

Parable of the Scribe

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[0 : 0 0] We've been looking through some of the parables in the Gospels, and we've been specifically looking at some of the parables of the kingdom. So these are parables where Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like this.

And parables, they're just short stories taken from normal experiences of a first century person, often agricultural. Here we have a story about a scribe, and God uses them, God uses stories.

Much of the Bible is written in narrative. These stories really pack a punch, and they're meant to sit with, to sit with for long periods of time, to think about, to wrestle with.

Sometimes the commentators tell us a parable can be one point, or it can be, it can have two points or three points. Sometimes the parables are allegories, where every single aspect of the parable is a symbol, a kind of thoroughgoing symbolism.

That's an allegory. I think that's what we have here in this parable today. But one of the interesting things is that if you open up Matthew 13, at the beginning there's the parable of the sower, one of the most famous parables.

[1 : 0 5] It's quite long parable. And then after the parable of the sower, there are seven more parables where Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like. So there's this sevenfold movement mimicking the days of creation in Matthew 13.

Seven parables, seven parables of the kingdom, and what Jesus is doing is saying, these seven parables are teaching you that the kingdom that has come is like creation, but it's new creation.

Sevenfold creation, a sevenfold parable, to say that what I've brought to you is new creation. New creation has come into the world right here where I'm standing. And so we have looked at four of the seven kingdom parables.

Today we're going to look at the last one, the seven, which is the fifth. And then we'll go backwards. We're not doing them quite in order the next couple of weeks. I think this is probably the most ignored parable in all the Bible.

So one sentence is something that probably you might not even remember this parable if you've read through the gospels. It's hard to understand. A scribe is a master of the house who brings out his treasures old and new.

[2 : 0 9] That's the parable. It's a story, very short. It's a bit of an enigma, but it's got depth. It's got riches. It's the words of Jesus, right? So let me just ask you, will you today allow yourself to sit with this parable and be changed?

Be changed by it. That's what it's here for. So just take a moment maybe right now and decide, I want the words of Christ here to flow over me this morning and to leave.

For me not to leave this place the same as I was. That's the power of the parables. So let's wrestle with it. Let's think about it. Let's dig into it. Let's think about it deeply and wrestle with it like Jacob did with the angel of the Lord.

In the Old Testament, just two quick things. One, very simple, very obvious. What is this about? It's elusive. Let's try to understand it first. The main idea, the big point.

And then right after that, in every single one of the images that's given, there I think is a fourfold way that Jesus shows us what it means to be a disciple.

[3 : 12] So this is a parable, I think, ultimately about discipleship, about what it means to follow Jesus. So let's think about it together. First, what does it mean? It's elusive. The meaning is not obvious when you first listen to this, like some of the other parables come out a little more clearly than this one.

So let's try to think about it. The first thing Jesus says in verse 51 is, have you understood the things I've been telling you to the disciples? Now if you are a reader of the Gospels, you can confidently say that when they say yes, we have understood all that you've said.

You later know the answer is actually no, they have not understood all that Jesus has said. So they've understood some of it, but not all of it. And Neil read for us at the beginning of Matthew 13, toward the beginning, that Jesus says, the parables I'm about to give you are meant to do two things.

They're meant to reveal things about the kingdom, but also conceal things about the kingdom. And that was true for the disciples. Some of the stuff was revealed to them, but we know for sure someone was still concealed.

They couldn't quite see it. And so there's a sense in which Jesus says, I am telling parables to conceal. And you say, why would you do that? And one of the reasons I think is very simple, that Jesus is trying to teach us in this seven fold movement, kingdom parables, that the kingdom, as we've said the past couple weeks, is so rich, it's so vibrant.

[4 : 37] There's so much about the kingdom of God that we do not understand. Still, in that we won't understand until we see the kingdom of God. There's a concealment in this movement.

But the more precise reason for the concealment, it's back in verse 11 and verse 13, he says, hearing they do not hear, seeing they cannot see.

Who is he talking about there? He is talking about the religious leaders of the day, the Pharisees, the scribes, the Sadducees, particularly the scribes, who hearing the word of the law better than anybody, more than anybody, yet they can't hear it.

Seeing the things of God in the Bible better than anybody else, the scribes, the scholars, the theologians, these were the professional theologians of the day, yet they can't see it, they can't hear it. That's the concealment.

And so concealment for Jesus was there. He gave the parables to say, to help the scribes, the Pharisees, the religious leaders, the teachers, us realize what we don't know.

[5 : 42] To actually say, when you don't understand, it's meant to be there to lead you to conviction, to say there is so much about the things of God I don't know, I don't see, I don't yet understand, and to bring you to a place of humility.

And that had not happened in the lives of the scribes. Now that context is so important to understand this parable, because immediately you see when he gives the parable from verse 51, 52 I should say, he says, therefore every scribe.

So the parable is about a scribe. And in the context he's saying the scribes are the ones who think they see, but don't see, who think they hear, but cannot hear the word about the kingdom.

And so now Jesus turns and says, now the real scribes. So this parable is about what it means to be a true scribe of the kingdom of God.

There is such a thing as a real scribe, a true scribe in God's kingdom. And he's saying, but it's not the scribes that are around us listening right now.

[6 : 44] He's separating from them. And he's saying, what is it? What is it that makes somebody a true scribe in the kingdom of God? That's the question here, and there's a very, very important piece of grammar that you have to see, I think, to get the meaning.

The ESV here has given us a highly interpretive translation, one that doesn't give you exactly what Jesus said, but interprets it for you.

And I think it's really important to get underneath that to actually understand the parable. And so in verse 52, when Jesus says, in verse 52, therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven, Jesus uses the word for every scribe that is a mafaites of the kingdom of heaven.

That's the word disciple in Greek. And so the very literal translation is, therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom.

And the ESV has translated it, interpreted it for us. But it says actually, every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom is like this.

[7 : 53] Now that is so important. That language has become, it's passive. It's something that you receive. You've become a kingdom. You've become a disciple of the kingdom.

Not that you've been instructed for it. You've been trained for it. No, you've become of the kingdom. Now why, why is that grammar, that bit of grammar so critical?

Okay, first century describes the professional theologians, the teachers of the day. Why? It's important for us to remember that most people in the first century in Jesus' context could not read.

So literacy was low and nobody had a book. So nobody listening to Jesus owned a book. So if you wanted to read a book and you were one of the few people that could read, you had to go to one of the public libraries, typically the synagogues to read.

Very few people, you didn't even have books. You had scrolls and codexes that were stitched together and things like that. One of the interesting things, I don't know if you've read Umberto Eco, any of his books, very famous, The Name of the Rose.

[9 : 02] It's a murder mystery set in 1327 in Italy and wild times in the 14th century in Italy. In that book. And in this murder mystery, there's this scene where this man goes to a library and he asks the librarian, can I read one of your books?

And this is 1300 years after this event. And the librarian says, why do you want to read one of the books? And he says, well, because I'd like to know what's in it. I'd like to read the content.

You know, I want to read it. And the librarian says, no chance. Well, why can't I read it? And he says, that is not a good enough reason. You just want to read it to know what's in it?

He says, no, no, no. If we let every single person who comes into this library read the books that just wants to read the books, the books would have disintegrated by now. You see, now that's 1300 years later.

And that gives you a picture that you couldn't just go read a book. And so what happened was the scribes are really just the people that could read. And they would become a scribe for that reason.

[10 : 05] And you would never go read the Bible, you would come to the synagogue and hear the scribe tell you the Bible, read it for you. These are the people who have the text.

And so they know, and they've made their life in knowing things, right? They've sought power through their pride because nobody else knows like the scribes know.

They know the law backwards and forwards. And in knowing that, the old, the law, they're the only ones that can read it. They've rejected Christ very publicly and said, this is not the Son of God.

They've rejected him. And so in Matthew 23, Jesus says, the scribes sit on the seat of Moses and they teach the law of God, but they do not practice what they preach. So they know the law, they see the law, they hear the law, they've got the Old Testament, but they don't see, they don't hear because the kingdom of God has come down from heaven and is standing right in front of them.

And they can't see it. They reject it. So Jesus then turns and says, okay, well, what does it mean then to be a real scribe, a true scribe in the kingdom of God? And that's when he says, a true scribe is one who has become a disciple.

[11 : 13] That's the language. And so you see what he does in the context. It's hard for us because we're not first century people, but boy, he was flipping things upside down because how do you become a real scribe in the first century?

You know how to read and you're smart and you take power and prestige through that fact, through the ability to read books and to be able to teach other people. And he says, no, that's not the real scribe.

The real scribe is one who knows that the only way to be a citizen, a disciple, is to become one. In other words, D.I. Carson puts it like this.

He says, the emphasis in the first part of this verse rest not only idea that the scribe has been instructed about the kingdom of and therefore understands more than other people, but that he has become a disciple of the kingdom and therefore his allegiance has been transformed.

Now Jesus is saying, look, a real scribe is a person not who knows a lot about God, but who has bowed the knee before the Lord and said, this is my master, who's given their allegiance away and said, this really is God.

[12 : 19] This is the Son of God. This is the King of the world. Now let's bring that home a little bit and we'll move to the characteristics we see here. The first simple application, and it's very simple, is just to say Jesus is trying to tell us that anyone who says, I'm a follower of Jesus does so truly by becoming a follower through receiving, not acting, not grasping.

In other words, he's saying it's not by research that you come into the kingdom of God. It's not by instruction that you come into the kingdom of God. It's not by grasping and reaching for knowledge that you come into the kingdom.

It's by a posture of humility and reception. You enter in by bowing the knee, by turning your allegiance to the master, that it's first not about how much you know about God.

One of the ways we could describe it, you might ask yourself this question today. If you're a person who really likes to know things about God, to know things about the Bible, to really dig in and find the depths of things, it's a very good posture.

It's a very good thing. But one of the questions you can ask yourself today is, do I seek understanding for the sake of my understanding? Or do I really have in my life a humble faith seeking understanding?

[13 : 40] That's the way the theologians of the Middle Ages put it. The posture of the Christian, the posture of the true scribe, faith, allegiance, bowing the knee, seeking understanding, and not the other way around.

That's the question I think before us today. We simply learn here, you don't become a disciple by learning, by study, by doctrinal accumulation.

It's very possible, it's very possible for some of us that we have been in church our entire lives and have accumulated a lot of doctrine and have steadily stacked on top, knowledge after knowledge after knowledge, and understand better than maybe the average person, the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament and all sorts of things like that.

But we may not yet be a true scribe of the kingdom because we've made understanding the object of our faith instead of the object of our faith leading to understanding.

And Jesus is just inviting you to examine your heart for a moment and say, is the object of my faith my own knowledge? Am I a scribe of the old way or am I a true scribe of the kingdom?

[14 : 49] That's the question. Let me take it one more direction. It could be possible today, on this Sunday, some folks here, I have no doubt in July, like we said last week, that are visiting from all sorts of backgrounds, a variety of religious backgrounds.

I know that I've heard in our city, I've talked to people in our city, I've talked to people that have been around St. Columbus and the community who have said, I like being around, I only wish I could believe.

And I just don't have the same kind of faith that you have. And I want to believe, but if I could understand more, if I could get enough research, if I could find the right piece of evidence, then finally I would be able to come to faith.

In other words, they want to say, if I understand, then I can believe. And Jesus is doing something here, the Bible does something that flips that upside down and says there comes a point in your life where you have to realize that faith is the beginning of all knowledge.

