

The Parables of Our Lord - Introduction

“The Parable of The Good Samaritan”

Sunday July 24th, 2022

Let's start with some questions:

- What is a “parable”?
- Is it the same as an allegory or metaphor?
- What does the word “parable” mean?
- Why did Jesus use them so frequently?
- Did Jesus invent parables?
- How do we properly interpret them?
- Do parables come with any interpretive challenges?
- Are there many ways to interpret what Jesus was saying in them?

We'll be examining the Parable Of The Unjust Judge (also known as the Parable of The Persistent Widow). But let's set something straight before we do so: Jesus was the greatest teacher in human history (though He was so much MORE than that). We know that was the case because Jesus was the actual embodiment of Truth itself (being that He was fully God). Therefore the content of His teaching was perfect, since He was Divine. And even stylistically, Jesus was an amazing teacher. The way He spoke, the way He taught, etc.

We read in the Gospel accounts of Matthew and John in the 7th chapter(s), that the crowds were astonished by the way He taught. Even the Pharisees commented that, “*No one ever spoke like this man!*” (John 7:46). They even said of Him that, “*...He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes [and religious leaders].*” (John 7:29). The word used here in the Greek for “authority” (“*exousia*”) can also be translated as “power”. That is to say that

the teachings of Jesus were not trivial or casual or shallow. Rather, His teaching was profoundly significant. He spoke with authority and power. Every word He spoke had substance.

Another memorable aspect of the teachings of our Lord (besides His style of speaking) was His use of parables (though Jesus didn't "invent" parables). The parables of Jesus were designed to illustrate NEW revelation about the Kingdom of God that wasn't yet understood.

A couple other interesting points to note:

- In the New Testament, parables are only found in the Gospels (the teachings of our Lord).
- They are rare in the Old Testament (Nathan's parable to King David of "The Rich Man And The Poor Man's Lamb" for example)

The word "parable" means:

- "Comparison"
- Comes from the Greek word where we get the word "parabola"
- "Para" is the prefix which means something that is alongside something else.
- The root of the word from where we get the word "parable" means "to throw".

Jesus used parables this way:

- He's teaching some important idea and in order for Him to clarify His meaning, He "throws" the parable alongside of it to illustrate and explain the truth that He is giving.
- So a "Parable" means "to throw something alongside something else".

But there's actually another important thing to consider about the parables Jesus used:

- *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear"* (Mark 4:9). He's talking about people that have an ability to "hear" to UNDERSTAND and to grab ahold of the truth that Jesus is speaking. He understood that some of the people who were present DID understand and there were people present who DIDN'T understand. It never really penetrated their hearts. And so Jesus was making a distinction between those who "hear" and those who "don't hear".

Also of note, In Mark 4, verses 10-12, He says *"[10] And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. [11] And he said to them, 'To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, [12] so that 'they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven'."*

So to those that have ears "to hear", Jesus uses the parable to bring revelation of His deeper truths. But to those who DON'T have ears "to hear", Jesus uses the parable as a way of hiding the truth. So parables weren't simply used to make the deeper truths of what our Lord was teaching more CLEAR to everyone; they were also used to HIDE what He taught to those "outside" that were not given the understanding of the Kingdom of God. Wow, that sure doesn't sound like the popular modern image of "Hippy Jesus" who's just floating around and smiling and begging on His hands and knees for people to come to Him.

So: Jesus not only came to help people understand the Kingdom of God (for those who have ears to hear) but He also came as a judgment against those who have NOT been given an understanding and who don't care and don't want to hear the truth. Remember, particularly in the New Testament, we are described as people BY NATURE (in our fallen, corrupt, natural state) who don't want to hear God's word and who don't have a built-in desire to WANT to follow

Him. And because of that, whenever God speaks His word, which is redeeming for some, it is an expression of judgment against others.

Let's look at the 6th chapter of Isaiah. We recall how Isaiah had seen just a glimpse of the holiness of God. And how he heard the seraphim singing the song which began "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts...". And you'll remember that he then pronounced a curse upon himself and declared that he was a man of unclean lips dwelling among a people of unclean lips. And how God then sends an angel to him to cauterize his lips and purify him with a coal from the altar of God.

And so as Isaiah is standing there trembling in terror before the holiness of God, he hears a voice from heaven asking "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?". And Isaiah responds with "Here I am! Send me!". And what does God say? "[9] *Go, and say to this people:*

'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'

[10] Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

Isaiah is being sent to SHUT the eyes of the people. To CLOSE the ears of the people. That the hearts of the people might be HARDENED; LEST they repent and be healed. So Isaiah was sent by God to be His instrument of judgment. A judgment where God says [PARAPHRASING], "The people don't want to hear my word? Fine. Then I'm going to give them over to exactly what they want. They don't want to look at me? Fine. I'm going to close their eyes. They don't want to hear my word? Good. I'm going to shut their ears. Lest they repent and be healed."

Isaiah responds by asking, “Lord: How long will I have to go and preach to a people who don’t want to hear it?”. And what does God say? He says in verse 11, “*Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, [12] and the Lord removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. [13] And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled.*” *The holy seed is its stump.*” God saves a remnant of His people for Himself, who WILL hear and be given ears to hear. Who will be given understanding, to embrace His truth. In order that they might repent and believe and be healed (or converted).

