

## The Parables of Our Lord - Introduction

### “The Parable of The Unjust Judge (or The Parable of The Persistent Widow)”

Wednesday July 20th, 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.

Now let’s examine “The Parable of The Unjust Judge” also known as “The Parable of The Persistent Widow” which we will find in Luke 18, *“[1] And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. [2] He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. [3] And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ [4] For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, [5] yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.”[6] And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. [7] And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? [8] I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”*. Thankfully we have the explanation given at the front of the parable where Jesus gives us the central theme: Jesus spoke a parable to them in order that they “...ought always to pray and not lose heart”.

This parable is about persistent prayer in the face of:

- Trouble

- Difficulty
- Misery
- Calamity
- Sickness
- Injustice

Jesus tells the story of **two** people:

1. **A widow** who is totally alone and who has no one to stand up for her; no one to defend her against whoever it is that is coming against her in some matter of justice. God has a special place in His heart for widows. They were extremely vulnerable in Jesus' day and we're told in James 1:27, that pure and undefiled religion is the care of widows and orphans. So He decides to tell a parable using such a person whose only hope is to try and find justice by way of the court.
2. **A judge**. Jesus says in verse 2, "*In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man*". This judge didn't care about God and he didn't care about people. Combining the lack of regard he had for those two things, how much do you suppose he cared about justice? Here's this judge whose job it is to provide justice for this helpless widow who had no one to plead for her, no one to represent her, no one to defend her. Jesus describes how this widow comes to this judge asking for justice and how the judge refuses to intervene. But Jesus notes that the judge refused "FOR A WHILE".

In verses 4 & 5 we read that "*...afterward [this judge] said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, [5] yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming*". Rather than out of a sense of morality, the judge eventually relented. She had finally worn him out.

Jesus gives us this parable to demonstrate that we ought to be persistent in our prayers and to not faint. Usually we find a contrast in the parables between how fallen people respond and behave and how God responds and behaves. Usually that contrast shows up in the phrase, "How much more...". And we know our God is the embodiment of perfection. He can do nothing wrong. He cannot make a mistake.

And Jesus uses that principle here. In verse 7 he says, "*And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?*". Now isn't it amazing to know that God vindicates and avenges His people? The God we serve, the God we belong to metes out justice on behalf of His people. And knowing the end of the book helps tremendously in providing us with comfort and confidence in our walk with the Lord. He WILL return. He WILL gather His church to Himself. He WILL come again to judge the earth.

We see this played out in the Exodus. And THAT Exodus was an amazing foreshadow of the greater Exodus that will come with the New Covenant, where God delivers His people from sin.

God's vindication of His people is a wonderful promise from our Lord and it should give us tremendous comfort to know that sometimes though it might seem that He doesn't hear our prayers or that He doesn't seem to care about how we're treated maliciously, or how we suffer, that we remember that we don't serve a God who's senile or deaf and can't hear us and who doesn't care. It is true that God often doesn't answer our prayers according to our timeline or as expeditiously as we would like. But be encouraged: for reasons that are wise and perfect, God sometimes delays answering our prayers. Yet we are to continue to pray with persistence and to avoid losing faith.

Jesus ends the parable in verse 8, *“I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”*. Although it's a question that the Lord asks, He clearly knew the answer. He knows that when He returns that He will find faith on the earth and that He will find faith in His church. And it's definitely NOT because we are so faithFUL! Rather it is because HE is faithful to keep those of us whom the Father has given Him. So be encouraged not to lean on your own power, but rather to lean on the Holy Spirit's power to maintain your faith and your persistence in prayer and to KEEP you from fainting in the midst of your troubles.