

The Power of Parables to Smack Us Awake

How (and What) the

Parables of Jesus

Help Us See

Lesson 5

“I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.” (Matt 13:35)

Few things have the power to pierce us to the heart more than a well-developed conclusion we never saw coming. Remember the “parable” Nathan told David in [2 Samuel 12](#)? Nathan wasn’t relaying actual news; he was confronting the king’s sin of adultery with Bathsheba. But instead of directly accusing David, he led the king down an indirect path, drawing David in as an observer. Nathan’s story naturally led David into a judgment about “the rich man” before he even realized who the rich man represented. And with the smack of [2 Samuel 12:7](#)—“You are the man!”—David was forced to look at himself in a new light. The ball was now squarely, unmistakably in David’s court and he had to transparently react to what he knew could not be ignored, hidden, or denied.

In [Luke 14](#), Jesus was dining at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, who were watching him carefully. When he reasoned with them about healing on a Sabbath day, “they could not reply” ([14:6](#)). Eventually, when one of those who reclined at table exclaimed, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” Jesus responded with a parable. **Let’s take the time to carefully read it in [Luke 14:16-24](#).**

- What had Jesus “noticed” earlier ([Luke 14:7](#))?
- Why do you think Jesus responded to “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” with this parable?
- “For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet” ([14:24](#)). What do you make of the concluding statement in this parable? What is Jesus getting at?
- We concluded Lesson 4 by noticing Matthew’s summary in [Matthew 13:34-35](#)—a quotation from [Psalm 78](#)—and encouraging you to read and reflect on that ancient psalm. How does it relate to what is going on in [Luke 14](#)?
- **Here’s the kicker:** why not just directly, straightforwardly tell all who were gathered in that Pharisee’s house exactly what was wrong, what they weren’t seeing, and what to do about it?



Direct communication is important for conveying information, but learning is more than information intake, especially if the learner is someone who already thinks they understand. People entrenched in their current understanding set their defenses against direct communication and end up conforming the message into the channels of their current understanding of reality. But indirect communication finds a way through the back window to confront a person's view of reality... A parable's ultimate aim is to draw in the listener to awaken insight, stimulate the conscience, and move to action. Jesus' parables...are prophetic instruments...used to get God's people to stop, reconsider their way of viewing reality, and to change their behavior.

- Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories With Intent* (pg. 8-9)

For Jesus, the parables were not used to explain things to people's satisfaction, but to call into question all of their previous explanations and understandings... Far from being illustrations that illuminate what people haven't yet figured out, the parables are designed to pop every circuit breaker in the mind... Mention "Messiah," and the disciples pictured an armed king on horseback; mention "forgiveness," and they start setting up rules about when it should run out. From Jesus' point of view, the sooner their misguided minds had the props knocked from under them, the better. After all their yammer about how God should or shouldn't run his own operation, getting them to just stand there with their eyes popped open and their mouths shut would be a giant step forward."

- Robert Farrar Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment in the Parables of Jesus* (pg. 5-7)

For Next Week...

Can you think of some other examples of Jesus using parables to "knock the props" out from under people, get them to stop, and reconsider what they thought they already knew?