So now we see that Jesus came as a Savior to some but as a judgment to others. He came for a rising and a falling of many. Many would rise with Christ and many would fall before Him. He even said of Himself that He came not to bring peace but a sword. To set children against parents, and husband against wife, and so on.

A number of different themes in the parables but the chief theme in the parables that Jesus used was the “Gospel of The Kingdom of God”. Now what is meant by the word “Gospel”? The word was used with regard to the proclamations of John the Baptist AND Jesus. And in both cases, the term “Gospel” refers to the “Good News” of the Kingdom of God. And later in the epistles of the New Testament, for example the letters written by Paul and Peter, will refer to the “Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” such that the actual content of that Gospel is the very Person and Work of Jesus. And over and over throughout His parables, Jesus will use the words “...and the Kingdom of God (of the Kingdom of heaven) is likewise” or “like unto this”. And He would throw alongside that announcement of truth, a parable, so that we might come to understand the “mystery” of the Kingdom of God.

A very important note about the interpretation of the parables:

- The early church fathers used the “allegorical method of interpretation” which was such that they would try to find some hidden meaning in every single element within a parable.
- John Bunyan’s “The Pilgrim’s Progress” is allegorical (each character that Christian meets along the way is understood to be representative of a type of person that we might encounter in our own lives). That’s how the church fathers attempted to interpret the parables. However, that method of interpreting parables has become almost universally discredited. In other words, since that time we interpret the meaning or significance of a given parable as one, central, decisive point or theme. They are NOT to be handled as allegory. They are not to be interpreted allegorically where we attempt to find some hidden significance in every item noted within the parable.

Let’s look at the parable of “The Good Samaritan” in Luke 10:25-37:

- Probably the most famous of our Lord’s parables
- The term “Good Samaritan” is frequently used by society as an idiom for good works
- Most States in the U.S. have laws known as “Good Samaritan” laws
- There are lots of hospitals across the country called, “Good Samaritan Hospital”

“[25] And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” [26] He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” [27] And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” [28] And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” [29] But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”. [30] Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. [31] Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. [32] So likewise a Levite, when he came to

the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33] But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. [34] He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. [35] And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' [36] Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" [37] He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Jesus is questioned by a lawyer who challenged Jesus about the Law (as a way to trap Him rather than being genuinely interested in His wisdom). It's obvious that our Lord knew that the Pharisees, etc prided themselves on what they viewed as their flawless adherence to the Law of God and (by virtue of following the Law) would then have cause to merit their entrance into God's Kingdom.

But the Law exposes our sin (Paul later said that the Law is our tutor, leading us to Christ). So when we view the Law correctly, we **should** be driven to despair and therefore see our needfulness of a Savior. But the lawyer wasn't finished and he asked our Lord, "**Who** is my neighbor?". For the Pharisees, the idea of "neighbor" was narrowly defined as a fellow righteous Jew and they differentiated themselves as "righteous men" from the "people of the land", those who they viewed as lesser than themselves, the lower classes. That includes those who were seen as "outside" of the nation of Israel because they would have been seen as outside the "neighborhood" of God. The most reviled and hated of those "outside" would have been the Samaritans. The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans because there was a tremendous amount of historic enmity between them.

Jesus then answers this lawyer's question by giving this parable. He speaks of a man traveling to Jericho from Jerusalem. The road between would have been a prime location for thugs and thieves and robbers to lie in wait for lone travelers to wander by to attack. Jesus describes a man attacked by thieves who robbed and beat him badly and left him for dead.

A certain priest, seeing the poor guy, crossed the road and passed by on the other side. Why? There were laws among priests & Levites having to do with touching a dead body. So rather than take a chance, he walked to the other side of the road and kept walking. In like manner, a Levite (a priest of the Jews) came upon this man and he too passed by the poor guy on the road. These two men were set apart for the work of the Ministry. And yet they gave no care to this man on the road.

But now we read of a man that Jesus identifies as a Samaritan. The parable says that when he saw the man lying there **he had compassion**. The Samaritan would end up doing everything he could to render aid to this poor soul. The Samaritan bandages his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. And after having done that, picked him up and put him ON HIS ANIMAL. He gave up HIS seat so that this half-dead guy would have a place to ride. And then we're told that the Samaritan took the man to an Inn. He buys him a room, makes sure he gets everything he needs, food, etc. and even stays the night with the guy making sure he's ok. The next day before he left, he even gave the Innkeeper money and said to take care of the guy and if he should require more money for additional care or food or nights at the Inn, then he would be back to take care of the bill.

Jesus then asks the lawyer, "[36] *Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?*". And of course he responds "The one who showed him mercy". He didn't just feel a sense of compassion - he actually SHOWED him mercy. Remember

the whole point of this parable was to answer the question, “Who is my neighbor?”. And it’s clear from the parable that there are no limitations on the Kingdom of God.

There’s no such thing as a universal brotherhood with the world. But there is a universal neighborhood. Which is to say that every human being created in the image of God is our neighbor. And that means that we are called to love every human being on the face of the earth as much as I love myself. Pretty convicting stuff.

And with that, we will close our introduction to the parables of our Lord.