Why did God speak in parables? Can we understand them?

The purpose of a parable was obviously to give us a message. It was often made up by examples used by Jesus to explain to people the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven. As the way things work in heaven might be difficult for us to comprehend, Jesus used examples that we can relate to. Comparisons from our daily life. But nevertheless not all the people could understand and comprehend the meaning. Why? Because it still had to do with heaven. And that’s exactly opposite to our human nature. So, from this we can conclude that the examples were used to facilitate the meaning for those who could understand them, but for those who couldn’t, these words remained vailed and hidden. How could the disciples understand that He was referring about the heart while speaking about the different kinds of ground in the parable of the sower? Because He explained them. That is the only way for us to understand. When He explains it to us. Even with the best and easiest examples, they couldn’t understand, but when Jesus explained the parable to them, the whole new world was open to them and all of a sudden the examples given to them took life and they got the meaning. This happens with each word of the Bible when it is revealed in our life. We can find answers in the explanation given by Jesus to the parable of the sower.

“Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who Indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” Matthew 13:18-23

We can see this parable in three of the gospels. In Matthew 13, in Mark 4 and in Luke 8. Obviously it varies a bit, but when we put this parable together from these three gospels, then we get the complete picture. We have to know that each one of those evangelists who wrote this parable, wrote what impressed him more, what touched him more. Seeing all three of them, they generally go in the same line. The one in Matthew for example speaks a lot about understanding. In 13:23 it says: “But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it…”

From here we see which is the way not only to understand a parable, but to understand the word of God in general. It is to have good, and open heart, a fertile ground for the word. We obviously know that no one’s heart is good. I mean really good to fulfill God’s standards. The only way for that is to allow Him to work in our heart, so that He can turn it into a good one. The only way for us to understand the word is when He opens our eyes and ears. It is His work. We can say that it is a miracle.

We can see another short parable that comes after the parable of the sower in the gospels of Mark and Luke. It is about the lamp. And need to know that not by chance we find it there. Obviously God can speak to us through a single verse, but sometimes we need to see the whole story and a context of it. And in this case we see that the lamp is having to do with the parable of the sower.

“No one, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel or puts it under a bed, but sets it on a lampstand, that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light.” Luke 8:16,17

Same verse we find as well in Mark 4:21,22, always after the parable of the sower. In this case we can make a reference to Psalm 119:105 where it says: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and light to my path.” So from here we can conclude that the lamp is the word of God. And where does the lamp need to stay? In its right place, meaning on the lampstand. Don’t you think that our heart is that lampstand. And we have to allow the word of God to accomplish its work in us. We need to allow it to be in our heart, where it can shine and show us our reality.

“Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against You, cast your laws behind their backs and killed Your prophets, who testified against them to turn them to Yourself; and they worked great provocations.” Nehemiah 9:26

Here we see a passage in which is said that those people cast God’s word behind their backs. They didn’t put it in the right place. We can somehow put it away, even if we know it. We can hide it and make as nothing happens, as in the case with the lamp. We can harden ourselves. Obviously the work in our hearts belongs to God, but we need to be careful to take heed to His word.

It happens as we see in Luke 8:18 “Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken away from him.” Why? Because those who have, have it by the only reason that they believed and received from God. That’s the most important – to receive from God. Even for understanding the parables, we need to receive. And those who don’t have is because they haven’t believed in Him.

This verse comes after the explanation of the parable of the sower. Luke 8:11-15 And also in Matthew and Mark where we see the parable of the sower, we see also this same verse coming a bit after, in the same conversation. In the same verse Jesus says: “Take heed how you hear”. That means that “hearing” is having to do with faith. They need to go together. Speaking about the parable of the sower, we see that by the way we receive this seed that is the word of God, will define how are we going to understand it. For the natural man these things are foolishness. 1 Corinthians 1:18 God made it in this way, so that only those who believed could understand. By a nature, it is a miracle for us to have His word revealed in our hearts. This is the meaning and the purpose of the parables, that His word can be revealed in our hearts. Then the parable is explained. Which was the way for the disciples to understand a parable? By asking Jesus for its meaning.

