL exclusive BECAUSE we all have different ideas for what makes for a "good person." The difference is: Christianity/ the Gospel is the most "inclusive-exclusivity" there is. Because only IT teaches that your goodness/your acceptance with God isn't based on anything about you, but rather on receiving and trusting God's invitation for salvation in Christ. It only requires trust. That's in-part, what made it so scandalous to those in Jesus' time and why, to Jesus's chagrin here, people repeatedly "*closed their eyes and shut up their ears*" to it. Because it wasn't based on who was excluded, but on who was INcluded by faith!⁴

Second, Jesus's parables are reminders that life with Christ oughta consistently humble you.

One of the most beautiful aspects of Jesus' explanation here is how, even in the midst of hard truth, like needing to respond in faith or being left out of Jesus' Kingdom-party/even in the midst of that, there's still SO much grace. Cuz look, He tells His Disciples that "*to them it is GIVEN to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.*" GIVEN! So how did the Disciples come to be invited into and ultimately enjoy the Kingdom? Working hard, cleaning up their lives, achieving their New Years resolutions right? ***Is that what it says?*** No! It says it was "*GIVEN to them.*" Friend, that's the beauty of the Gospel. If you've trusted Jesus/you're learning to trust Jesus in any area of your life, it's not because you've done something to get yourself on the inside with Christ, it's because He's GIFTED you an insider's pass...I remember a couple years ago, I got to lead Chapel for the Red Sox. And so they gave me this stadium pass that allowed me access into the clubhouse. And I'll be honest, I did my best to...keep my jaw from hitting the floor, cuz there I am standing inside the clubhouse - 3-4 feet from some of the biggest superstars in the world/certainly in the city. And it's just super awkward when someone like me is staring at someone like Big Papi, while He's he puttin' on his pants. So I did my best, UNTIL, one of the coaches comes up to me and directs me to the medical room, which I swear is no bigger than (THIS) and says, "*ok when you're ready the guys'll come in and you lead em.*" So now I'm not 3-4 feet from these guys. I'm basically on top of em and they're all lookin' me waitin' for me to teach em the Bible. And you know why? Cuz I had that pass! I was on the inside! And NOT because I'd DONE anything to deserve it, but because someone had invited and then GIVEN me the pass... Incredibly humbling...How much more with Jesus, who doesn't just bring you into some clubhouse full of sinful/albeit talented sinners, but inside to the very presence of God Himself/ into HIS family! And NOT because you do anything to deserve it, but simply because HE invited and then GIFTED you with the pass that HE earned in your place! Friend, that oughta humble you/oughta root out arrogance and self-righteousness/oughta cause you to see that your "*seeing eye, hearing ear*" and believing heart is a gift from God! That oughta - and I know this is gonna run counter to our, "gotta love yourself" culture - but that oughta make you more-and-more DISDAINING of yourself, cuz you see how little you deserve Jesus' grace, WHILE at the same time more-and-more delighted in Jesus. As John Piper says, simultaneously pushed downward in HUMILIATION of yourself, but then upward in ADORATION of Christ.⁵

⁴ "Inclusive Exclusivity" // Romans 3:27-31 // Romans #8 - J.D. Greear

⁵ Speaking of the life of Charles Simeon in "The Roots of Endurance," p.78

Finally and Very Briefly, Jesus's parables remind you that life with Christ oughta consistently embolden you too. Ya see in **v.16**, Jesus says, "**BLESSED** are your eyes, for they see/your ears, for they hear"? And then down in **v.35**, "**I will utter what's been hidden since the foundation of the world.**" **See that?** Jesus is reminding His disciples that the **ONLY** reason they understand Him/trust Him/enjoy life and salvation with Him, is **NOT** cuz they came to work it all out intellectually or something, but because they'd been, "**Blessed.**" God had opened their eyes/turned on the lights as it were to see "**what had been hidden since Creation**" - as we saw in our "True Myth" series last year, **SEE** that what was **Anticipated** in the OT, and now **Manifested** in the Gospels, what would ultimately be **Proclaimed** in Acts, **EXplained** in the Epistles, and **Consummated** in Revelation - is that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior...And church, that's not only true for them. It's true for you and me also, since as **Ephesians 1:9** says, "**It's GOD who makes known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ.**" To enter into relationship with Jesus, you understand, is to in a sense, have God "flip the switch of your heart," so that you see your need for Christ **AND** see that Christ has indeed met all your deepest needs. That's **WHY** scholars have said that one of the best descriptions or analogies for conversion is that of "awakening." This sense of coming alive, peering through the haze, or as **Psalms 73** puts it, "**awakening to the truth as one awakens from a dream!**" An utterly mysterious thing, and **YET** an utterly emboldening thing too. Because if you understand that God "**blessed**" so as to awaken the Disciples, and "**blesses**" so as to awaken you and me if you're a follower of Christ today; then you understand that He can "**bless**" so as to awaken...anyone. That it's not on **YOUR** ability to share the Gospel, explain the Bible, present the perfect apologetic. It's not even on your ability to be hospitable or invitational, winsome or welcoming, cleaned up or tidied up. It's on Him/**HIS** willingness and ability to "**bless.**" **WHICH MEANS**, if it's all on Him, none of it's on you. So you can boldly step out and pray that God would "flip the switch" in the hearts of those you love. Boldly go out of your way to open your home, and invite people into spaces in which they can hear the Gospel declared and see the Gospel displayed. Boldly share your faith/study the Bible with those around you. Boldly show up, serve and give generously. **OR** just boldly...**NOT** give up...Cuz ya never know when God is gonna see fit to "flip that switch" for someone.

So you see? As Kingdom-invitations, Jesus' parables are not only gonna show you what God is like, even if it's **upside down** from the way we normally think, but they're gonna push you to ask yourself, "**do I actually like this God? Am I drawing near to and trusting Him. Is He both humbling and emboldening me because I'm receiving and being transformed by His message?**" **OR** are you, in some way, walking away from Him. So I hope you're ready/**I HOPE** you're committed to **investigating what God is really like** this season, because I promise: If you are, it could make all the difference in the world for **YOU, US...AND** those we love around us!...**Let's Pray...(Amen).**