

Introduction to the Stories That Jesus Told

Introduction

In *The Parables He Told*, by David Redding he begins, "God gave Jesus some Good News. What could He put it in to keep it safe and fresh? What would be the most practical cup to serve it in at any time of place? Homer had an Iliad, Paul used letters, Aesop fables, and Shakespeare plays, to put their thinking in. Christ's choice was in perfect taste. He picked up and polished to perfection an old container the prophets had left behind: the parable."

1. Where did this form of teaching come from?

No other New Testament writer uses it but Old Testament writers often did:

Isaiah 5:1-7 presents Israel as a vine and the God as the vine dresser. Verse 7 explains, "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His delightful plant."

In 2 Samuel 12:1-7 a parable is used to trap King David. (Later)

So, Jesus didn't invent this teaching form, he just perfected it.

There were sonatas before Beethoven, but he rules the form.

There were parables before Jesus, but He turns water into wine.

2. What makes a good story teller?

He must know the material -- Jesus knows everything, is master of all.

He must be creative and imaginative -- Jesus made everything.

He must know his audience -- Jesus made them, knows them by name.

What is a Parable?

It is the middle of the night, you're asleep, your house is on fire. Someone wakes you up crying, "Fire, come on, follow me, I'll get you out." It is no time to think, who is this person, why are they in my house? (Or you might put it this way, "You don't worry about bad breath when someone is giving you mouth-to-mouth.")

Parables don't explain everything in detail, they give you just enough to save your life, to lead you out of trouble or save you from death.

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A. What a parable is not.

1. A Parable is not an Allegory

An allegory is story full of comparison in which every detail stands for something or means something.

Galatians 4:24-31 begins, *"This is allegorically speaking: for these women are two covenants, one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are in slavery with her children, but the Jerusalem above is free; ..."*

2. A Parable is not a Fable

A fable is a fantastic tale, a fantasy with things like talking trees, and flying horses. One reason we trust the Bible as reliable is that, unlike other "holy books," it does not include fantasy.

3. A Parable is not a Proverb

A proverb is a statement with a lesson, but no story line. Like a lynx cat it has a body, but no tail.

Jesus used proverbs as in Luke 4:23, *And He said to them, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernium, do here in your home town as well.'"*

B. What a parable is.

1. A Parable is a Parallel

A comparison or (lit. Greek = throwing along side of things to help us understand). By comparing we gain insight.

2. A Parable is a Window

Redding again, *"What is a parable? A fable is a fantastic tale with trees and foxes speaking. A parable is a statement with no tale at all. An allegory is a story with each part robot-like, standing for something. But a parable is a story true to this house of earth, but with a window open to the sky."*

C. S. Lewis, *"There can ultimately be no logic to prove the spiritual; there can only be prophets opening windows in the hope that blinded eye might see, looking out on the mountains of God."*

Lewis illustrated this concept in one of *The Chronicles of Narnia, The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. The children are so fascinated by a painting on the wall that they are literally drawn to fall into it and are ushered into a world of fantasy that teaches them deep physical and spiritual truth.

3. A Parable is a Simple Story

They are primarily very simple and if they are at all complex Jesus tends to explain them.

They have many labels: "A story with a moral lesson, " "An earthly story with heavenly meaning," (Dow)"Using earthly illustrations to teach kingdom truths."

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4. A Parable is a Picture

Painted with words--colorful, emotional, expressive, creative

Like a great movie--favorite story, familiar setting, common subject, with a twist, a flash of light that make us understand.

Why Did Jesus Use Parables?

David Redding said, *"They illustrate the Gospel, make it popular, not academic. These parables do not belong to the theologians, but to the poets, and most of all, to the people."*

A. It was a familiar teaching tool.

In ancient Rabbinical writing the Jewish teachers referred to a favorite teaching tool that they considered very effective. They called it "Stories-with-a point." *They were parables.*

Jesus was a master teacher, the ultimate Rabbi, and He used parables for about one third of his teaching. They must work.

Ancient orators used this concept to remember the main points of speeches and often talked for many hours.

B. It is an effective teaching tool.

Stories cause a high degree of retention. In fact, preachers and teachers have to be careful when they use stories to illustrate truth because often the story is remembered but the truth isn't.

The mind works in pictures so presenting word pictures is a great way to teach. One teaching book says, "A story grips the slave of your imagination and demands attention. It attracts, fascinates, and teaches.

Modern memory courses are based on this same principle. (Do exercise if we have time.)

How Did Jesus Use Parables?

"The purpose of a parable is not to entertain or inform but to change a person's attitude: the way he sees things, and particularly, the way he sees himself." -- Edmund Flood (Catholic Bible Scholar)

How does that work? Read 2 Samuel 12:1-7a

See how it worked? Nathan tells the parable setting David up, then says, "You are the man." Did it work? Yes, David saw himself as he was and repented.