“But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable.” Mark 4:10

And which was one of the first parables that Jesus started with? The parable of the sower. It was the foundation of all the parables. Why? Because it explained how to receive His word in our hearts. And by this we can also understand it. “And He said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?” “ Mark 4:13

This verse also comes after the parable of the sower. So, we can see that understanding this parable is fundamental, because it speaks about understanding His word and which is the condition for it. With this one, He gave us the key of how to understand His word.



Lets see some other verses in Mathew 13:11-17

“He answered and said to them, ‘Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundantly; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor they understand. And in them the prophesy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

We see an answer given by Jesus after the parable of the sower, to a question: “Why do You speak to them in parables?” And we see as He caries on answering that He says: “Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, ….” And to me here Jesus wasn’t referring just for the people not understanding the parables, but for those not understanding His word in total. He was saying that what He was trying to tell them was like a mystery, like something unveiled. We speak for the whole word of God. And even if someone could understand the general meaning of the word, still for Him its real meaning was hidden. That’s why the people can’t practice it sometimes. Because they don’t actually understand it. They can’t see its real value and consecutively, they don’t give it much importance. God needs to open their eyes, so that they could see. But there are conditions and attitudes for it, and the most important is that faith is required. With the parable of the sower, He already explained all. All the basics and what is important. He said that the seed is the word fallen in each heart. And some of them could understand it and some others no, according to the condition of their heart. Notice that He didn’t say that the seed is another parable, but He said that the seed is the word of God. In this way He said that not only the parables could not be understood, but the word in general. That means that the whole word of God for some people is like a parable, like a mystery. I repeat that, the people maybe can understand the literal meaning of a certain word, but not to understand what that word means for their life, and not to understand its deeper meaning. All these makes the word of God as a parable, as a comparison. Yes, made by events really occurred and speaking in a literal way most of the times, when is about basic commandments, but still with a personal meaning that only the believer can discover for his life. Speaking about things we need to do, the Bible speaks in a literal way. When it says for example “Do not steal” or “Do not commit adultery” it is obviously about something literal and we mustn’t look for a parable in those cases, and even if we do, then remember that the explanation of a certain parable mustn’t never contradict the rest of the word, but it must be confirmed by it. This is how we are going to know that the explanation is right. When it is confirmed by the word of God.

“But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” Matthew 13:23

We see this part of the explanation of the parable of the sower and we see that it is about understanding of the word. That the one having a good ground (heart), receives the word, **understands** it and bears fruit. Here Jesus gave us the key of how to understand the word and the parables. Obviously He was referring to the whole word. And this is by having that kind of heart, like the parable of the sower explains. And how we can have this kind of heart, as often we can see our heart being hard like the one on the wayside or being like stony places, or having thorns? Our heart needs to be transformed and touched by God. He is the only one able to turn our heart from its condition to a good soil (heart).

Of course that Jesus explained some of the parables in the new testament, but the rest He left to us, I mean that we with the help of the Holy Spirit, that is Jesus Himself, need to find out the meaning for our life that in most cases will be on personal level, speaking to us personally, but obviously not contradicting with the Bible doctrine. And we are not being presumptuous, but we state what the Bible says. And that is that He will send the counselor, the Holy Spirit to guide us in all the truth. John 16:7 We can say that everything in the Bible can be used as a parable, understood in a comparative way. Because what actually a parable is? It is a comparison, it is something used as an example, so that we can imagine in a easier way what God wants to tell in our life.

“I will open my mouth and speak in parables…” Matthew 13:35 To me He was referring to many things, to most of the things he was saying, not only to certain parables He said in the New Testament. Obviously we have to know that certain commandments He gave us and certain things to do were a literal expression, they were not parables. When God speaks to us telling us precisely what to do and what not, as it is written in the Bible then obviously it is not a parable. And we know that the Bible is composed by historical facts true occurring, but still, they can be used as a comparison in our life. We can find a meaning today in some of the battles occurred in the times of King David for example. The meaning that we need to consult with God before facing certain situation, that can be compared as a battle we need to face, for example. Without allowing the Spirit of God to work freely in us through His word and to speak in our life, the Bible turns into simple historical book without more meaning for us than the rest of the books. Obviously there are great stories there, all of them, or at least most until now, historically proven, but what is the most important there is that the Spirit of God has decided to manifest Himself to us through it.

A parable in the Bible or a word has to have a personal meaning for the life of the believer. That personal meaning mustn’t go away or in another direction from the principal meanings and teachings of the Bible. Then we can say that the interpretation is wrong and dangerous. And the most important is that, that interpretation must be revealed by the Spirit of God in the life of the believer. Without that vision and interpretation, we are dead, we can not live a spiritual life.

Many times the parables don’t have necessary only one specific meaning only. The believer can have a personal interpretation of a parable as long as that meaning doesn’t contradict the word of God and the most important – that the interpretation is given by the Spirit of God, the right Spirit, the Holy one. Depends as well on the situation in which the believer is living. Let’s see some of the parables in which we can find this situation.

“Then He said, “To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on the earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.”

Mark 4:30-32

Here in this parable for example we see the kingdom of God compared to this seed that became a three. Now, you would hear some people saying that the tree is good and it needs to grow and also you can hear others saying that the kingdom of God mustn’t be overgrown or better said puffed up, because the birds of the air that came under its shade are the sons of the evil one, thus being compared to the birds of Matthew 13 of the parable of the sower. Now we need to see which one of two is right. The answer is: none of them and both in the same time. It depends on the situation in which we are living and how God wants to speak to us. As long as the interpretation of this or any other parable doesn’t contradict with the rest of the Bible and is inspired then it’s fine, as in the parables we don’t see a specific teaching or commandment in which is explained how we should conduct ourselves, but we rather see a comparisons to something. That means that we can also call it a free space in which God wants to manifest Himself to us and to reveal us His word and will through His Spirit. We mustn’t necessary stick to the specific interpretation of someone of the parables, but we need to attain ourselves to the words of the Bible. I mean that we need to believe to interpretation that is scriptural and confirmed by the word itself. When I say not to stick to a certain interpretation, it doesn’t mean to exclude it, but to remain open for the interpretation that God wants to give us. The only time when we need to exclude certain interpretation is when it is wrong and not biblical. And more confirmations we find in the rest of the word of God, when we receive an explanation of a certain parable, more we can be sure that we received the right explanation and meaning of it. (We also need to consider that not everyone will necessary receive the exact same point of view or explanation of a certain parable. But if it is in the right Spirit and confirmed by the Bible, then we can and we need to agree with it. We need to know that when the inspiration comes from the Holy Spirit then it takes all the possible dimensions and directions. It is directed to the right person, in the right time and with the right message obviously. When it doesn’t come from Him, then some of these indicators is not in its place and it won’t profit the listener in the most of the cases. That’s why we need to consider what the others have to say about a word or a topic from the Bible. If it is inspired, it will contribute to our growth and help us. That’s why there is one body with different parts in it and they help each other. We can not carry on by ourselves alone many times. We also need someone to minister to us. Our personal revelation is essential, but we also need the word received and explained by someone else. There are also certain religious groups that have specific meaning about a certain parable or word and so we as Christians do as well, but we believe that the Holy Spirit can speak in a deeper and more personal way to the believer, always if it doesn’t contradicting to the rest of the word and glorifies God. When the Holy Spirit speaks explains to us a certain parable or a word, He always brings other examples from the rest of the word to us. In this way the Bible explains itself. We only need a wisdom from above, so that we can find the right meaning. The right meaning of the word of God always takes us to His glory. It exalts God.

