

The Purpose, Meaning, and Message of the Parables of Jesus

Biblical Terms

□ Hebrew = *Mashal*

- Taunt song (Hab 2:6)
- A parable (Ezek 17:2)
- Proverbial sayings (Prov 1:6)
- An insightful song (Ps 49:4)
- A prophetic message (Num. 24:15)

□ Greek = Parable

- Appears 50 times in the NT
- Only 2 occur outside the Synoptic Gospels (Heb 9:9; 11:19)
- Luke is most frequent (18x) then Matt (17x) and Mark (13x)
- Mk 4:10-12

Basic Definitions

□ What is a parable?

✓ “A fictitious saying picturing truth.”

(Theon [1st century Greek writer])

✓ “Imaginary gardens with real toads in them.” [modern poet]

✓ “A parable is a story taken from real life (or a real-life situation) from which a moral or spiritual truth is drawn.” (Boice, *Parables*, 14)

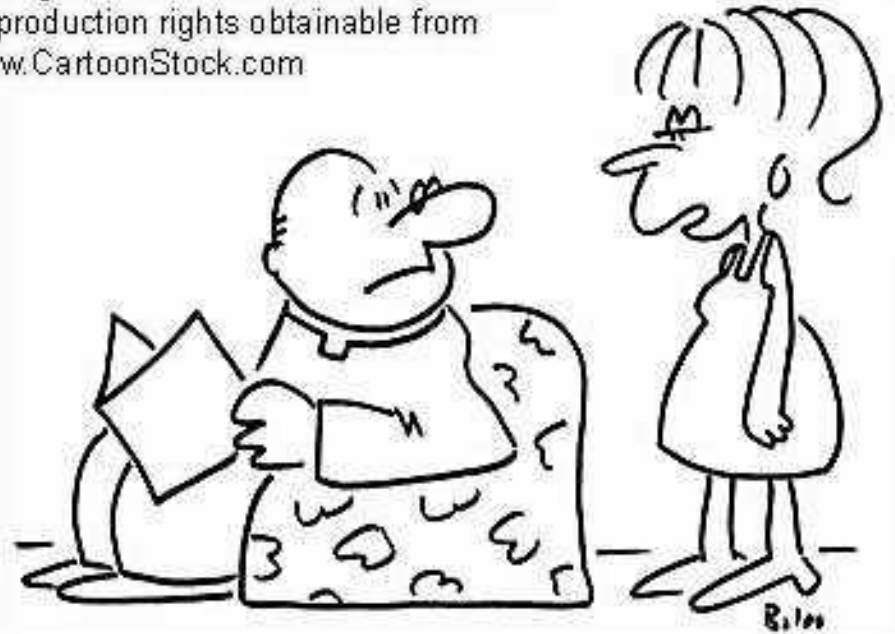
Basic Definitions

□ What is a parable?

- ✓ “[A] *parable* is an expanded analogy used to convince and persuade.” (Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 9)
- ✓ “A *parable* is an extended metaphor and as such it is not a delivery system for an idea but a house in which the reader/listener is invited to take up residence.” (Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 280)

The Role of Parables

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"Have you ever heard the parable of the lawn left unmowed?"

- ❑ Parables present theological truths with *simplicity* and *impact*.
- ❑ Parables capture the *interest* of the audience through the *vivid imagery* of a story.

The Role of Parables

- ❑ Jesus often employs parables to *convict* and *condemn* his opponents.
- ❑ Jesus told parables to *instruct* and *motivate* his disciples.

The Role of Parables

- ❑ Jesus told parables to *explain* who God is and communicate God's *expectations* for his listeners.

The Meaning of Parables

6 Helpful Classifications

The Meaning of Parables

1. *Similitude*: “An extended analogy which lacks plot development”

- ✓ There is action but no plot
- ✓ No problem needing resolution
- ✓ More straightforward
- ✓ Less confrontive
- ✓ Less representational

Example: The kingdom is like a woman who took leaven and hid it in three measures of dough until the whole was leavened.

The Meaning of Parables

2. *Interrogative Parables*: “those parables that are presented entirely as questions.”

