

Idealistic vs. Literal Truth

If you really want to understand the message of Jesus, you need to understand why He mostly taught using similes, metaphors and parables. When His disciples asked why he mostly taught in parables, Jesus answered, *“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.”* (Matt. 10:17). I believe that even Jesus’ closest followers were not privy to “all” the secrets of the Kingdom, only what they actually needed to know.

Why doesn’t God want us to know all of those “secrets?” Because we are not ready for them. Our earthly existence can be compared to an exercise we engage in to develop special skills that can only be learned in an imperfect, deeply flawed setting where nothing is easy, and where we are not given all the answers ahead of time.

In order to exercise and develop our love muscles the weights we lift need to be heavy, not light.

So, like it or not, the trials and tribulations we face in life are there for our benefit. Jesus taught that the goal of entering the Kingdom can only be achieved by making sacrifices here on Earth. There are no short cuts. The way that leads to eternal (age-abiding) life is difficult and challenging. The wide, easy way leads only to destruction (failure).

We need to understand that rewards and punishments are not absolute. Perfection in Heaven and punishments in Hell are idealisms, not actual, or literal truths. Jesus taught about these eventualities using similes, metaphors and parables. His teachings suggest that entering Heaven and Hell are realized by each of us in varying degrees, beginning now. The Kingdom is already among us. Rewards and punishments are not all-or-nothing propositions, and they are not given to us only in the future. Instead, they are meted out in an equitable and proportionate fashion on a daily basis.

Words and phrases that Jesus used, like Heaven, Sheol, Hades, and the Kingdom, were not meant to be understood as absolutes. Instead, they are idealizations that represent opposite ends of a continuum. There is no sharp dividing line between those who are “saved” and those who are not, or between those who enter the Kingdom and those who are turned away. Heaven and Hell are not literal places.

Instead, they should be regarded as idealized descriptions of opposing states of existence. These states of mind exist both in the here and now and after death.

I should not be worrying about whether I go to Heaven or Hell when I die. Instead, I should concern myself about how much progress I am currently making. In a manner of speaking, I am living in an Earthly version of Heaven and Hell right now. Hopefully, I am progressing in the right direction.