Let’s notice the verses in Matthew 13:34,35

“All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:

“I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.” “

We can see that this was the way in which He was speaking to people. Through parables. When it says “I will open my mouth in parables”, to me it means that most of the times He was going to speak to them in parables and even today He speaks to people in this way. Without having a clear revelation of God and being born again, His word can be still as parable that we can not comprehend to us. I’m referring to the whole word, or at least to the most of it. It can be still vailed for us. And I’m not saying that a believer understands all the word, but he can at least grasps the meaning of what is needed for Him to understand. Without this revelation from God, the word remains vailed for us and we might be thinking that we understand, but in reality it is not like this. This is what parable is. Something vailed, something hidden, a secret to us. Even one simple word from any part of the Bible can be as a parable to us. But when it is revealed, it becomes a comparison of something to us. Something that we can relate to. Something that can be applied in our daily life, in the situation in which we are living. That’s why it says that the word is alive. It reaches out to the depths of our heart. The Bible was actual 2000 years ago and keeps on being till today.

Let’s take the Christian books for example. They are written by authors, supposedly being Christians and is good for us to read such books from time to time, so that we can have better knowledge on certain aspects of the Christian life and the Bible. It is more or like as listening to a sermon when we go to a church. Obviously we need to be always cautious and examine well who are listening to and which book are we reading. The problem arises when Christians don’t make up time to read their Bible and only stick with the book. It is good to read Christian books, we just mustn’t make our ultimate foundation on them, but on the Bible. Why? Because they are someone else’s revelation on a certain word of God. And this can help, touch us or uplift us for a certain moment or time, but we need something more. I believe that each person needs to have his own revelation from the Bible, obviously given to him by God.

What we get from a book or a preacher is also good for us and can help us, but every person needs to have also his own personal experience and revelation that Jesus is Christ, that Jesus is the Lord of his life.

“When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the son of Man, am?” So they said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” “

Matthew 16:13-17

Here we see one of the greatest revelations that Peter ever had. We see how great it is, by the way it was praised by Jesus. To us it might not seem much of a revelation, as today you ask anyone you find, and he will be able to tell you that Jesus is Christ. And this is because we lost the meaning of it with time. This specific revelation is received by the believer in the moment when God opens his eyes to the truth and he accepts it in his life. The meaning of Christ is actually “ the anointed “, “ the One “. This was the one that the Jews were waiting so long for. The one that was in the most of the prophecies of the old testament. This means that what Peter said that time had really a weight and importance. You couldn’t say that to anyone. It could have been as a blasphemy. In today’s language the meaning of what Peter said would be that Jesus is the one and most important in our life, that we need to follow Him with all our strength, that He is our hope, the ONE that can deliver us, the ONE in Which we find all our solutions and the answers of our questions. Even if we say it sometimes, do we really mean t? Now, this is a revelation and we can say that is the most important and this can be revealed to us only by God. We may hear it by someone, we may see it in someone, but until it is not understood and revealed personally, we will never have it in us. That’s why Jesus also said that flesh and blood has not revealed this to Peter, but His Father who is in heaven. This was the meaning of “Christ” in that time. I’m saying this to tell you how important is the personal revelation from God in our life. This is what we need to desire. And this is with the revelation of His word as well. We need always to feed ourselves with it and look for its real meaning, for God to reveal it to us.

Sometimes even things that are doctrinally right, but said in the wrong way and in the wrong situation without the Spirit of God, then they can be dangerous. “He who is not with me is against Me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.” Luke 11:23

We see that what is very important and fundamental is the word we receive to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. That's the right revelation, the right interpretation we can receive, said in the right place and in the right time. When the revelation comes from God, it takes and it points everything right - the situation, the time in which is said, the person, the place. This is the way how God has chosen to communicate with us – through His Spirit, through His wisdom. That’s why also depending on the person, or the situation God can use a different kind of word and a way of interpretation, but always in the right context. That’s why when you hear a certain preacher, he will use a way to explain himself, different than the others and many times unique. I repeat that must be always in the right meanings and Spirit. It is because he's been given by God, that specific way through His Spirit to reach people. All of this is not a matter of contradiction, as long as it comes from Him. **And whatever comes from Him is always confirmed by the Bible and it doesn’t contradict it.** “Who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter, **but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”** 2 Corinthians 3:6

We also obviously have to compare sometimes if the revelations and the interpretations we receive are in the same Spirit with the great men of God used by Him throughout the history. True men that are acknowledged by the rest of the body of Christ.

