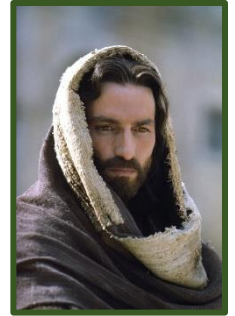


Understanding Jesus' Parables



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PART 1 *Introduction*

A. WHAT IS A PARABLE?

- Definition: A parable is a simple story used to illustrate a _____.
- The term for parable is from the Greek word *paraballo*. The term means to place "by the side of something." In other words, a parable is where Jesus has taken a picture of the real world to picture something that is true in the spiritual world. Another way to state this is that a spiritual reality is placed next to a picture of the real world.

B. HOW DO PARABLES HELP ME?

- They give me visual images that are _____.
- They grab my attention in a _____.
- They stimulate my thinking about _____.
- They were intended to _____.

C. WHY DID JESUS SPEAK IN PARABLES?

- To _____ truths to his followers (Matt. 13:10-11, 16).
- To _____ truths from his adversaries (Matt. 13:10-11, 13-15).

D. PITFALLS TO AVOID

- Interpreting parables apart from what precedes and follows them.
- Seeking to find some spiritual truth in every little detail.
- Not responding to them.

E. FIVE GUIDELINES FOR UNDERSTANDING PARABLES

1. Know the _____ of the parable.

Jesus did not just teach parables at random. Many of the parables plainly state the occasion for their existence. Luke 14:7 declares that the reason for this parable was because of people seeking seats of honor. Luke 15:1-2 shows that the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin and the lost son all stem from the fact that the Pharisees and scribes grumbled at Christ's eating with sinners. The interpreter should note that three parables are used by Christ on two separate occasions. The parable of the lost sheep is found in Matthew 18:12-14

and Luke 15:1-7. The Matthew text follows the rejection of the little children by the disciples, while the Luke text follows the complaining of the Pharisees about Jesus befriending sinners. The parables of the mustard seed and leaven are found in Luke 13:10-21 and then in Matthew 13:31-33 and Mark 4:30-32. The Luke text follows the healing of the crippled woman, while the Matthew and Mark texts are Christ speaking from the boat. In both cases the student should note that although the occasion is different, the intent of the parable is the same in both instances.

2. Determine the _____ of the parable.

Knowledge of the occasion will greatly aid in determining the main lesson of the parable. This is not to say that there may not be secondary lessons in a parable, but to keep from abusing the text, all things must be kept in line with the main scope of the parable. The interpreter must make a distinction between what older interpreters would call the "body and the soul" of the parable or the "shell versus the marrow." Parables are not meant to show examples of character nor do they necessarily recommend certain kinds of behavior, such as usury (Matt. 25:14-29), but rather cite the instance to illustrate the main point. Do not get lost in the details. The main scope of the parable is to declare that God the Father revealed in God the Son loves to love sinners over and against the opinions and practice of the Pharisees.

3. See the parts in light of the _____.

All the parts must always be seen in light of the big picture. In the parable of the prodigal son all the secondary props should be viewed underneath the umbrella of God's rejoicing love over the repentant sinner. This is not to say that the secondary props are useless, but they are there only to add to the main picture painted by the Lord. The secondary lessons should always be viewed within the scope of the primary lesson.

4. Do not get bogged down in the _____.

If the main scope of the parable is not affected by the determination of the meaning of a secondary prop, then do not sweat it out trying to uncover the hidden, secret meaning. For example, the parable of the wheat and the tares is not a mystery without determining what kind of sleep the Lord was referring to in Matt. 13:25. (Is this slothful Christians, unregenerate man, or is this soul sleep?) In the parable of the vine-growers from Mark 12, uncovering the identity of the wall is not mandatory in understanding the main lesson. Jesus in interpreting the sower and the seed did not identify every object in the parable. But do pay attention to specific identifications such as the "Son of Man" or the "Kingdom of Heaven" which are clearly stated, and are key to the best interpretation.

5. Identify how it _____.

Unless you apply the main principle of the parable you will miss its whole purpose. Parables are not riddles to be "decoded" for entertainment purposes but serve to strengthen the believer. As you read Jesus' parables, put yourself into each one. Question yourself: Why is this parable important to me?

F. WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981, 1993, 2003.

Lockyer, Herbert. *All the Parables of the Bible: A Study and Analysis of the More Than 250 Parables in Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963.

Pentecost, J. Dwight. *The Parables of Jesus: Lessons in Life from the Master Teacher*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1982.

Sterrett, T. Norton. *How to Understand Your Bible*. Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1973, 1974.