

Gospel Truth

Biblical Instruction and Encouragement for the Mission Field Worldwide.

THE POWER OF THE PARABLE

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock” (Matthew 7:24 KJV). Using a simile, Jesus, the son of God, began to tell an engaging story to the crowds in simple yet profound language they could all understand. Without a seminary degree or specialized speech training, the Anointed One engaged multitudes of people with stories of common life that enlightened the listeners with spiritual truths. These stories evoked thought and stirred the spirit, emotions, and intellect. As Jesus ended the story of the wise man and foolish man, “the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (28-29).

Many of the simple and memorable stories which Jesus told are called parables. A parable is a similitude, or a narrative, of common life that conveys a lesson, moral, or duty. The Greek word for parable “literally denotes a placing beside.... It signifies a placing of one thing beside another with a view to comparison” (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary*). As *Thayer’s Greek Definitions* states: “A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” It is a comparison or analogy drawn from nature or human circumstances to teach a spiritual lesson. Jesus used metaphors and stories that were pertinent to the culture. Jesus taught the truth about an unfamiliar subject by comparing it to things that were familiar to the people. He explained and illustrated deep truths with well-known imagery such as the

lessons of the farmer sowing seed or the traveler on the way to Jericho (Good Samaritan). These illustrations were relatable to the time and generation to which He spoke and had great relevance in understanding and meaning to the hearer.

Parables comprised more than one third of Christ’s teachings. Many of the stories were simple and easy to understand. Often, His parables, while detailed and interesting, were told to convey a singular truth or message. Christ, a master teacher, is an example to be emulated still today. His illustrative teachings and application of life lessons under the power of the Holy Spirit are not easily forgotten.

The parables of Christ, which are much easier to understand and to remember than a dry, theological discourse, reveal details about God, His character, the kingdom of God, etc. Much doctrinal truth is found in the simplicity of the parables. The deceptiveness of sin and the forgiveness of the Father are immortalized in the powerful story of the prodigal son. The importance of prayer is seared into the memory with the parable of the importunate widow. A tale of the ten virgins forever reminds us of the importance of living ready for the unexpected return of the bridegroom. The story of the lost sheep reveals the loving nature of the seeking Savior for the lost. The beautiful parables of Christ are gems of truth and are worthy of continual study and sharing with others. ■

The Importunate Widow



“Jesus taught the truth about an unfamiliar subject by comparing it to things that were familiar to the people.”

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WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT...

Word of God

2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Matt. 24:35

Relationship of Love

Matt. 22:37-40; John 14:21-23; 1 John 4:7-11

Repentance

Acts 3:19; Acts 17:30; 2 Cor. 7:10

New Birth

John 3:3-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:1-4;
Eph. 2:1, 5-6

Freedom From Sin

1 John 5:18; Matt. 1:21; John 8:11

Infilling of the Holy Spirit

Acts 19:2; Acts 15:8-9; Acts 1:8

Holiness

Luke 1:73-75; Heb. 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15-16;
Titus 2:11-12; Rom. 6:22

Kingdom of God

Luke 17:20-21; Romans 14:17; John 18:36

The Church

Acts 2:47; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Col 1:18

Unity

John 17:20-23; Gal 3:28; Rev. 18:2-4

Ordinances

Matt. 28:19-20; Matt. 26:26-30;
1 Cor. 11:23-27; John 13:14-17

Divine Healing

Luke 4:18; Isaiah 53:4-5; James 5:13-16

Sanctity of Marriage

Matt. 19:5-6; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:2-3;
1 Cor. 7:10-11

Outward Appearance

1 Tim. 2:9-10; 1 Cor. 11:14-15; Deut. 22:5

End of Time

2 Peter 3:7-12; John 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:10;
Matt 25:31-46

Pacifism

Luke 6:27-29; Luke 18:20

Worship

John 4:23-24; Eph. 5:19; 2 Cor. 3:17

Great Commission

Mark 16:15



The Purpose of PARABLES

Jesus used parables to teach a truth or to answer a question. He used real-life situations in His stories to connect with His audience. A lawyer once stood tempting Jesus and asked Him: "Who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29). Jesus proceeded to tell the story of the good Samaritan. Jesus then asked: "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?" (v. 36). The answer was evident in the related story, but it caused the listeners to consider and think for themselves. It elicited truth from those who otherwise might have rejected a declarative statement.

