

July 9, 2017

“The Reason behind the Reasons”

Matthew 13:10-17

FCF: Misunderstanding how we got to where we are

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus is showing us why we respond to Him as we do.

(magnet) We need to wrestle with the implications of His teaching.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

This upcoming trip to Cherokee is my eighth in the last ten years. Among my more vivid memories are conversations I had with Ruby that first year. Ruby was blind and diabetic. She was in bad shape. And so was her house. After a few days of cleaning and painting, she began to open up and ask some questions. One of which was “Do Indians come from the lost tribes of Israel?” That’s an idea that’s been around for some time but soundly dismissed by DNA testing. “Where did you hear this, Ruby?” From Mormon missionaries that had recently visited. Ah.

Why do I bring this up? Simply this. It’s a sad thing when we don’t know how we got to where we are - both geographically and spiritually. And Jesus speaks clearly into this need.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 13:1-23](#) (vv.10-17)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

There are layers of reasons as to why we do the things that we do - a chorus of voices, a variety of inputs, a range of possibilities. One way to think about it is nature and nurture. Nature - genetics, personality, chemistry, nutrition, sleep. That has to factor in. But so too does nurture - family, culture, environment, education, life experiences. All of that needs to be in play. To say nothing of spiritual factors - the affections of the heart and unseen forces at work in the world.

There are layers of reasons as to why we do the things that we do. So much so, it’s often quite difficult to parse them out. That said, difficult that may be, we need to be aware of this. There is a range of possibilities as to why we respond as we do to our circumstances and to certain messages - including the gospel. There is a range of reasons there, even a reason behind the reasons. In the words recorded for us here in Matthew 13, Jesus is showing us why we respond to Him as we do. And we need to wrestle with the implications of His teaching.

What would that mean? As we move progressively through this text, we see that it involves these three things. First, examination. Second, explanation. And, third, exaltation.

I. EXAMINATION

First, examination. By that, I mean the parable Jesus tells. Here’s a quick recap of that.

A) The Question

1. The reception

There was a question hanging in the air. His message and miracles, His words and works, made clear Jesus’ identity and mission. And yet He was received with but either apathy or hostility.

2. The tension

Which created some tension. “How can this be?” It was the question then and still is today.

B) The Answer

1. The parable

Jesus answers this pressing question with a parable, a common technique of the time. This one was drawn from their agrarian culture. And He tells the story of a sower who went out to sow.

2. The lesson

The idea being that the human heart is like soil. And how we respond to the gospel is largely determined by the receptivity of our hearts. That’s the basic gist of the parable of the soils.

We need to hear and heed this examination, to grapple with this analysis.

Application:

For these dynamics are still true today. There is this timeless message of the king and His kingdom. It is truly good news. But there are these varied responses to that one message. Some give it a real hearing and are changed. Others, however, are hostile, shallow, or too distracted.

Jesus is not surprised by this. And He would not have us to be. Again, He is showing us why we respond to Him as we do. And we need to wrestle with the implications of His teaching.

II. EXPLANATION

Which brings us to the explanation (**READ Matthew 13:10-15**). The disciples ask about the parables. Jesus gives them the answer. And much more - the reason behind the reasons.

A) Our Receptivity

1. Explanation

Why does He speak in parables? Part of it has to do with our receptivity. Meaning that the more truth you have, the more you can learn. You have to have the basics in order to go any deeper.

2. Dismissed

That’s part of what’s going on here in vv.12-13 when Jesus says that those who have will be given more and that those who don’t will lose what they have. That’s part of it. But not all of it.

B) Our Responsibility

For Jesus is not just speaking here of receptivity but of responsibility, of a culpability and a judicial hardening. Which is made very clear in this quotation from Isaiah in vv.14-15.

1. Hardened hearts

These are hardened hearts. Not just a failure to hear and to see but a refusal to hear and to see.

2. A hardening

And as a consequence and punishment for that hardened response comes then a hardening. Why does Jesus speak in parables? The answer is clear but sobering. To reveal to some. And to conceal from others. Why? To give them what they want. To let them go their own way.

C) God’s Sovereignty

Part of the reason for our response to the gospel has to do with our responsibility. The culpability and accountability is right there. But so too is this - God's sovereignty. Why does Jesus speak in parables? (READ Matthew 13:11) This sets the tone for everything that follows.