And it's faith that then seeks understanding. This is the Jordan Peterson phenomenon. Jordan Peterson, very famous, most of you probably are aware of him.

[16 : 00] He's been asked so many times, do you believe in Jesus Christ? He was recently asked that again by Alex O'Connor, who recently visited our city. And Alex O'Connor asked him, do you believe, this is what he said, do you believe that if we brought a Panasonic camera to the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea that Christ was buried in, that a man on Sunday morning would walk out of the grave and that that camera would have captured that image of a human being who was once dead walking out of the grave?

And Peterson, this is just a few weeks ago, Peterson says, I believe, yes, the camera would have captured a man walk out of the grave. And then Alex O'Connor says, so why do you keep telling people that you don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

And this is what Peterson says, because I just don't yet know exactly what it means. And he's got it exactly backwards. And there comes a point in life where you have to realize that in order to see the world rightly, it has to begin with faith, begin with things that you can't yet prove and then say my faith then can determine my understanding.

I love the way C.S. Lewis puts it, he says, I quoted this two weeks ago, but we'll do it again. I believe in Christ in the same way I believe in the sunshine.

Not because I walk around staring at it, but because by the sun I see everything else clearly in my life. Faith, faith is the beginning of knowledge.

[17 : 28] And the true scribe is one who bows the knee in allegiance to Christ and then says, now I want to know. Now I want to know more of the world, more of the things of God, because I've got the sun at my back.

I've got the wind in my sails. The true scribe of the kingdom. Secondly, finally, briefly. Then Jesus in each of the images gives us four characteristics then of what this looks like, how this plays out in our lives as followers of Christ.

So let me give them to you very quickly. Each of the images here gives you something. First, he says, therefore, every scribe. Very simple.

Say, Jesus is teaching us here that every single disciple, if you are a Christian today, a follower of Jesus, you are called to be a scribe of the kingdom of God.

Being a scribe is not an elite position. It's not merely the teachers of the church or something like that. Jesus says here that every single disciple has become a scribe of the kingdom of God.

[18 : 36] In other words, let me say it like this. Jesus won't let anybody in here come today and say, I'm a Christian, but learning more and seeking more knowledge about God in the Bible is just not my thing.

He's saying, no, once you've bowed the knee and given your allegiance over to Christ, you've been called to know the things of the Lord. Not just to know the things of the Lord, because in knowing the things of the Lord, you know the Lord more and more.

You conform to the image of the sun more and more. You just think about who he's talking to in this setting. Who's there? It's a bunch of fishermen, tax collectors, public centers.

And he's saying, in all of you, you lowly fishermen in the first century who are not elite people, you are the scribes of the kingdom of God. It's a call for every single one of us.

Secondly, afford. The second image we see here is then he says, okay, if you're a disciple, you're a scribe. And if you're a scribe, you're also, he calls you a master of the house.

[19 : 38] Okay, this is not master of the house in the lay-miss variety. Master of the house, you know. Not the despot, innkeeper in lay-miss.

That's what I think of when I see this phrase. Most of you apparently don't. But not that at all. What is a master? What is he saying?

If you're a disciple, if you're a follower of Jesus, you're a scribe, you're a master of the house. What does that mean? It's an allegory. The house, as it often is in scripture, is actually everything that God has said about himself in his word up to this point in history.

And now what we have, the Old and New Testaments. That's what the house is here. And so he says, if you are a disciple, if you've bowed the knee to the true Son of God, Christ, you've become a scribe of the kingdom.

And if you're a scribe of the kingdom, you ought to seek to be a master of the house. And the house here is the mini-roomed mansion and estate of all that God has revealed about himself.

[20 : 36] And so he's saying, in other words, you're an owner, you're a master. Not that you master the things of God, but that you're a possessor. You can see, you can know, you can hear it.

You can read the parables and understand. And so then God's word becomes for you like a mini-roomed mansion where you run around and open all the doors and find all the treasures. And so he's talking about a warm-hearted, let's be practical.

He's saying that every single disciple, every single disciple becomes a disciple not by knowing, but by bowing. And then once you've done that, you become a scribe.

And what is a scribe? Well, a scribe is a master of the house. And what is a master of the house? He's saying that every single Christian is a theologian, that you're called to be a theologian. You're called to seek the things of God, to know more, to be hungry, to want to run around the house and open all the doors and find the treasures, find the riches that are there for you, to know what is true, what is good, and what is beautiful according to what God has said.

That's the call here in this image of the master of the house. I like Kevin Van Hoeser. He describes the work of theology, the work of Christians, all of us together doing theology.

[21 : 49] This is what he says. It is the passionate work in community that seeks to know and love the God of the gospel and to demonstrate it in obedient speech and practice.

You hear how practical that definition is? He's saying, true theologians are people who are being so changed by the power of the gospel that they want to know the things of God to become passionate, obedient lovers of God and people.

That's how he defines it. Third, then he gives us the third image, this allegory. He describes you're a master of the house and then he says right after that, and you bring out the treasure from the storeroom.

We could add what is new and what is old. You've been trained for the kingdom of heaven. You're like a master of a house who brings out his treasure, what is new and what is old. The commentators will talk here about there's something implicit and that's that there is a treasure room here.

It's what the Bible calls the storeroom. The storeroom in Greek is the word thesaurus from where we get our word thesaurus, a storeroom of words and ideas. In the Bible, the storeroom, the treasure room is typically a metaphor for the heart.

[23 : 01] The next implicit image we see is that a true scribe, a disciple of the kingdom goes to the storeroom which is the heart and finds treasure there, new and old.

The idea is that the Bible is bedded down into the heart here and that you can, when you're out and about in your life, you can go into your heart and pull out the treasures, old and new, old testament, new testament and pull them out and show them to other people.

The biggest emphasis here though is old and new. Down in the treasure room of your heart, there's both old and new. What is he doing? He's talking about the scribes that are all around him versus what it means to be a true scribe.

The scribes all around Jesus were saying, it's all about the old, away with the new. Jesus you've come and you've said you're the Son of God, you're the Messiah, but we know the law, we know the old, we know the old testament, the old covenant.

Out with the new, we keep the old. Jesus says no, a true scribe loves the old and the new and sees how they fit together. That means what Jesus is saying here is that one of the ways that you know you're a growing, ensuring follower of Christ's scribe, faith seeking understanding is that you're growing more and more in your love for the Bible and your love for the interconnectionality, the intertextuality as the scholars put it, between the old and new testament.

[24 : 29] That you love to see how what God revealed in the old is fulfilled in the new and how what's unveiled in the new shows you what was concealed in the old.

He's saying, the scribe of the kingdom, the one who longs for the word of the Lord, loves to dig the treasures out of the old and new and see how they connect to one another. Jesus in Luke chapter 24 says, he says, the Torah, the law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms were all about me.

That's what he says just before he ascends into heaven. He tells the disciples, as you leave, I want you to know that you need to go back to the old testament and seek the treasures, old and the light of the new.

Our real scribe longs to do that, a follower of Christ. Are you growing in your love for the scriptures is one of the obvious questions that comes up here, but another thing to say here, and we'll talk about this really explicitly in September, but one of the distinctive commitments of St. Columbus in the past and especially going forward is that we want to be a church who finds Christ in all of scripture, who sees the gospel in every single chapter and every single passage all throughout the scriptures.

And here we're being told that's exactly right, that that's what a scribe of the kingdom does. Now, fourthly, finally, and we'll close. The last thing that he tells us here, the emphasis is not only do we go into the storeroom of the heart and find the old and new testament hidden there, but then he just noticed that he says, and the scribe of the kingdom brings it out and shows it to people.

[26 : 02] And so just to say, a true follower of Jesus, a scribe of the kingdom, hiding the word of the Lord old and new in all of its connections about Christ in the heart cannot help but bring that out for other people.

