

Parables: Introduction

Why study Parables?

- What applies to the reading and interpretation of the Gospels as a whole also applies to the Parables
- However, since the Parables have been so misinterpreted and misappropriated, we will treat them separately
- Jesus alluded to the fact Parables are often misunderstood (Mark 4:10-12; cf. Matt. 13:10-13; Luke 8:9-10)

Jesus & Parables

- Parables are “self-contained stories that highlight a single theological truth”
- They are NOT Allegories: “Stories that can be interpreted to reveal a *hidden* meaning.”
- A Parable’s meaning must be tied to its context
 - Allegories do not require this level of connection
- *Example: The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37)*
 - Compare with Augustine’s interpretation of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (p. 155)
- We are not to read hidden meaning into every detail of the story
- The meaning of Parables is normally understood by their audience
 - They are an effective teaching tool
- The challenge of the Parables is in their application
 - Letting them alter one’s behavior

The ‘Mystery’ of Jesus’ ‘Parables’

- In Jesus’ native language, Aramaic, the term *methal* is translated as *parabole* in Greek
 - *Methal*: “An Aramaic term for a range of figures of speech in the riddle/puzzle/parable category.”
- Thus, when Jesus says, “but for those outside everything is in parables,”
 - Jesus was NOT referring to the crowds’ inability to understand His teaching
 - But in their inability to hear in a way that leads to obedience
- Like the rest of Scripture, the Parables are not hard to understand if as we seek to understand them in their own context

The Variety of Kinds

- There are different types of sayings of Jesus which fall under the broad category of parables:
 - True parables: “Stories used to convey a single theological meaning”
 - Ex. The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37)
 - Similitudes: “Illustrations taken from everyday life”
 - Ex. Yeast in Dough (Matt. 13:33)
 - Similes & Metaphors: “Expressions which show comparisons”
 - Ex. “You are the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13)
 - Near Allegories: “Stories where many details parallel real corollaries”
 - Ex. Wicked Tenants (Matt. 21:33-44)
 - Though they are NOT allegories because the meanings are not hidden
- Because there are different types of ‘parables’ it is not possible to lay down rules that apply to them all
 - The principles we discuss will apply to ‘true parables’
 - Though some the tenants can be applied to other categories at times

How Parables Function

- Story parables, strictly speaking, do NOT serve to illustrate Jesus’ prosaic teaching with word pictures
 - Prosaic: “That which is directly spoken”
- They DO function as a striking way of *calling forth a response* on the part of the hearer
- In a sense, the parables itself acts as the message
 - They are told to:
 - Address or capture the hearers
 - Bring them up short about their own actions
 - Or cause them to respond in some way to Jesus and His ministry
 - In a sense, true parables are mini-sermons
- To interpret a parable can almost make it lose its purpose
 - Its purpose is its impact
 - Like explaining a joke
- However, to understand it, the hearer must understand its points of reference
 - The exegetical task
- Thus, to interpret parables, we must understand what the original audience ‘caught’ as they heard them
 - And explain it to a modern hearer in a way that makes them ‘catch’ it too
 - The Hermeneutical task