

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

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What Is a Parable?

- 1) A parable [παραβολή (*parabole*)] is NOT a distinct, identifiable literary genre with intrinsic defining attributes.
 - A) The intrinsic genre of one parable [παραβολή (*parabole*)] can be very different from the intrinsic genre of the next one. In fact, a parable [παραβολή (*parabole*)] can involve communication through some means other than language.
- 2) Typically, a parable [παραβολή (*parabole*)] is any form of communication that employs language in some way other than employing it to make simple, direct, straightforward prose statements.
 - A) A parable [παραβολή (*parabole*)] can be any of the following:
 - a) Analogy
 - b) Allegory
 - c) Fable
 - d) Metaphor (brief or extended)
 - e) Proverb
 - f) Statement that employs symbolism
 - g) Any other creative and imaginative use of language that departs from communicating directly and straightforwardly in simple prose
 - h) An event that anticipates (by picturing) some other meaningful event
 - i) An established cultural or religious reality that creates an analogue to some other meaningful reality

Why Jesus Taught In Parables

- 1) The question that was posed to Jesus by his disciples and Jesus’s response to it:
 - A) In these passages:
 - a) *Matthew* 13:10–17
 - b) *Mark* 4:10–12
 - c) *Luke* 8:9–10
 - B) The right way to understand exactly what his disciples were asking in these passages:
 - a) “Jesus, why are you making it hard for the people to understand? Why don’t you make your teaching more accessible? If you would just speak to them plainly, would they not then understand you?”

- C) The right way to understand Jesus's response to his disciples' query in these passages:
- a) "The spiritual condition of this people has rendered them unable to understand what I am teaching anyway. By teaching them in parables, I am not preventing them from understanding anything that they are not already prevented from understanding by their own spiritual hardness."
- 2) Why (i.e., to what end) did Jesus use parables when he taught?
- A) We never have a direct answer to this question from Jesus himself.
 - B) However, from various things that Jesus taught, we can infer an answer to it. Namely, Jesus's various reasons for teaching in parables were these:
 - a) The use of a parable can make a truth clearer and more readily understandable or more impactful.
 1. An analogy (or other figurative device)—when fully spelled out—has great pedagogical and/or rhetorical value. Many of Jesus's parables are "unfinished" analogies (or other figurative devices). Once the analogy (or other device) is fully grasped, it has great pedagogical and/or rhetorical value insofar as it serves to make Jesus's point clearer and/or more impactful.
 - b) A parable can be presented in such a way that it "hides" the truth that Jesus wants to convey, thereby requiring that the interested person work hard to grasp the truth that Jesus intended to convey. If a person has to work hard to lay hold of the truth that is being conveyed, he is more invested in that truth. And if he is more invested in it, then he is more inclined to remember it and "own" it.
 1. If Jesus partially hid or cloaked the truth that he was teaching, then only those whose heart was eager to understand his teaching would put in the effort to seek out what he meant. Only those who were eager to understand Jesus's teaching would seek to discover the meaning of the parable.
 - A. A truth that is eagerly sought for and hard-won is a truth that one will be more inclined to remember and make one's own.
 - c) The use of a parable can shield an unbeliever from the harmful effects of being exposed to a truth that he is unwilling to embrace.
 1. If Jesus partially hid or cloaked the truth that he was teaching, then any adverse effects that confronting that truth might have on the person whose heart is hardened against it would be minimized.
 - A. The hardening effects that an exposure to truth would have on someone who is unwilling to receive it would be muted or lessened if that truth were hidden within a parable.

Important Background to Understanding Parables

In order to understand the point that Jesus is conveying through the parables he delivers, it is crucial that one have an understanding of the following equivalences:

- To be qualified **to find acceptance by God** is equivalent to ...
 - Being qualified **to receive an inheritance in the Kingdom of God** is equivalent to ...
 - Being qualified **to be counted a member of the people of God** is equivalent to ...
 - Being qualified **to receive the ultimate blessing** is equivalent to ...
 - Being qualified **as belonging to Jesus, the Messiah** is equivalent to ...
 - Being qualified **to receive eternal Life** is equivalent to ...
 - Being qualified **to receive God's mercy** is equivalent to ...
 - Being qualified **to be rescued from God's condemnation (wrath) and destruction** is equivalent to ...
 - Being qualified **to have one's sins forgiven** is equivalent to ...
 - Being qualified **to be considered holy (i.e., sanctified by God)** is equivalent to ...
 - Being qualified **to be counted as one who knows God** is equivalent to ...
 - Being qualified **to be counted as one who loves God** is equivalent to ...
 - Being qualified **to be counted as one who fears (respects / honors) God** is equivalent to ...
 - Being qualified **to be considered righteous,**
- *Etc.*

Jesus's Teaching Through Parables: The Themes and the Issues

Theme #1 > One important theme in Jesus's parables is the issue of his own person. Through his parables, Jesus made several different claims about himself—about his unique authority, status, role, identity, and mission:

- (A) Jesus taught that he was the touchstone of who would receive God's ultimate blessing, *aionic* Life. How a person is related to Jesus determines whether he will be saved or not saved. Jesus taught that only the person who "belongs" to Jesus in a certain sense is a person who belongs to the people of God and, therefore, will receive eternal Life: