

Parables: Making the Word Flesh

Matthew 13:34 tells us that “All these things spoke Jesus in parables unto the multitudes; and without a parable spoke he nothing unto them.”

The Greek word for parable is *parabole*, which literally means “a placing beside; a comparison.” *Smith’s Bible Dictionary* says “a parable is therefore literally a placing beside, a comparison, a similitude, an illustration of one subject by another.” *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* says, “It is the lesson that is of value; the hearer must catch the analogy if he is to be instructed.”

From the dawn of time, storytellers have gained the ear of generation after generation, and have used their parables, stories, and fables to impart truths. In my missionary journeys, I’ve found that storytellers are highly respected in Islamic societies, and some missionaries in rural areas strive to be known as storytellers in the villages. Likewise, my service in Africa has shown that storytelling is highly effective in preaching. People do not think in concepts. They think in pictures. I’ll prove it to you.

The purple cow ate the green cheese on the moon.

Did you see a picture in your mind of the purple cow, or did the above sentence remain plain text in your mind? You saw the purple cow, the green cheese, and the moon, right?

In the same way, we do well when we leave our hearers with pictures and illustrations that will help them remember gospel truths. Besides the fact that it makes the sermon more memorable, it also keeps the message from being boring. Boring preaching may be one of the greatest enemies of evangelism today. I would that more preachers would work harder to serve the church and the lost by teaching and preaching with more parables and stories.

One of the things one of my pastors, respected author and speaker Michael Cavanaugh, taught me about preaching is that we need to “make the Word flesh.” He is referencing, of course, the verse in John 1:14 that says, “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.”

Jesus is the Word, but we did not fully understand the ways, the mind, or the heart of God until Jesus became flesh and walked among us. Then we could see the Word.

In the same way, we need to use parables, stories, and illustrations to help our hearers see the Word.