

A Brief Survey of the Bible – Parables

February 22, 2015

Quotations about Parables

Mark 4:30-32 The Parable of the Mustard Seed

30 He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?' ³¹It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³²yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'

Quotations about Parables:

Parables are tiny bits of coal squeezed into diamonds, condensed metaphors that catch the ray of something ultimate and glint it at our lives. Parables are not illustrations; they do not support, elaborate, or simplify a more basic idea. They are not ideas at all, nor can they ever be reduced to theological statements. They are the jeweled portals of another world; we cannot see through them like windows, but lights are refracted through their surfaces that would otherwise blind us – or pass unseen. (Walter Wink, *“Transforming Bible Study”* pg. 159)

From *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, eds., Oxford University Press, NY, 1993.

In the Hebrew Bible, the word “parable” (Hebr. *masal*) can refer to a proverb (Ezekiel 18:2-3); a taunt (Isaiah 14:3-4); a riddle (Ezekiel 17:1-10), or an allegory (Ezekiel 24:2-5)

In the Gospels it can refer to a proverb (Luke 4:23), aphorism (Mark 9:5) Metaphor (Mark 7:14-17), similitude (Mark 4:30-32), story Parable (Luke 14:16-24), example parable (Luke 10:29-37), or allegory (Mark 12:1-11).

In contrast to the Aristotelian tradition, no sharp distinction is drawn in the Bible between simile/allegory and metaphor/parable... it is impossible to give an exact list of Jesus' parables. Although *parabole* is used explicitly to designate thirty different sayings of Jesus, when one adds other clear examples... the total number is about eighty... Moreover, if one includes every simile, proverb, and aphorism that Jesus taught, then almost everything Jesus said falls into the category of parable.

An allegory consists of a string of metaphors that have individual meanings, whereas a parable is essentially a single metaphor possessing a single meaning. The details of parable, then, should not be pressed for meaning; rather, one should seek only its basic point of comparison... this distinction between allegory and parable is useful and provides an important rule for interpretation: seek the main point of the parable and do not seek meaning in details unless it is necessary.

In identifying the main point of a parable, several questions prove helpful:

- 1) What comes at the end? This rule of end stress recognizes that the main emphasis of the parable, as in most stories, comes at the end.
- 2) What is spoke in direct discourse? In a parable what is found within quotation marks is especially important.
- 3) To what or whom is the most space devoted? Usually the most space given to the main point of the parable.

The second rule for interpreting the parables is to try to understand its meaning in its original setting;

- 1) What is the general theological framework of Jesus' teachings? Each parable of Jesus should be interpreted in light of the totality of his teachings.
- 2) To what possible audience did Jesus address this parable?

J. Edward Carothers, *Living with Parables: Jesus and the Reign of God*, Friendship Press, NY, 1984.

Parables as parables do not have a 'message'.... They tease the mind into ever new perceptions of reality; they startle the imagination; they function like symbols in that they give rise to thought.

(quoted from Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, p. 106)

Marianne Moore's distinction: "A parable gives us imaginary gardens with real toads in them, while a myth gives us imaginary gardens with imaginary toads in them."

"...the parable touches hard reality at one end of its rainbow while the other end reaches out into eternity to inform us about divine activity."

Perrin & Duling, *The New Testament: An Introduction*, 2nd, ed., Harcourt Grace Jovanovich, Pub., NY, 1982.

What happens when one is confronted by the demand to conceive the inconceivable, to say what cannot be said? Either the demand is rejected, or the person concerned begins to question all that he has taken for granted up to that moment. He is confronted by the necessity suddenly to reexamine the ground of his being, by a challenge that is effective at the deepest level of existential reality. The parable has become proclamation.

PARABLES OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK AND THEIR PARALLELS

1. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

- Mark 4:1–20, Matthew 13:3–23, Luke 8:5–15, Thomas 9

2. THE PARABLE OF THE SEED GROWING SECRETLY

- Mark 4:26-29 [unique to Mark]

3. THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

- Mark 4:30-32, Matthew 13:31-32, Luke 13:18-19, Thomas 20

4. THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS

- Mark 12:1-11, Matthew 21:33-46, Luke 20:9-18, Thomas 65

5. THE PARABLE OF THE BUDDING FIG TREE

- Mark 13:28-32, Matthew 24:32-36, Luke 21:29-33

6. THE PARABLE OF THE FAITHFUL SERVANT

- Mark 13:33-37, Matthew 24:42, Luke 12:35-48, Thomas 21, 103

PARABLES OF MATTHEW NOT FOUND IN MARK

7. THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND TARES

- Matthew 13:24-30, Thomas 57

8. THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

- Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:20-21, Thomas 96

9. THE PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE

- Matthew 13:44, Thomas 109

10. THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL

- Matthew 13:45-46, Thomas 76

11. THE PARABLE OF THE NET

- Matthew 13:47-50, Thomas 8

12. THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP

- Matthew 18:12-14, Luke 15:3-7, Thomas 107

13. THE PARABLE OF THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

- Matthew 18:23-35 [unique to Matthew]

14. THE PARABLE OF THE LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD

- Matthew 20:1-16 [unique to Matthew]

15. THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

- Matthew 21:28-31 [unique to Matthew]

16. THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING FEAST/BANQUET

- Matthew 22:1-14, Luke 14:15-24, Thomas 64

17. THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

- Matthew 25:1-12 [unique to Matthew]

17b. THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

- Matthew 25:14-25:30

•

PARABLES OF LUKE NOT FOUND IN MARK OR MATTHEW

18. THE PARABLE OF THE TWO DEBTORS

- Luke 10:30-37 [unique to Luke]

19. THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

- Luke 10:30-37 [unique to Luke]

20. THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

- Luke 12:16-21, Thomas 63

21. THE PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN

- Luke 15:8-10 [unique to Luke]

22. THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

- Luke 15:11-32 [unique to Luke]

23. THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD

- Luke 16:1-8 [unique to Luke]

24. THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND THE BEGGAR LAZARUS

- Luke 16:19-31 [unique to Luke]