Jesus left these parables, He left His word for us and He’s got a particular word and teaching for everyone, even if everyone is different from the other and unique in something. The variety of His word administered by His Spirit can reach each one. The author and the Creator of all the creation with its variety is able to reach each one of us, being different from the other. And even being administered in such a personal way, His word always attains to what He is and goes together in the same Spirit. He wants us to find the meaning, He wants us to have that desire and thirst to find it out. But it must be revealed, we never must rush up and make up our own interpretation. God doesn’t like it, when we are not patient for Him, when we do something on our own without waiting for His instructions. The same happened to king Saul when he didn’t wait for Samuel the prophet. 1 Samuel 13:7-14

“As for some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. So Saul said, “Bring a burnt offering and peace offering here to me.” And he offered the burnt offering. Now it happened, as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, that Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him. And Samuel said, “What have you done?” Saul said, “When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, ‘The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplications to the Lord.’ Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering.” And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”

He made a sacrifice to God, instead of waiting for Samuel to do it, as it was right. It was a good intention, a good desire, but without God’s approval and guidance. Many religions were also born in this way, I believe. When the man took the place of God and started to do the things on his own, without waiting on God and His directions.

We see as well in verse 8 that the people were scattered from Him. That maybe made him a bit worry and he rushed to make a sacrifice, just not to lose his position of authority. He indeed was an authority, but he had to present a much major authority than Him and that was God. Instead of being worry of what the people were going to think about Him or see Him, he had to encourage them to have faith in God and to wait on Him, but somehow he wasn’t representing that. He was more worried of what the others were going to think of him and perhaps until that moment he was representing more himself than God to them. We can see as well in some of the next chapters of 1 Samuel that he made a monument for himself. He was really worried for his personality. This is the attitude he was having. This is the attitude he was having. And that’s why he didn’t have, patience while waiting for Samuel to perform sacrifice to the Lord in the way it was supposed to. We mustn’t commit the same mistake as him and not to have patience for the Lord in our life. Patience, so that he can accomplish His work in our life in the way He wants to. And the most important, patience to receive and to act afterwards as He wants and not in our way, even though done with a “good” purpose.

It can be painful sometimes and sometimes also, we may not receive as much as we expected, but we need to see or act according to what we have or understood from God. If we don’t have as much as we expected, then we mustn’t act as we have more, but rather see the reason why we have so much. That is the problem, when we start to act and do on our own and when we think that we already have something. In this way we can apply the last part of the verse in Luke 8:18 saying: “and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken away from him.” It speaks about somebody assuming to have something. Sometimes there is a silence, we don’t hear or receive as much from God, but then, let it be! Obviously we have to examine ourselves and ask God to give us an answer and give us more, but we mustn’t react as we already have received something. The problem is that sometimes we don’t want to see ourselves weak, or see ourselves with little. The man in general always wants to be in control. That’s the major problem.

So, in this way we need to wait on the revelation of God in our life and have faith as well. Faith is having to do with His word. With hearing it and understanding it.

“So then **faith** comes by hearing, and **hearing** by the **word of God**.” Romans 10:17

As we see here hearing the word of God produces faith in us. When we say “hearing”, we don’t mean just listening, but hearing. That’s having to do with understanding as well. It is the same hearing as the one that Jesus was referring in Matthew 13:9 “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Faith goes hand to hand with the word of God and many times that word inspires us in faith toward Him, it shows us our need, our poverty, it gives us promises. All of this for His glory.

So the word takes us to the faith or either way, the faith shows us His word through His Spirit working in us. We need to desire to hear it and wait on Him, and leave ourselves to be molded by Him. We need to leave ourselves in His hands and in His way.