

Dear Friends,

Whenever a natural disaster such as a tornado or hurricane occurs, you will inevitably hear a well-meaning believer claim that God is judging us by this event. Implied is the idea that we could repent and prevent the disaster. Scripture's description of the Lord's chastening on His people does not match this idea. Wise and loving chastening communicates clearly to the erring child what he did wrong and why the chastening is necessary. We would readily condemn a parent who arbitrarily chastened his child with no explanation regarding the wrong committed and the right way that would have brought blessings, not chastening. Absent that "Education," we have no basis to attribute an event to divine judgment or chastening. Scripture repeatedly reminds us that every event that occurs is not the Lord's doing. (1 John 2:16)

When Jesus taught the disciples, He taught them in clear easy-to-understand style. Consider the Sermon on the Mount as an example. (Matthew 5-7) When He taught deliberate unbelievers, people who consciously chose to reject His teaching in favor of their own ideas, He taught in parables. Those people often sensed His disapproval and His warning of judgment, but they likely understood little beyond this basic message. By their corrupting "His house," making it a den of thieves instead of a place of prayer, and by their rejecting Him and His message, they brought this "Judicial and righteous judgment" against themselves.

Which path do we choose today? Jesus and His way? Or popular opinion and our own ways? I suggest that this dramatic distinction between mysterious parables and simple godly teaching repeats itself frequently in our world today. Examine your own heart. Do you study the Bible to learn about Jesus and His ways so you can live them daily? Or do you occasionally read it to find a way to rationalize your own opinions? In one case, the Bible will appear to you as a whole book of mysterious teachings, focused mostly on judgment. In the other case, the Bible will become a book of rich teachings about Jesus and His ways. Oh yes, you'll still encounter difficult passages, but you will find those enriching treasures that precisely fit your heart's need at the moment and that encourage you in your faith way of living your life by Jesus and His teachings. Choose carefully. The results are sobering.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

“Kingdom Parables”

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. (Matthew 13:10-11 KJV 1900)

Jesus' personal preaching or teaching to the disciples differs significantly from His public teaching. As an example, compare the first eleven verses of Matthew 13 with the first two verses of Matthew 5. When Jesus taught the disciples, He spoke simply and clearly. He communicated distinctly how they should think and live as His followers. When He taught the multitudes, often consisting of mostly religious elite who regarded Him with intense opposition, He taught in parables. In Matthew 13, He explained the difference. The ignorance of the religious establishment was deliberate. Jesus simply didn't match their

preconceived ideas about Messiah, so they dismissed and rejected Him. Many of the parables are oriented toward a righteous judgment against their unbelief and sin.

In the study passage, the disciples questioned Jesus. Why did He speak to these people so differently than He spoke to them? His explanation is not at all arbitrary. There was good reason which He explained to them. They had pre-judged Him and rejected Him. His teaching communicated to them that He well knew their deliberate rejection of Him and warned them of the judgment their sinful rejection brought against them. When these people objected, "*We will not have this man to reign over us,*" (Luke 19:14) they removed themselves from Jesus' "Kingdom," and He righteously spoke the judgment parables against them.

Many pastors and Bible teachers tend to make all the parables spin on whether the symbolic subjects of the parables are "Really born again or not." I suggest that this view of the parables misses Jesus' major emphasis and purpose in them. He repeatedly describes the theme of His parables as related to "The kingdom of God" or "The kingdom of heaven," not to whether the subjects of the parable are members of the family of God or not. In His teaching Nicodemus, Jesus highlights the distinction between the family of God and the "Kingdom" of God. A person enters the family of God by birth, by being "born again," born from above. Only after being born again can a person either "see" or "enter" the Lord's "Kingdom." (John 3:3, 5) Seeing and/or entering the Lord's kingdom is a life function of those who were previously born again, brought into the family of God by new birth. In John 3:8, Jesus taught Nicodemus that this new birth process is the only way a person can become part of the family of God, "**...so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.**" God doesn't save people by multiple ways, only by one way, the exclusive work of the Holy Spirit, wholly completing this new birth process alone. Jesus didn't teach that all born again people would see and enter His kingdom, but rather that neither task is possible apart from previous new birth, being made a member of the family of God by new birth. Simply stated in Jesus' teaching, new birth is a "Family" matter, making someone a member of His family for time and for eternity. Either seeing or entering His "Kingdom" is a living activity for people who have been so born into His family and involves faith and lifestyle, living with full acknowledgement of Him alone as Lord and King of their lives.

Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. The ignorance of unbelievers was a matter of God's righteous judgment because of their prior deliberate rejection of Him. God didn't arbitrarily "Reveal" His truth to some and just as arbitrarily conceal it from others. There was a moral reason for the blindness of those to whom He spoke the parables. In this explanation to the disciples, Jesus also explained another point that we often ignore and contradict. He did not intend to teach the disciples about their "Kingdom" lives and service by the parables, so we should not study the parables for spiritual insights and guidance for our discipleship.

Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. (Isaiah 28:9-13)

The question often arises. Do all born again people believe and obey the gospel? Isaiah answers this question. The Lord's teaching of His truth to His people is focused on mature children, not spiritual infants. God's truth is not equivalent to our personal opinion. It is precise and specific, "*precept upon precept, line upon line.*" When believers abandon Scripture alone as their source of truth and direction for their lives, personal imagination claims priority. It is not uncommon for these folks, when their personal opinions are challenged and no Scripture can be offered for that opinion, "Well, maybe later they...." Scripture is not a book of "Maybe," relying on hypothetical events not recorded anywhere in Scripture. Faithful Bible students who truly follow "Scripture alone" for their faith will require "Book, chapter, and verse" to support an idea. They do not rely on their imagination of what may or may not have occurred that Scripture never mentions. Paul warned Timothy of a class of people as....

Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. (2 Timothy 3:7)

After I retired and sold my business, I taught business classes part-time at a nearby Christian university for several years. On one occasion a student approached me for personal help. He was not doing well, so I gladly agreed to meet with him. As we talked and I asked a variety of questions, I discovered his problem. He was not reading the text! He was trying to "Bluff" his way through a third-year accounting class without reading the technical material in the text. Pastors occasionally encounter believers in their churches who try this tactic in their faith. They listen and try to pick up the clues of the faith from conversations they hear, but they never invest the time or effort to study God's "Textbook." Like my student, they are confused by the information of the gospel. When I realized my student was trying to "Bluff" me in our interview, I stopped him immediately, challenged his failure to study the material and complete his assignments, and assured him; if he made a reasonable effort to do the work, I would go out of my way to help him, but I would not give him a free pass. In His parable teaching, Jesus reminds us that our discipleship requires a serious investment. He made us His child freely and with unreserved love and grace. However, He will not give us a free pass to the blessings of obedience. "**Strive to enter in at the strait gate....**" (Luke 13:24) No child of God ever "Coasted" into the blessings of the gospel. The Lord's blessings require that we "**Strive**" to enter into those "Kingdom" blessings. The word translated "Strive" in this verse is the Greek root for our English word "Agonize," It means to struggle, to labor fervently for the prize. No child of grace ever "Coasted" into gospel "Kingdom" blessings. Jesus identified the only path for His children to access those blessings. "Strive," labor intensely and vigorously, and in Biblical God-centric faith. Spend lots of time with your "Textbook." And rely on no other source for your information.

We should never miss the point that Jesus made in our study passage. Believing children of God receive the Lord's aid in coming to understand His truths. Unbelieving folks do not receive this aid. In fact, whatever the Lord does make known appears in parables, not in simple clear teachings. When we demonstrate in faith that we love and respect Him and truly long to believe what He teaches us and to follow Him and His ways, He is graciously accommodating. When we turn away from His teachings in favor of our own opinions and ways, He leaves us to our own devices. He never so leaves us without reason. Jesus explained that He taught in parables because of the spiritual attitude of the people. We should never think the Lord, in His providential oversight of our lives, does anything capriciously or without a righteous response to our own conduct. The idea which occasionally surfaces that the Lord manipulates His children

for no reason contradicts Biblical teaching and should be rejected. The premise of chastening rests on the foundation of a wise caring parent who applies correction to his children. Causeless manipulation of a child is never equated to parental chastening.

In a similar vein, a believer may occasionally think something bad happened to them because of the Lord's judgment. Again, Biblical teaching on the Lord's chastening rejects this idea. A caring parent only applies chastening in the setting of the child fully understanding what he did that was wrong and what he should have done. "*Time and chance happens....*" (Ecclesiastes 9:11) Solomon reminds us; we live in a broken world full of broken people. However, this brokenness in no way excuses believers thinking that God is also broken. He is not! When "time and chance" happens, and it does, it is not divinely caused, and the Lord has not promised to explain this world's brokenness to His children. When bad things happen and you have no idea why, I can assure you, based on Biblical teaching regarding the Lord's chastening (Hebrews 12:5-11), that He never chastens His children and leaves them ignorant and bewildered. Chastening requires teaching, explanation of its righteous basis. By its very nature, chastening is informative and educational. The Lord lovingly and wisely takes us through chastening in a manner that teaches us what we are doing wrong, and why, along with teaching us the right path that honors Him. Believers who attribute every bad thing that happens in their lives to the Lord's judgment err in this matter. Is it possible for a believer to discern the difference between chastening and bad things? Yes indeed. As noted above, when the Lord chastens, He teaches and points us back to the right way. When something bad happens and you sense no teaching or direction from the Lord in what happened, do not attribute the bad things to the Lord. Chalk it up to this broken world. In this setting, the Lord didn't cause it or send it upon you. Rather, He will be present to support and help you endure and get past the trial. He is your loving Father, not your adversary. (1 John 2:16)

Elder Joe Holder