- ✓ Lack plot development and logical function
- ✓ Key is the use of questions (intro, middle, end)
- ✓ “Who from among you” (tij evx u`mw/n)
- ✓ The “who from you” question always expects a negative answer

Examples: Lost Sheep (Matt 18:12-14/Lk 15:4-7);
Friend at Midnight (Lk 11:5-8)

The Meaning of Parables

3. *Double Indirect Narrative Parables*: “A fictitious story which narrates a particular event, is usually told in the past tense, and is intended to convey a moral or spiritual truth (e.g., the Prodigal Son).”

- ✓ 3 types of plot development
- ✓ An event generating a problem or possibility which stimulates further action to bring resolution or closure.
- ✓ Dialog signals the point where resolution begins
- ✓ May be intentionally open-ended so that the hearer/reader must ponder what should happen (e.g.- Fig Tree [Lk 13:6-9]).

Example: Parable of the Banquet (Lk 14:15-24)

The Meaning of Parables

4. *Juridical Parables*: “By hiding their referent, juridical parables elicit a self-condemnation from the hearer(s) through the aid of an image.”

- ✓ Among the best known and most forceful parables.
- ✓ Key thrust: The hearer is forced to judge the circumstances of the parable and then the lens drops and one realizes that he or she has judged him or herself.
- ✓ Require concluding explanations
- ✓ May be intentionally open-ended so that the hearer/reader must ponder what should happen

Example: Nathan and David (2 Sam 12:1-14); Two Sons (Matt 21:28-32); Wicked Tenants (Matt 21:33-45/Mk 12:1-12/Lk 20:9-19); and the Two Debtors (Lk 7:40-47).

The Meaning of Parables

5. *Single Indirect Parables*: “Present a positive or negative character (or both) who serves as an example to be imitated or whose traits and actions are to be avoided.”

✓ Address the reader indirectly by telling of another person but directly by treating the subject at hand.

✓ They are staged portraits of reality.

✓ Either implicitly or explicitly urges the reader to imitate the action.

Example: Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37); Rich Fool (Lk 12:16-21); Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31); Pharisee and the Toll Collector (Lk 18:9-14)

The Meaning of Parables

6. *“How much more” Parables*: These parables function to say that God’s action far exceeds or is not at all like the person depicted in the parable.

- ✓ Explicitly or implicitly contrast human action with God’s action.
- ✓ Determined by function not form
- ✓ Often belongs to another classification
- ✓ Some are interrogative parables without plot development, and some are narrative parables with plot development.

Example: Unjust Judge (Lk 18:1-8)

The Meaning of Parables

Principles of Interpretation

Principles of Interpretation

1. Analyze the *sequence, structure* and *wording* of the parable.
2. Listen to the parable without presupposition as to its *form* or *meaning*.
3. Remember that Jesus' parables were *oral instruments* in a largely oral culture.

Principles of Interpretation

4. Note the *cultural* or *historical* features in the parable that provide insight.
5. Listen to the parables in the context of the *ministry* of Jesus.
6. Note how the parable fits into the *plan* and *purposes* of the Gospel in which it appears.