It's a public faith. The real scribe is seeking to help people, exactly the opposite of the scribes of the day, who Jesus said, are closing the door of the kingdom to the people all around them they're meant to teach.

And so the question today, disciple of Christ, if are you a follower of Jesus, do you have in your life a little bit of Christian maturity more than somebody else? Of course you do.

You're at a stage of the journey of the Christian walk a little bit further along than the next person. Who is it in this community? Who is it outside of this community that you are seeking to open the treasures old and new with?

And he says, that's the scribe of the kingdom, you can't help but bring it out and show it to somebody else and say, can we read scripture together? Can we explore the Bible together? It's the path of discipleship.

[27 : 07] It's disciples making disciples is ultimately what Jesus is talking about here. Now let's close with this. How do we become more like this?

Scribes of the kingdom, allegiance to Christ, treasuring the word of the Lord in the heart, bowing in the native king Jesus, treasuring the things of God because we treasure God more than anything.

How do we become like this? And we'll just close with this. In Matthew 23, Jesus said, woe to you, you scribes. Woe to the scribes, you hypocrites, for you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces.

You neither enter it yourselves, you don't allow those who you're meant to teach to go in. Woe to you, you scribes and you Pharisees, you hypocrites. You teach the things of God, but you don't practice them.

And when the Messiah comes, you reject him. Woe to you. Now, we know that the scribes were some of the primary people that sought to crucify Jesus.

[28 : 09] And there's a real temptation, I think, when you get to Matthew 23 and you get to a parable like this to say, oh, those scribes, those are the bad guys.

They killed him, they murdered him. They were hypocrites, they were the awful teachers. They closed the kingdom to so many people. They said to everybody, love God and your neighbor, and they didn't do either.

And there's a real temptation to come and say, woe to them, I want to be a real scribe. I want to put away pride. I want to be a real follower like Jesus talks about here.

And the temptation would be to miss this. How do you become a disciple and a true scribe of the kingdom? And the answer is not by looking at the scribes and saying, oh, the bad guys.

And instead, it's saying, oh boy, that is exactly who I am. It's to say that scribiness. Can I say that word? There's a scribiness down in the bottom of my soul.

[29 : 06] And boy, I know that I am motivated by pride and by power. And if I was the only person in the first century that can read, you better believe. I would have used that to my advantage.

There's a scribiness. There's a pride. There's a power hunger deep down in the bottom of my heart. And it's that that nailed him to the cross. It's my scribiness. It was my pride, my power hunger, my seeking to be exactly as the scribes were that put him there, that nailed him there on the cross.

See, it's the more you enter into the reality of your sin, that you come out bowing the knee in humility and allegiance, and you become more and more a scribe of the kingdom.

Full faith, seeking, understanding. Try this this week. Last word. Try this this week. Something to try. Remember that in the first century and before, and all the way up to even a couple centuries ago, overwhelmingly most people could not read.

And so when you come to church 200 years ago and beyond that, very likely for all of us, we would have only heard the word of the Lord, never read the word of the Lord.

[30 : 14] And when you read the Bible, one of the things you might notice is the Bible doesn't that often say, read God's word. What does it say? It says, hear the word of the Lord.

This week when you, with the gift, oh boy, do we have a gift we can read. Most people can read in our modern Edinburgh. You've got a Bible. Oh boy.

When you come this week to read it, make a slight transition from saying, I'm coming to read God's word today where I'm active to saying I'm coming today to hear the word of the Lord, where God is active and I am passive.

That's the posture of a true scribe of the kingdom. Let us pray. Father, we ask that you would give us deep humility that we would not rest in our knowing, but in what Christ has done for us.

And so I just pray that for us as a church today that we would long to be true scribes, that we would long to know about you because we want to know you and only because we have first been known.

[31 : 13] So I pray that for us, Lord, please give us that heart, that posture, and we pray it in Christ's name. Amen.