ELICIT
REVEAL
CONCEAL
PRESERVE

The parables of Christ often reveal the truth in a way that a simple declaration would not. Those who have honest, seeking hearts will hear and understand. The telling of parables is a way to convey and reveal truth in ways easy to be understood as in the above illustration.

Other parables that Jesus told were presented in such a way as to conceal truth from those who were choosing to walk in darkness. "And the disciples came, and said

unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." (Matthew 13:10-13). The unbeliever may incorrectly understand the primary point of a parable, as it is hidden to those who "hear not." It was not uncommon for the disciples to return to Christ and ask for a more in-depth explanation of a parable.

Parables are easy to recall for their detailed imagery and hence are useful to remember spiritual truths. They were and remain vital to the preservation of truth for people of all cultures and backgrounds. ■

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Editorial



And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples. —Mark 4:33-34

The *Gospel Truth* this quarter highlights the parables of Jesus. Parables were an important part of the teachings of Christ, and they should be a valuable resource for teaching today. Parables illustrate truth in ways that a list of facts can never do. While Christ's teachings were not pretentious, He spoke to the heart of issues in relative simplicity. Bible scholars and theologians quibble at times over the definition of a parable and what makes something a parable versus an illustrative story. A true parable is a story with a hidden truth containing a comparison of a natural occurrence with a spiritual lesson.

My burden is to encourage people to study the parables and to immerse themselves in the wonderful teaching illustrations of Christ. Everyone learns differently, and Christ obviously thought it important enough to reach people with stories and examples that the truth might be understood.

A few years ago, I had the privilege of conducting a ministers' meeting over a number of days with a group in Africa. On many past occasions we had teaching sessions and doctrinal studies together. I felt the need for something different. God inspired me with the power of the parables. My eyes were opened to the wonderful truths that are contained in the parables of Christ. For days, the ministers studied the parables and shared the lessons together. I was so blessed to be able to give pertinent lessons after each presentation that dealt with a wide array of subjects: prayer, forgiveness, salvation, the love of God, the judgment, sin, the Kingdom of God, mercy, eternity, heaven, hell, evangelism, and the list goes on. There is much doctrine and truth contained in these stories, and they engage people in a way that lecture-style teaching cannot.

I pray that God will inspire you to read the parables and discover the wealth and power contained therein.

Michael W. Smith

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Preaching Illustrations



Modern illustrations and life stories are valuable in relating truth to an audience. Illustrations can engage the people and make truth relevant in the light of current situations and culture. However, while sharing stories to bring a point can be an important tool in the arsenal of the preacher, the minister of Christ must not become an entertainer or a comedian. Our job is to preach the Word of God. If a story helps, then use it, but do not let the storytelling take precedence over the truth itself.

It is also important when sharing an illustration not to try to make something an issue of truth because it "fits" your example or story. Many a preacher in using an illustration has erred in getting the role of truth and illustration reversed. Something is truth because of the Word of God, not because we tell an engaging story from which we create a truth. ■

Parables of Jesus

“And He spake a parable unto them saying...”

Parable	Matthew	Mark	Luke
Kingdom of Heaven			
The Sower	13:3-8, 18-23	4:4-8, 14-21	8:5-8, 11-15
The Mustard Seed	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19
The Leaven	13:33		13:20-21
The Hidden Treasure	13:44		
The Pearl	13:45-46		
The Growing Seed		4:26-29	
Loss and Redemption			
The Lost Sheep	18:10-14		15:1-7
The Lost Coin			15:8-10
The Prodigal Son			15:11-32
Obedience/Disobedience			
The House on the Rock	7:24-27		6:47-49
The Two Sons	21:28-32		
The Unprofitable Servants			17:7-10
Stewardship			
The Talents	25:14-30		
The Shrewd Manager			16:1-13
The Pounds			19:11-27
Christ			
The Wicked Husbandmen	21:33-45	12:1-12	20:9-19

