

A parable is a very short story that has a moral or message. In the Bible, Jesus Christ often speaks in ***parables***. Why parables?

One answer is that stories are powerful. They have the power to move listeners at a deep level.

However, the meaning of a story is often ambiguous. Sometimes storytellers don't want their message to be obvious.

Recall Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour"? She had good reasons for releasing her message as a hard-to-decipher story. If she had written an in-your-face essay like Judy Brady did nearly a century later, that might have ended her writing career—or worse.

Jesus Christ was actually in a similar predicament. He had enemies. Yet he wanted to preach a message that would reach people whose hearts were open to the truth. Consequently, he resorted to speaking in parables.

This is brilliantly displayed in the Gospel of Mark, part of the New Testament of the Christian Bible. In Chapter 4, Jesus is preaching to a crowd from a boat near the shore of the lake. (This setup provided voice amplification without modern technology.) He is telling a story about a farmer sowing seeds. He is describing how this farmer will reap a good crop if the seeds fall into good soil, but not if they fall into poor, rocky soil. He ends by saying, **"If you have ears to hear, please hear what I'm saying!"**

Of course, some listeners gave up and went home. They had no idea what this itinerant preacher was trying to say. They probably complained that he spoke in "riddles," and they weren't interested enough to ask for an explanation.

However, some of his listeners stuck around and asked Jesus about the meaning of his “parable of the sower.” They learned two important truths:

1. They are the good soil. The people who went home were not. The “story” Jesus told was therefore happening in real life as Jesus was speaking. Jesus was “fishing” from the boat for those with open hearts.
2. Speaking in parables provides a good result for everyone:
 - a. People with open hearts receive Truth.
 - b. Jesus prolongs his own life when his enemies don’t understand him.
 - c. Those who go home ignorant have not hardened their hearts by rejecting the truth. How could they be guilty of rejecting the truth when they didn’t even understand it?

One’s interpretation of a parable therefore says more about the interpreter than about the parable. Keep this in mind as you ponder J.M. Witherow’s tale!