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A. To apply spiritual truth to everyday living

1. Jesus told true-to-life stories that could be understood.

He used readily recognizable people, objects, and situation to deliver powerful spiritual truth. He used farmers, servants, housewives, merchants, bureaucrats, families, etc.

In his book *Parables of Jesus*, George Buttrick writes,

"A slender volume would hold them; but from that volume, without access to any other source, we would know the aspects and attitudes of His Palestine. We read the parables and the poor homes of the land are before our eyes. We see the baking of bread and patching of garments; we see even the emergency of a friend borrowing a loaf at midnight for his sudden guests. Rich homes are drawn with a pencil equally shrewd--barns bursting with fatness, laborers not daring to eat until the master has broken his fast, and the unseemly scramble for the chief seats at the feasts of the mighty. "The glaring contrasts of our earth are drawn in dramatic line--"chosen" Jews and despised Samaritans, sumptuous Dives and abject Lazarus, householders and thieves, compassionate parenthood and the rascally steward who feathered his nest against the well-merited retribution. "The whole gamut of human life is sounded--farmers at the plow, fishermen at their nets, a wedding procession moving through the dark with dancing torches, builders rearing towers, kings marching off to wars, and a widow pleading her cause in the persistence of despair before a heartless judge. "Over all there is the mystic glamour of Palestine. Behold a sower tramping weary furrows. Soon the fields will be "white unto harvest." On the high hillside flocks are grazing beneath the watchful eye of the shepherd. In the distance there is a vineyard on a favored slope, or a deep defile where brigands lurk. That dry watercourse is a raging torrent when the storm breaks in the mountains, and on its golden summer sand a foolish man once build a house. "The motley array of characters and this vivid scenery are wrought into unforgettable stories."

2. Jesus used a common and effective format.

He often started with, "What do you think" and ended with, "Now what do you say," demanding a verdict.

B. To drive truth past hearing to doing.

1. Everything He does leads to an action response.

Arouse curiosity, lead unsuspectingly along, confronted with the force of truth, shut them up with irrefutable argument.

2. Redding says, *"the Son did not blast earth with an explosion of light. He let it dawn on men in these parables. He made them like stained glass so men would not be blinded, but blessed with color . . . Here is much of the artistry of the parables. Jesus did not have to go around reproaching people, He pictured the problem in stories, then permitted people to pin it on themselves . . ."*

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How to Study the Parables

There are two main rules of study and interpretation of parables.

Rule 1: Find the central truth.

Don't allegorize and don't bog down in the details.

Rule 2: Understand in light of origin, background and context.

Follow all the proper rules of Biblical exegesis, even though these are stories.

Lesson Outline

Introducing Your God --What is He like?

A. "This man receives sinners"

1. The Lost Sheep
2. The Lost Coin
3. The Prodigal Son

B. His pattern for prayer

1. The Friend Who Got Up At Midnight
2. The Widow Who Bothered The Judge
3. The Pharisee and the Publican

C. He expects fruitful service

1. The Rebellious Tenants
2. The Entrusted Talents
3. The Unproductive Fig Tree

D. "He gives more grace

1. The Crazy Employer
2. The Two Debtors
3. The Two Creditors

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INTRODUCING YOUR GOD'S KINGDOM--What is it like?

A. The growth of the Kingdom

1. The Leaven
2. The Mustard Seed
3. The Seed Grows By Itself

B. The value of the Kingdom

1. The Pearl of Great Price
2. The Buried Treasure

INTRODUCING YOUR DUTY--What is it?

A. Personal Responsibility--Hearing

1. The Sower
2. The Prince's Wedding
3. The Unprepared Guest

B. Personal Responsibility--Doing

1. The Good Samaritan
2. The Wheat and The Tares

C. Count the cost

1. The Wise and Foolish Builders
2. The Rash Attack
3. The Unfinished Tower

INTRODUCING YOU LIFE--It lasts forever?

A. Prepare for it

1. The Man God Called a Fool
2. The Dishonest Manager
3. The Deceptive Sons
4. The Chief Seats

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B. It goes on, and on, and on . . .

1. The Rich Man and the Beggar
2. The Sheep and the Goats
3. The Wise and Foolish Girls

Lord willing, this course has been planned for 2 periods of from 12 to 14 weeks.

GOAL: *"The purpose of a parable is not to entertain or inform, but to change a person's attitude: the way he sees things, and particularly, the way he sees himself."--Edmund Flood*

As was the case when the prophet Nathan told a parable to David in 2 Samuel 12, we hope we will see things and ourselves as we really are and come to the repentance that brings about changing and maturing lives.

"It is difficult to say how many parables are present in the Gospels. The exact number depends on one's definition of a parable. If the word parable is taken to include proverbs, riddles, and simple comparisons, as well as those in story form (it should not) the number is about sixty. Not counting all these, the number is usually estimated as being from thirty to thirty-five."

--Lightfoot

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