The Lost Sheep



The Sower & the Seed



Parable	Matthew	Mark	Luke
Prayer			
The Friend at Midnight			11:5-13
The Unjust Judge			18:1-8
The Pharisee & Publican			18:9-14
Love and Service			
The Good Samaritan			10:30-37
Forgiveness			
The Unmerciful Servant	18:21-35		
The Two Debtors			7:41-43
Eschatology/Preparedness			
The Tares	13:24-30, 36-43		
The Net	13:47-50		
The Laborers in the Vineyard	20:1-16		
The Wedding Banquet	22:1-14		
The Rich Fool			12:16-21
The Watchful Servants		13:34-37	12:35-40
The Wicked/Faithful Servant	24:45-51		12:42-48
The Ten Virgins	25:1-13		
The Barren Fig Tree			13:6-9
The Great Supper			14:15-24

Selected Stories & Illustrations



The Lost Coin

Story/Illustration	Matthew	Mark	Luke
Salt of the Earth	5:13	9:50	14:34-35
The Candlestick	5:14-16	4:21-22	8:16-18
Offending Eye and Hand	5:29-30; 18:8-9	9:43-47	
Laying up Treasure	6:19-21		
Fowls and Lilies	6:25-34		12:22-32
Mote and Beam	7:1-5		6:41-42
Straight Gate and Broad Way	7:13-14		
Camel/Needle's Eye	19:23-24	10:23-25	18:24-25
Cup and Platter	23:25-26		11:37-39
The Sheep and Goats	25:31-46		
The Lowest Seat			14:7-14
Building a Tower/Going to War			14:25-33
The Rich Man and Lazarus			16:19-31
The Good Shepherd	John 10:1-16		

KEYS TO STUDYING PARABLES



The Talents

“The interpretation of a parable should be in harmony with the rest of the scripture and the teachings of Christ and the apostles.”

The study of parables is an interesting and profound way to learn many of the doctrines and teachings of Christ. They are more than stories; they are practical tools to reveal deep doctrinal truths. The primary purpose of a truth conveyed in a parable will never contradict other doctrinal scriptures; rather, other scriptures and prophecies more difficult to understand should always be interpreted to agree with the simplicity of the teachings of Christ. It is vital to examine parables with honesty and openness to more fully grasp their true significance. The tips below can help facilitate a sound approach to understanding the wonderful parables of Jesus Christ.

Consider the Literary Context

Study the context of the parable. Examine what is said in the text before and after the parable. Often, Jesus explicitly states the purpose or meaning of the parable told. The parable of the persistent widow and the judge in Luke 18:2-6 could be badly misinterpreted without considering the context. One might infer by the story itself that God is unjust and uncaring. That is not the point of the parable; rather, Jesus stated the purpose in verse one: “And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”

Examine Details Correctly

Some parables have details that do not have great spiritual significance. They are given to enhance the story and to paint a picture illustrating an overriding spiritual truth. The parable of the unjust judge does not illustrate God but rather the details were used to demonstrate the importunity and tenacity of the widow. Be careful about attaching spiritual significance to every detail of a parable.

It is said that “a parable is not designed to walk on all fours.” Every detail is not a unique lesson or analogy. For this reason, parables are not always true allegories, as every detail does not have spiritual meaning. Assigning a meaning to every detail can derail the true meaning of a parable.

Observe Repeated Imagery

Many times images Jesus used are repeated in the Scripture and have similar meaning from parable to parable. Often, a master, judge, or king represents God. Workers and servants illustrate followers of God. Sheep represent children of God, and goats represent the unredeemed. A shepherd, keeper of the vineyard, or the son of a king often represents Christ.

What Prompted the Parable?

When Jesus told parables, He was sometimes answering a question or addressing an attitude of people present. In Luke 15, Jesus told parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. Jesus told these parables in response to the Pharisees and scribes murmuring and saying, “This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them (v. 2).” Understanding what instigated these parables helps one understand the point of the parables. In this case it was to demonstrate God’s attitude toward sinners.

Look for the One Main Point

Parables are told to make a point. As you read, carefully examine the central truth that Jesus is

Workers in the Vineyard



communicating and do not forget the context or the reason Jesus told the story to begin with. To help keep focused on the point, consider the answers to these questions:

1. What is the main contrast found in the parable?
2. Who are the main characters?
3. Who or what is the primary focus in the parable?
4. What happens in the conclusion of the parable?

