

The Parables of Our Lord Jesus

Introduction

I. The Definition of a Parable

A. An earthly story with a heavenly meaning

B. How a parable differs from other literary means

1. The fable

- Essentially of the earth; never lifts itself above the earth
- Reaches that pitch of morality the world will understand and approve
- Enforces prudent earthly virtues
- Attributes reason and language to beasts and trees

2. The myth

- Presents itself not merely as the vehicle of the truth, but as being the truth
- May have some spiritual significance, but merely as an afterthought

3. The allegory

- Differs more in form than in essence
- Contains its interpretation within itself

C. A parable is constructed to set for a spiritual truth

1. Jesus' parables always teach one main spiritual truth

2. Meant to awaken man to a consciousness of a divine truth

3. May be severe, stern, and cut to the quick

4. Jesus presents to us no talking trees or reasoning beasts

5. Parables never transgress the actual order of natural things

6. In Jesus' parables there is "a perfect distinction between form and essence, shell and kernel"

7. In Jesus' parables the outward symbol and deeper spiritual meaning remain separate

II. On Teaching by Parables

A. Sometimes Jesus' purpose in teaching by parables was to withdraw from certain of his hearers the knowledge of the truth they were unworthy or unfit to receive. Examples:

Matthew 13:10-15; Mark 4:11-12; Luke 8:9-10

Matthew 13:10-15. ¹⁰ The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" ¹¹ He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹² Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. ¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. ¹⁵ For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them."

B. Jesus' general purpose was to illustrate or to prove, and thus make clearer, the truths of God's Word

C. All Jesus' teaching parables are found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke

1. Matthew, writing for Jewish readers, to show them Jesus was the promised Messiah, records parable concerning the kingdom of God

2. Luke, writing for Gentiles, to show them Jesus is the Savior of the world, was most careful to record Jesus' parables concerning God's free grace and mercy

3. Mark has only one parable peculiar to himself – The Seed Growing by Itself, Mark 4:26

III. On the Interpretation of Parables

A. The main question: "How much is significant? How many details are to be interpreted?"

1. Determine and hold fast the central truth that Jesus wishes to teach
2. Distinguish that central truth as accurately as possible from all truths that border upon it
3. Be careful to note the introduction and the application
4. See if the interpretation is given
 - By the Lord Jesus himself – Matthew 22:14; 25:13
Wedding Banquet: Matthew 22:14. "For many are invited, but few are chosen."
Ten Virgins: Matthew 25:13 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."
 - By the inspired writers – Luke 15:1-2; 18:1
Lost Sheep: Luke 15:1-2. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."
Persistent Widow: Luke 18:1. Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.
 - In what precedes the parable – Luke 18:9; 19:11
Pharisee and Tax Collector: Luke 18:9. To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:
Ten Minas: Luke 19:11. While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.
 - In what follows the parable – Matthew 25:13; Luke 16:9
Shrewd Manager: Luke 16:9. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

B. The interpretation must be easy

1. Not discovered by violent means
2. If not easy to discover, yet once discovered, easy

C. Parables are not to be made first sources of doctrine

D. Parables are not to be used to thrust into Scripture one's own ideas

IV. Misinterpretation of Parables - done by going to extremes

A. Reading too much into a parable

Example: Luke 10:30-37 - The Good Samaritan

Man = Adam

Jerusalem = heavenly city from which Adam fell

Jericho = moon, signifies mortality

Robbers = devil and his angels

Stripped him = of immortality

Samaritan means "guardian" = Lord himself

Bandaged his wounds = restraint of sin

Oil = comfort

Coins = two precepts of love or this life and life to come;

Innkeeper = Apostle Paul

B. Seeing too little in a parable (missing details)

Example: Luke 10:30-37 - The Good Samaritan

Samaritan helping a wounded Jew when priest and Levite do not; striking example since Jews and Samaritans were bitter enemies