

Sunday, January 10, 2021 am

THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS (32)

The Parables Jesus Taught (1)

An Introduction to Parables

Welcome to year 2 of our studying the teachings of Jesus. We devoted last year to the Sermon on the Mount (with the interruption of a pandemic). There is so much to learn from the teachings of Jesus. If He is our Lord and He whom we are to imitate, then it would do us well to consider His teachings. That is why I am extending that theme throughout this year. And even with this (about 40 more lessons), we will not cover all of His teachings. So this year, I want to examine some of the parables Jesus taught, and then we will notice some of His claims from the gospel of John, some of His other sermons including His teachings on the night of His betrayal, and follow this with other subjects that Jesus addressed – some pleasant and others controversial or even harsh. But they are all truth and designed for us to learn from them.

Today, we begin examining the parables of Jesus.

I. Some thoughts about parables

- a. **What is a parable** – a transliteration of the Greek word (παράβολή, parabolē) meaning to cast beside of. The idea is that something is explained by comparing it to something else, usually something mysterious or spiritual that is better understood with a practical, physical illustration. The parables of Jesus typically appealed to everyday activities that everyone might observe. Other definitions: A short, simple story designed to communicate some spiritual truth or lesson. “An earthly story, with a heavenly meaning”
- b. We have recorded more about 32 parables that Jesus taught s in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark & Luke). John records no parables. There may also be a few other parables hidden within other sermons of Jesus (such as the two builders – Matthew 7:24-27) The word parable as used by Jesus is found about 48 times in the gospels, and is FIRST mentioned in Matthew 13:3.
- c. When studying the parables:
 - i. Look for the intended meaning – most parables teach one central truth – with associated details. (If more than one lesson is to be gleaned, apply them all).
 - ii. But NOT every detail necessarily has a significance in application. Example: Parable of the landowner is not about wage inequity, but God’s mercy. (Matthew 20:1-16)
 - iii. Try to research the background or setting of the parable.
 1. That might give you a better understanding – example: A friend comes at midnight (Luke 11:5-10). Knowing about the typical home with animals helps.
 2. Also, consider the context in which the parable is stated. Many parables are answers to questions or inquiries. Note the context as you apply the message. IN many instances, Jesus explained the parables – that is part of their context and crucial to properly understanding the intended message.
 3. This will also help us to see certain details that might not still apply, though they did back then.
 - iv. Also, parables do not typically formulate doctrine, rather they confirm or help explain doctrine. For example: Jesus taught plainly that He intended to establish His kingdom/church. Parables which deal with the kingdom are taught with that understanding already established.

- d. Many of the parables that Jesus taught were intended to emphasize the kingdom of God in various ways. Jesus was trying to get individuals to understand the nature of His kingdom (not of this world). This was helpful, as His Kingdom was spiritual in nature. It was NOT about conquering Rome or ruling the material world. Thus Jesus wanted people to understand what this kingdom was about. They had a hard time grasping its meaning because of hardened hearts and preconceived ideas they were slow to let go of. We will see this introduced as we look at Matthew 13.

II. Why did Jesus teach in parables?

- a. Matthew 13:1-3, 10-17 – Matthew in this text records 7 or 8 parables of Jesus that give us a good understanding of parables. We also find here an explanation as to WHY Jesus taught in parables.
- b. Vs. 10 – The disciples of Jesus ask Him, “**Why do You speak in parables?**”
We begin with Jesus teaching to great multitudes as He typically did. Here He is by the sea. And He begins with the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3-9). We know that on this occasion He kept teaching in parables. We have 6 or 7 more parables recorded in the text.
Vs. 34 tells us, *All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them.* This tells us that at least on this occasion, Jesus ONLY taught with these parables. Likely, the audience was mixed – some genuinely interested in learning more, while others, including His critics were watching. So Jesus began to teach with these parables.
Why would He do that? Some reasons are actually given which we will notice in a moment. Meanwhile, we come to our text in vs. 10-17. Likely these were spoken to Jesus a little later when He was alone with them. Matthew just includes them in the midst of his lesson to explain Jesus teaching in parables.
- c. Vs. 11-12 - **To further reveal God’s kingdom and message to the true believer.**
- i. Vs. 11 – Jesus begins by noting that to them (His disciples – those who followed after Him) was given the privilege to know (understand, or even to experience) the kingdom of heaven. Jesus wanted them to grasp what the kingdom of heaven (kingdom of God) was about. So He gave them illustrations with which they could get a grasp of various aspects of that kingdom.
Jesus even explained the meaning of two parables here (which were challenging to interpret)
 - ii. Vs. 12, “*For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance*” –
 1. Still dealing with His interested disciples, we find here a promise – if you are genuinely seeking to serve God and follow Jesus, you will be able to understand and KEEP growing in that understanding.
 2. The very thing we are called upon to do as Christians (cf. 2 Peter 3:18). Ephesians 5:17 tells us, “*Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*” We CAN understand God’s will for us – what we need to do. 2 Peter 1:3 notes that He has given us “all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue...”
 - iii. Bear in mind, the Jews misunderstood the nature of the kingdom.
 1. They were looking for a physical kingdom and king that would rule over the world. Jesus seeks to help them understand that such is NOT the nature of His kingdom. And continually He would try and get them to understand that. Consider John 18:36, Luke 17:21 (the kingdom is within you).
 2. NOTE: An interesting observation is how only Matthew most of the time uses the expression “Kingdom of heaven” (33 times), while the other gospels use the expression “Kingdom of God” – sometimes on the same occasion as Matthew uses “heaven” (e.g. Matthew 4:17 – Mark 1:15-15, Matthew 5:3 – Luke 6:20, Matthew 13:31 – Mark 4:30-31). Matthew only uses the expression, “Kingdom of God” 5

times.