1. Fundamental responses

We saw this last week. Fundamentally, there are two kinds of soil - fruitful and unfruitful.

2. Fundamental reason

We see that with the parable. Behind those fundamental responses is this fundamental reason. And we see this with Jesus' explanation. To some it has been given. And to some it has not.

We need to hear this. And hold together divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

Illustration:

Such things can often be caught better than taught. Think of C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, when Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy arrive in Narnia for the first time, they discover four thrones at Cair Paravel, empty and waiting for them. Their choices, which they freely made, resulted in the fulfillment of ancient prophecy.

In the next story, *Prince Caspian*, when Jill tries to explain to Aslan that they had called on him, he replies that if he had not called them, they would not have called him. The initiative is all his. (READ quote) "You would not have called to me unless I had been calling to you."

Application:

Can I just say this in terms of application? May we not try to be wiser than God! The biblical writers repeatedly recognized this compatibility between divine sovereignty and human responsibility (READ Genesis 50:19-20; Acts 2:22-23). Clearly, ours is not to try and resolve this tension by downplaying one side in favor of the other. Ours is to hold both equally high.

Jesus is showing us why we respond to Him as we do. We need to wrestle with this.

III. EXALTATION

Which brings us to the last point, that of exaltation (READ Matthew 13:16-17). After the examination and explanation, we are brought to a call to praise and wonder, gratitude and trust.

A) The Fact We That We See and Hear

Jesus makes clear two reasons for this, the first being the fact that we see and hear.

1. The contrast

Verse 16 marks such a contrast in this text. The flow of thought is arrested and redirected.

2. The cause

And the cause is that the follower of Christ is blessed. It has been given to us to see and hear. But His giving is the only thing that sets us apart. It has nothing to do with our deserving, merit, or grit. And it has everything to do with His determining, mercy, and grace. It has been given.

B) What It Is We See and Hear

That's the first thing - the fact we see and hear. Then there's what it is we see and hear.

1. Something long awaited

This was something long awaited. Ours is such a privileged position. So many through the years longed to know how God's promised salvation would come about and to see it as it did.

2. The secrets of the kingdom

([READ Matthew 13:11a](#)) The mystery of the kingdom, and how it would come. It does not break in all at once in triumph but dawns slowly, steadily, and even secretly. The mystery of the kingdom and the majesty of the King. Blessed are our eyes and our ears that we see and hear.

The examination and explanation are vital. But they must bring us to exaltation.

Application:

And out of that should flow these two things - certainty and humility. First, certainty - a boldness rooted down deep within that drives us to prayer and evangelism. When we pray, we are communing with the almighty God who has revealed Himself to us as our Father. So we go boldly. When we share our faith, we do so with an assurance that our frailties and failures cannot undo His purposes but rather He will work through them to bring about His purposes. You see, God's sovereignty does not negate prayer and evangelism. It enables them. It enables them.

So, first, certainty. And, second, humility. Boldness without boasting. We have, see, and hear only because it has been given. Ours can only then be a response of glad grateful wonder.

Jesus is showing us why we respond to Him as we do. We need to wrestle with this.

CONCLUSION:

With last week's celebration of Independence Day, much was said of the unique place of the United States, our history, and the privilege of citizenship. I looked up the USCIS "A Guide to Naturalization". In that document, there is a list of the benefits of citizenship ([READ list](#)): voting, bringing family members to the United States, obtaining citizenship for children born abroad, traveling with a U.S. passport, becoming eligible for Federal jobs, becoming an elected official, and showing your patriotism. All those are ours as citizens of this nation whether we appreciate how that came about or not. You may not know much about key events and figures. You may have no appreciation for the history. But you still have those rights as a citizen.

But when you do know and appreciate those things, you have so much more. When that heritage and history settles in, it takes you deeper. And it enriches your experience as a citizen.

It's something like that here. Jesus is showing us why we respond to Him as we do - the reason behind the reasons, the backdrop to the parable of the soils, how it is we are saved. And as that settles in, it takes us deeper. It comes down to the Sower Himself. As we said last week, Jesus goes beyond sowing. He is the One who sends the sun and rain and brings the growth.

([READ Romans 11:33-36](#)) Jesus is showing us why we respond to Him as we do. We need to wrestle with the implications of His teaching. And let them take us deeper.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus is showing us why we respond to Him as we do.

(magnet) We need to wrestle with the implications of His teaching.