

PARABLES | The King and the Cross

Jimmy Harris

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Introduction

What is a parable?

A PARABLE is story that is told **to illustrate and illuminate Truth.**

The Parables of Jesus illustrate **eternal, unchanging, immovable realities about the Kingdom of God.**

The Parables of Jesus reveal **God's character, God's ways, and God's heart for people.**

The parables give us clarity on what it looks like to LIVE in the KINGDOM of God.

Today, we're going to study "**What is the kingdom of God?**"

The King

Kingdom is where the King rules and reigns.

Good news: You have a new King, and you have a new Kingdom.

Bad news: You still have a lot that is not under the reign and rule of that Kingdom.

Why is the kingdom significant?

It is the main thing Jesus talked about.

It is what Jesus asked us to pray about.

It is what Jesus taught about for 40 days to his disciples — AFTER resurrecting from the dead!

1. THE KINGDOM IS available RIGHT NOW.

Luke 17:20-21 — The Kingdom is not merely where you go one day when you die. The kingdom is now here and is going on forever as well.

2. THE KINGDOM IS FOR EVERYONE. The door is still open, but not forever.

Everyone's invited but not everyone will come in.

3. THE KINGDOM IS MESSY.

Kingdom gospel teaches us to live in the middle of ambiguity and diversity.

Matthew 13:24-30 — We're not charged with determining who's in who's out. That's God's job. Some weeds will develop ears to hear.

4. THE KINGDOM INVADES EVERYTHING.

We wish to see Jesus

Today we must look to one final parable of Jesus found in John Chapter 12.

Context: Jesus has just come riding on a colt into Jerusalem. The crowds are shouting Hosanna, waving palm branches; the people treat Jesus like he is a conquering King coming into the city.

Shortly these same people will cry out, “Crucify him!” as he is placed on a criminal’s cross. The cross was the earthly coronation of Christ as King — even Pilate wrote on a sign on the cross — the “King of the Jews.” The chief priests asked Pilate to change it to — “He *says* he is the king of the Jews.” Pilate said, “I have written what I have written.”

We find this parable between the triumphal entry of Jesus — and Christ’s death on the cross.

John 12:20-26

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “**Sir, we wish to see Jesus.**” ²² Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ **Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.** ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

The Cross

If you want to see Jesus you have to go through the cross.

“Jesus used the image of a seed to illustrate the great spiritual truth that there can be no glory without suffering, no fruitful life without death, no victory without surrender. Of itself, a seed is weak and useless; but when it is planted, it “dies” and becomes fruitful.”

~ Warren Wiersbe

John the Baptist described it this way — John said, “He must become greater and I must become less.”

I must become less.

Matthew 16:24-26

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”

Why must we see Jesus through the cross?

The symbol of the cross did not mean what it means to us today. It meant a terrible suffering death.

We wear necklaces with crosses on them — which would be the equivalent for us to be wearing an electric chair necklace. If anything, the symbol of early church would be a fish, or for early believer, an empty tomb and not a cross. Now, to us, the cross is a symbol of hope to the whole world. It is a symbol of life because of the resurrection of Jesus. But to the first century Jew the cross was torture. The cross was death.

The cross is confusing.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² **For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified,** a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

How do WE misunderstand the cross?

Sometimes even Christians make the mistake of making the cross merely a footnote on the way to the resurrection. Or they make the cross all about themselves.

- About MY sin
- About MY forgiveness
- About how much God loves ME

Pastor John Piper spoke a haunting warning to those who would distort the meaning of the cross.

“It horribly skews the meaning of the cross when contemporary prophets of self-esteem say that the cross is a witness to my infinite worth. The biblical perspective is that the cross is a witness to the infinite worth of God's glory, and a witness to the immensity of the sin of my pride.”

~ John Piper

And of course, it is true that you are valuable. That God loves you, and he died for you. These are things that Jesus accomplished when he died. But don't miss the cross. Jesus still calls his disciples to take up their cross and follow Him.

“Jesus did not die on the cross, so you don't have to.”

~ Dallas Willard

Jesus suffered on the cross so you and I can follow him there.

The cross is a symbol of total sacrifice. Of laying down your life. He calls us to do the same. With nothing held back. Complete surrender, even to the point of humiliation, suffering, and death.

Galatians 2:20-21

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Romans 6:5-8

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

How am I supposed to “die” to the life I am building?

