

MODERN PARABLES 5

You might be thinking, *What are we doing here? Why do we have movie posters in the church and popcorn in the auditorium? Why are we doing a sermon series on movies as modern parables?*

Jesus regularly taught using parables, presenting stories rather than direct exposition of Scripture, to convey spiritual truth. One day, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?” Jesus replied, “Because the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them” (Matthew 13:10-11). Jesus used parables so that the hearts of those rejecting God would not be hardened further.

A parable reveals truth to him who desires truth; it conceals truth from him who does not wish to see the truth. Those who are open and sensitive to spiritual truth will be given spiritual insights through parables. Parables, then, present God’s message in a way that requires imaginative discernment. Through a parable, the spiritually and imaginatively discerning will understand some aspect of truth clearly, but the spiritually unimaginative and imperceptive will merely hear a story.

About such spiritually unimaginative and imperceptive people, Jesus says, “In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them’” (Matthew 13:14-15).

About those who are spiritually imaginative and perceptive, Jesus says, “But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear” (Matthew 13:16). There are spiritual insights offered through these modern parables—movies. The goal of this sermon series is to help sharpen your spiritual imagination and to make you wise to the spiritual truths embedded in entertainment. You might think it irreverent to bring secular cinema into the church, but never forget, we are Christ’s ambassadors to the culture around us, and the Apostle Paul encourages us to become “all things to all people so that by all means possible, we might win some” (1 Corinthians 9:22).

There is no doubt that our world values entertainment. It craves it. And there is no doubt that the entertainment industry takes advantage of spiritually lazy people. Let us be a people who sharpen our spiritual imagination and discernment when experiencing modern parables, not those who check out mentally and spiritually. For the mentally and spiritually checked-out can be influenced away from godly truth—though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

We, however, by engaging our sanctified imaginations, will be able to discern clearly some aspect of truth in the movie, which will allow us to connect that movie—that modern parable—with spiritual truth and then invite people to have a conversation about God-stuff.

With your discipleship partner, catch up about the week, pray for and with one another, and consider the following issues.

Are you watching closely?

Houdini, Copperfield, Reza, Angier, Borden—great illusionists who employed slight of hand, trickery, and secrecy to conjure within a willing audience a sense of wonder, mystification, and belief in magic. Of course, all such illusionists perform their tricks using deception. Not so the Christian. We present no tricks, use no deception, and are called to lay all our cards on the table for all to see. What we offer—the gospel—may seem too good to be true, but it is true. We build our lives on solid foundation of Christ and His gospel and call others to do likewise.

The tragedy of a life not built on Christ

Colossians 2:8—“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow philosophy or empty deception, which depend on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.”

Matthew 7:24-27—“He who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But he who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

-What are some of the basic principles of this world upon which non-believers base their lives?

-How does having Christ as our life's foundation provide stability against worldly troubles?

-What other benefits do you enjoy now that your life is founded on Christ?

The power of plain truth

2 Corinthians 4:2—“Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.”

-The plain Christian truth—*God is the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good, eternal, necessary, eternal, and triune Creator of the universe. God is not merely personal, He is tri-personal. God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Spirit are the three divine persons who are the one divine being named Yahweh. God created us in His image, but we rebelled against Him and sinned. Our sin separates us from God, but God desires relationship with us so God the Father sent God the Son to live as a sinless human and die on the cross for our sins. But death could not hold Jesus, and He rose from the dead to save all who believe in and follow Him. God the Spirit indwells all who believe in and follow Jesus. This truth is found in the Bible and is Good News: Jesus is the crucified and resurrected Christ of God and King of the Universe. We can be His disciples and enjoy His presence into eternal life*—requires much explanation, but no secrecy or deception.

-Have you ever seen “Christians” use a bait-and-switch approach or deceptive tactics? Elaborate. —

-How does consistency of doctrine and lifestyle better advance the gospel than secrecy?