

Home Group Reading for June 30 – July 6, 2024

“When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, ‘The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, “they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’” Mark 4:10-12

When they were off by themselves, those who were close to him, along with the Twelve, asked about the stories. He told them, “You’ve been given insight into God’s kingdom—you know how it works. But to those who can’t see it yet, everything comes in stories, creating readiness, nudging them toward a welcome awakening. These are people— Whose eyes are open but don’t see a thing, Whose ears are open but don’t understand a word, Who avoid making an about-face and getting forgiven.” Mark 4:10-12 (The Message)

Excerpts

Parables are picture stories whose purpose is to illustrate complex truths.

“Jesus offered very little practical instruction in his sermons (at least as we measure practicality today... Jesus was not a straight talker. Instead, his stories were designed to challenge his listeners’ assumptions and surprise them with unexpected, even offensive, revelations about God and his kingdom. Sometimes Jesus even intended to confuse them. More often, however, his parables began with an object, circumstance, or relationship that his audience was familiar with, and then he surprised them with a twist that turned their assumptions upside down.”
Skye Jethani

“The parables of Jesus are not nice and conventional stories with a moral lesson... There is nothing nice or easy, clear or conventional about Jesus’ parables. If anything, Jesus’ parables are crazy, confusing, and most of all disorienting. But why? Jesus’ parables are designed to disorient us from our conventional assumptions so we can be coaxed into the alternative and un-imagined universe that is the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is nothing less than an alternative way (God’s way!) to arrange the world.” – Brian Zahnd

Why parables? Why symbols? Why puzzles? Make it plain!! Here’s why: because Jesus NEEDS them to sink deeper than our heads, into our hearts and out through our hands. – Brad Jersak

Reflection Questions

1. Which parable of Jesus is your favorite, and why? How has this parable impacted your understanding of God's Kingdom or your personal faith journey?
2. Reflect on the idea that parables are meant to "create readiness" and "nudge towards a welcome awakening." Can you recall a time when a parable or a teaching nudged you toward a deeper understanding or a new perspective in your spiritual life?
3. Have you ever experienced a moment when a parable or a teaching from Jesus turned your understanding upside down?
4. What challenges do you face when trying to understand the parables of Jesus in their original 1st-century context? What are some ways we can bridge the gap between the ancient world and our modern perspective to grasp the intended messages of these parables?
5. How do you feel about the ambiguity and mystery within Jesus’ parables? Do you find it frustrating or enriching, and why? How can embracing the mysterious aspects of the parables enhance our spiritual growth?