WHY would Matthew do this? Consider:1) Matthew is writing to Jews who were fearful of using the name of God, so possibly out of respect he spoke mostly of “heaven”; 2) Because of their misunderstanding of the nature of God’s kingdom, wanting a worldly kingdom, Matthew may have used this expression to emphasize the spiritual nature of the kingdom. Possibly other reasons as well.

- iv. One point to consider in this is how much of His audience was illiterate. Thus, Jesus simplified spiritual truths to their level. The parables would also have been easier to memorize and share with others – something important in an oral society, as was theirs (and still largely true today).
- v. HOW would a believer be willing to receive these parables? I believe they were designed to make them think. We know that is what God wants us to do! With the doctrinal knowledge we have, we make proper application.

d. Vs. 11 - *To hide the truth from the unbeliever*

- i. Jesus noted, “but to them it has not been given.” Clearly, Jesus was speaking of the corrupt leaders, and anyone who chose not to consider Him. Many who came to hear Jesus did not intend to follow Him. They were looking to criticize, contradict or even condemn Him. They were seeking to find faults. BUT, Jesus, being the Master Teacher, knew not only when to say something but what to say. Parables, to the critic, would seem like noting but babbling and harmless, especially if Jesus did not explain these things. That was the purpose.
- ii. In Vs.12 we note, “But whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away.” Because of the seriousness of their rejection, it would end with them losing EVERYTHING. A day was fast approaching when Judaism would no longer be acceptable to God. Not only would the “blood of bulls and goats” no longer be acceptable to remove sins (Hebrews 10:4), eventually they would lose it all – the temple and city.
- iii. NOTE: Understand that these sayings were NOT because it was impossible for them to be saved – rather it was by their choice of rejecting Jesus. As Paul would later say in Acts 13:46, they judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life. Matthew 21:43 Jesus later spoke of the kingdom being taken from them and given to another nation (after the parable of a landowner who leased his vineyard).
- iv. TODAY, there are many who simply see the teaching of Jesus and God as nothing but philosophy, or even nonsense. Many today reject the very idea of God and Jesus, but quite often there is a blindness equal to that of the audience of Jesus on that day. They have made up their minds that God cannot be and Jesus cannot be God, so anything you say falls upon deaf ears. AS LONG AS someone has this attitude, they are UNTEACHABLE! Therefore, MOVE ON! Do not cast your pearls before them (Matthew 7:6)
- v. Jesus would further illustrate this by quoting from Isaiah.

e. Vs. 13-17 – parables fulfilled prophecy – both in their usage AND in response to them.

- i. Consider first that prophecies were fulfilled. Note Matthew 13:34-35 – on this occasion, Jesus ONLY spoke in parables, because it would help distinguish the true believer from all others.
- ii. **Vs. 35 quotes Psalm 78:2**, (at least partly). This is a psalm of Asaph (a chief musician and prophet who served David). Time will permit a detailed examination of this psalm, but in summary it is a psalm where Asaph would speak to Israel reminding them of their rebellious history how in spite of God giving them signs, wonders and teachings – they STILL rejected God over and over. Much like the audience Jesus was addressing.
- iii. Vs. 13-15 of our text find Jesus quoting to His disciples from Isaiah 6:9-10. Vs. 13 is Jesus actually quoting the text. Then in vs. 14-15 we find the actual text (from the LXX). Like vs.

14-15 are Matthew quoting the complete text that Jesus had just mentioned.

NOTE this is a verse that talks about shut eyes and stopped ears. The signs of someone who refuses to even hear what the other side has to say.

It is a hardened heart that is always condemned.

- iv. Vs. 16-17 - ***But blessed are you*** – Jesus concluded by retuning to His disciple and noting that they are blessed BECAUSE they see and hear. NOTICE the willingness on their part to consider what Jesus said, as we have already noted.

- v. Vs. 17 concludes this by reminding them of how blessed they are. They are witnessing the fulfillment of messages the prophets and righteous could only anticipate. Think about that! They saw the culmination of God's plan of redemption unfolding.

Consider 1 Peter 1:10-12 which speaks of the work of the prophets as they inquired about meaning. 2 Peter 1:19 says, *“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts....”*

We in many ways are more greatly blessed than the prophets, because we have His message COMPLETED and can study it in full and make informed application with much greater certainty. Friends do NOT take that for granted.

And thus we can see the purpose of parables. They served to weed out true believers from the rest, AND give those who genuinely desire to know the truth better understanding of His will for us. Let us consider these things as we examine some of the parables in upcoming lessons. Think about it!