Principles of Interpretation

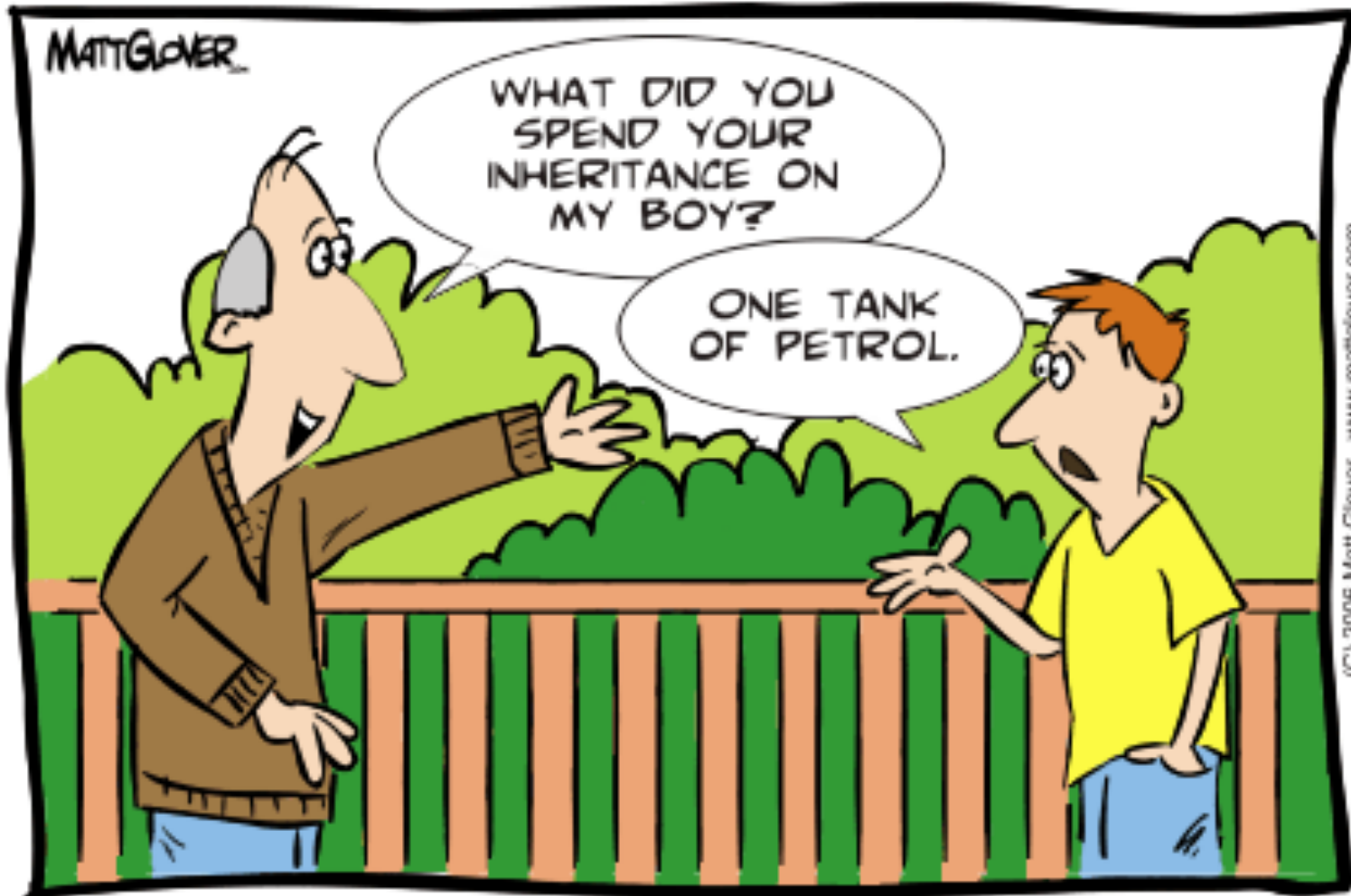
7. Determine the function of the story as a whole in the teaching of *Jesus* and for the *Evangelists*.
8. Interpret what is *given*, not what is *omitted*.
9. Do not impose *real* time on *parable* time.
(cf. Matt 22:1-14; Lk 14:15-24)

Principles of Interpretation

10. Pay special attention to the *end* of the story.

11. Determine the *theological significance* of the story.

The Message of Parables



Why the 2006 'Prodigal Son' never gets far...

The Message of Parables

A. Jesus' parables address the *nature* and *implications* of God's Kingdom.

B. Jesus' parables address the *heart condition* and *response* of national Israel.

The Message of Parables

C. Jesus' parables address the *use* and *abuse* of money.

D. Jesus' parables address the *cost* and *commitment* of discipleship.

The Message of Parables

E. Jesus' parables address the *scope* and *severity* of God's future judgment.

F. Jesus' parables convey the *beauty* of God's *character*.

Biblical Examples

*Luke 11:5-8 “Parable of
the Friend at Midnight”*

Biblical Examples

*Luke 14:15-24 “The Parable
of the Great Banquet”*

Biblical Examples

Luke 14:28-33 “Parables of the Builder and King”

Biblical Examples

*Luke 7:40-47 “Parable
of the Two Debtors”*

Biblical Examples

Luke 10:25-37 “The Good Samaritan”