Study the Cultural & Historical Setting

Greater understanding of a parable can be derived when one has a greater understanding of the historical and cultural setting. Some parables allude to an event or practice that the Jews of the time understood. This is exemplified with the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14. The man without a wedding garment was cast into outer darkness. One might feel badly for this poor man who did not have access to proper clothing until one learns that at the time Jesus told this story, it was the practice of the host to provide a proper garment for his guests. In reality, the man had chosen not to wear what was provided. This gives much greater understanding to the doctrinal truth of hell and punishment in this parable.

Interpretation

The interpretation of a parable should be in harmony with the rest of the scripture and the teachings of Christ and the apostles. While truths can be derived from a story, the reader must be careful about

building a doctrine from what could be an improper interpretation of a parable. A parable is by definition a contrast between two things. If the parable is about the kingdom of God, the interpretation should be about the kingdom of God, not how the story applies to family, political events, etc. Remember, most parables have a singular meaning.

Throughout history people have assigned fanciful, allegorical meanings to some parables. This often contradicts the stated or implied purpose of the parable. Martin Luther called some allegorical interpretations of the parables “amazing twaddle” and “altogether useless.”



The Ten Virgins

Analyze and Apply

After a parable has been read and analyzed for proper interpretation, it is important to apply the doctrine to oneself. What does this teach me about the kingdom of God and of things to come? How does this truth apply in my life? What would God have me to do?

The study of the parables will bring great blessings, challenges, and encouragement to the reader. Let us seek to know, study to understand, and pursue the knowledge of God that we may be found faithful at the coming of our Lord. ■

A Portrait of Christ

The Gospel of John is focused on giving a clear image of Jesus, His character and His nature. There are nine metaphors (figures of speech or illustrations) in John used to describe Jesus.

1. I AM the Bread of Life/Living Bread—John 6:35, 48, 51.
2. I AM the Light of the World—John 8:12; 9:5.
3. Before Abraham was, I AM—John 8:58.
4. I AM the Door—John 10:7, 9.
5. I AM the Good Shepherd—John 10:11, 14.
6. I AM the Resurrection and the Life—John 11:25.
7. I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life—John 14:6.
8. I AM the True Vine—John 15:1, 5.
9. I AM He—John 18:5-6.





DID YOU KNOW?

Most of the parables of Christ are found in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). While the Gospel of John contains a few stories and illustrations, there are no true parables. John 10:6 KJV uses the word “parable”, but it is a different Greek word than other parables and signifies an illustration or figure of speech.



A Word
in Season

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

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HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.
—Matthew 13:45-46

The goal of a merchant is to buy and sell merchandise in order to attain the greatest profit. For centuries, at the expense of their lives, people have sailed the vast oceans and explored new territories in pursuit of treasure and riches. The troubles and dangers encountered were considered worth the risk when valued against the potential gain of earthly possessions.



Jesus spoke this parable illustrating salvation from sin and the eternal reward as a pearl of great price. A merchant, when he has found such a great pearl, sells all his possessions in order to buy something of far greater value. Salvation is of more worth than any literal pearl. The seeker of salvation should with joy and gladness forsake all the things of this world in pursuit of Christ and deliverance of sin. This wonderful pearl can and will only be attained by those who seek after it with all their hearts.

Christians who are lazy and haphazard in their experience with God have either not truly found real salvation or they are in danger of losing that which they possess. To follow Jesus, we must forsake all to attain the power and joy of true salvation. We must seek after that pearl of great price with our whole hearts, holding nothing back.

When we find that pearl of great price, salvation from sin and hope of eternal life, it is accompanied by an inward peace and joy that the world cannot give. As servants of the Lord, may we convey the true worth and value of salvation. May our lives exemplify the riches and joy of full salvation. The enemy would like to cause us to paint a dire picture of the necessity of selling all other possessions rather than focusing on the wonderful treasure found in Jesus Christ.

If you are saved and know Jesus Christ, you have a rare pearl of great price. Go tell someone else about this great salvation that they also may have eternal life. ■