We all have a little bit different version of the American dream. ...nice house...nice family...nice vacation...retirement...grandkids...I want that. I *hope* that I get to enjoy those things...

But to be honest, I don't want to give up my life. I love my life. I guess there are some parts I could live without, but I don't want to give up my entire life.

Part of losing your life sounds like a relief — and part like a terror. What does Jesus mean?

Is Jesus calling me to purposefully aim for losing everything? No. That is suicide.

*Jesus wants surrender, not suicide.
He wants to set you free by teaching you how to truly live.*

It is going to require courage. *You cannot follow Jesus without courage. Without risking everything.*

To live with courage

"Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die. "He that will lose his life, the same shall save it," is not a piece of mysticism for saints and heroes. It is a piece of everyday advice for sailors or mountaineers. It might be printed in an Alpine guide or a drill book. This paradox is the whole principle of courage; even of quite earthly or quite brutal courage. A man cut off by the sea may save his life if he will risk it on the precipice.

He can only get away from death by continually stepping within an inch of it. A soldier surrounded by enemies, if he is to cut his way out, needs to combine a strong desire for living with a strange carelessness about dying. He must not merely cling to life, for then he will be a coward, and will not escape. He must not merely wait for death, for then he will be a suicide, and will not escape. He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine. No philosopher, I fancy, has ever expressed this romantic riddle with adequate lucidity, and I certainly have not done so. But Christianity has done more: it has marked the limits of it in the awful graves of the suicide and the hero, showing the distance between him who dies for the sake of living and him who dies for the sake of dying."

~ G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

You see, if you are truly going to live you have to be willing to die. Moment by moment. He is not calling all of us to die a martyr's death on a cross. He might. But whatever he is calling us to do it will be wild not tame. He is calling us out of our safe and comfortable lives. He is going to at times ask you to do things that make no sense, or that might cost you everything. Often it is going to be painful and costly to follow Jesus. That's what he said.

**We are called to live as those who do not fear death.
To live with courage.**

We may want to see Jesus without the suffering. Without the cost. The resurrection without the death. The Holy Spirit power without the blood.

John 12:25-26

²⁵Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

Jesus is going to show you how to do this. Jesus is with you. Your job is to stay close to Jesus and to hear his voice. That takes courage.

Speaking of courage.

This past year I have been teaching my son to drive — it's really got me thinking about death. I don't need him to be constantly checking with me to see if he is doing everything right.

What do I want him to do? Listen to my voice. Sometimes I need him to slow down. Sometimes I need him to speed up. Why? I want him to be able to drive without me telling him what to do. Because then he will know how to drive.

Jesus wants to do the same thing with your life. YOUR life! He wants to teach you. He wants to be in the car with you. He isn't judging every move you make; he wants to show you how to live!

But Pastor Jimmy, if I am honest, "I don't want to die!" Nobody wants to suffer. No one wants to die. That is normal.

Remember, Jesus did not want to die either.

In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed, take this cup from me — if there is any other way!

Why everything?

There is no real life in the kingdom unless you come — EMPTY-handed.

Put your hands out in front of you. Put your hands out in a posture of surrender. Now close them.

Think about what you are holding onto. Think about whatever area of your life your life where you need to let go. Where you need God's voice to lead you. Where you need to trust him.

Put it in your hands and feel the weight of it. Now, in an act of surrender, let it go.

The kingdom is like a treasure hidden in a field, that when a man after he finds it he goes and sells everything to buy that field. Why? Because it's worth it. What is the cost of discipleship? Everything.

Watchman Nee wrote the following when he was a prisoner in a communist re-education camp.

“That strong self-assertive will of mine must go to the Cross, and I must give myself over wholly to the Lord. We cannot expect a tailor to make us a coat if we do not give him any cloth, nor a builder to build us a house if we let him have no building material; and in just the same way we cannot expect the Lord to live out His life in us if we do not give Him our lives in which to live. Without reservations, without controversy, we must give ourselves to Him to do as He pleases with us.”

~ Watchman Nee

**I am afraid I can't do this.
You cannot do it.
Christ has done it already.
The door has been opened by his blood.**

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the various aspects of “The Kingdom of God.”
2. Why must we see Jesus through the cross?
3. How do we misunderstand the cross?
4. How am I supposed to “die” to the life I am building?
5. Discuss: “You cannot follow Jesus without courage. Without risking everything.”

NOTES