

IN **NEXT**
LEVEL

IN NEXT LEVEL

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SESSION 1

-One of the problems with studying the parables of Jesus is that we know the punchline to the stories (i.e. we know how they end).

-In this lesson we tell three stories outside of the Gospels to help us prepare for the study of the parables of Jesus.

Three stories:

1: Story of the Jewish tailor—there is such a thing as an enigmatic ending! Story leaves you wanting more!

2: Story of the needy family with student in the signature group, “Impact Brass and Singers.” Story of the bad guy being the good guy!

3: Story of the broken car and helping female faculty member by biker. Story of wrong perceptions and leaving open-ended.

-Enigma, bad guys doing well, and wrong perceptions and open-ended are all characteristics of Jesus’ parables.

SESSION 2

Resources

-Kenneth Bailey says that Jesus was a “metaphoric theologian.” Well, if that’s true we are probably going to need some help understanding him because metaphor, symbolism and analogies are not always easy to interpret.

Resources (from most significant to lesser significant):

- 1) Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*.
- 2) Kenneth Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes, Poet and Peasant*, and *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*.
- 3) Gary Burge, *Jesus the Storyteller*.
- 4) Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*.
- 5) Craig Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables*.
- 6) Roy Clements, *A Sting in the Tale*.
- 7) C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*.
- 8) William Herzog, *The Parables as Subversive Speech*.
- 9) Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*.
- 10) Simon Kistemaker, *The Parables of Jesus*.
- 11) Prentice Meador, *Stories that Astonish*.
- 12) Brian Stiller, *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns*.
- 13) Warren Wiersbe, *Meet Yourself in the Parables*.
- 14) David Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus*.
- 15) John W. Sider, *Interpreting the Parables*.
- 16) Brian Stiller, *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns*.

SESSION 3

Defining Parable

-One sure way to go boring in the first part of a lesson is to say, “Webster says...” But we have to risk that here.

- 1) Parable (parabole) = throw beside. Thus, a “comparison.”
- 2) It’s an “anecdotal” comparison—earthly story with heavenly meaning, and longer than the rabbis. In this light it goes back to narrative prophets. It’s more anecdotal due to being from the Hebrew word, “mashal” (closer to proverb or riddle).
- 3) It’s a true-to-life comparison—McQuilkin’s thought. Not fairy tales—at least at first.
- 4) It’s a true-to-life comparison that can leave you dumbfounded but open to the way of God in the world.
- 5) It’s a true-to-life comparison that can break out into fiction. Watch for this because something strange is happening. It might indicate the invasion of the grace of God.
- 6) Dodd, “At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature of common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.”
- 7) Finally, Herzog helps us by adding that parables are *subverted* comparisons.

SESSION 4

Antecedents

-Parables are not unique to Jesus—what he did with them is somewhat unique.

-There were Hasidic tales, Sufi stories, and Zen anecdotes. Some say there were Buddhist and Chinese ones. Supposedly Aesop's fables can be traced to Syrian origins.

-But we have some OT ones, and Judaism has its fair share.

1) The best one (2 Sam. 12:1-14)

2) Others:

-2 Sam. 14:1-20 Joab sent woman from Tekoa to David—parable of two sons.

-1 Kings 20:35-42 Parable of the Disguised Prophet.

-Judges 9:7-15 Parable of the Olive Tree and Thorn Bush.

-2 Kings 14:9-10 Parable of the Thistle and Cedar.

-Eze. 16:1-54 Parable of Unfaithful Israel; 17:2-24 Parable of the 2 Eagles and the Vine; 19:2-9 Parable of the Lions and Cubs; 19:10-14 Parable of the Vine and Vineyard; 23:1-49 Parable of Two Sisters; 24:3-14 Parable of the Pot.

-Rabbinic ones are much shorter. One in the Mishna (Niddah 5:2, 7 and 9).

-Greco-Roman Ones are actually closer in form to how Jesus taught.

1) They tend to be more poetic than those of Christ.

2) Seneca used ones that were primarily *interrogative* parables.

3) Later they tended in the direction of *persuasion*.

-Jesus drew upon some of these AND the people to whom Jesus spoke had a reservoir from which to draw to interpret them.

SESSION 5

Functions

-“Parables sound absolutely ordinary; casual stories about soil and seeds, meals and coins and sheep, bandits and victims, farmers and merchants. And they are wholly secular; of his forty or so parables recorded in the Gospels, only one has its setting in church and only a couple mention the name God. As people heard Jesus tell these stories, they saw at once that they weren’t about God, so there was nothing in them threatening their own sovereignty. They relaxed their defenses. They walked away perplexed, wondering what they meant, the stories lodged in their imagination. And then, like a bomb, they would explode in their unprotected hearts. An abyss opened up at their feet. He was talking about God; they had been invaded” (Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 32).

-“They take the mind off the thing they would put their mind on” (Arthurs, 108). “First, stories disarm resistance” (Arthurs, 110).

-Multiple Functions and Purposes:

- 1) Like a picture.
- 2) Like a mirror.
- 3) Like a window—These first three are from Warren Wiersbe.
- 4) Like a punchline of a joke or a punch in the gut. Jeffrey Arthurs suggests that we learn how to pass the punch along.
- 5) Like holy sandpaper.
- 6) Like an ellipsis (Reference is to Luke 11. It should be Luke 13).
- 7) Like indirect lighting.
- 8) Like the point of an arrow in a chiasm.
- 9) Like seeds planted in soil.
- 10) Like a political, religious and social subversion.

SESSION 6

Purposes

-Functions are very similar to Purposes. There are many purposes of parables. So we will expand Lesson 5 into this lesson on purposes.

-Subversion: “Whatever the foreground theme of a parable is, therefore, there is often a deep structure element of subversion at work by which conventional ways of viewing reality and/or valuing things is called into question. The general import of this technique is to announce that the kingdom Christ announces is based on new values, with special emphasis on divine grace as opposed to human merit” (Ryken, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 624).

-What might Jesus be subverting?

- 1) Politically: Oppressed.
- 2) Culturally: Agrarian.
- 3) Socially: Shame and Honor; Rich and Poor.
- 4) Religiously: Elite vs. people of the land.
- 5) Racially: Jew, Gentile, and Samaritan.

-How does the subversion work?

- 1) By drawing on common/stock images—speak language of customer; used familiar main characters—who played God roles?
- 2) By making uncommon connections (Lk. 10:25-37; 12:16-21; 16:19-31; 13:6-9; 15:1-32; 18:9-14)—part of the purpose was to polarize the responses of the hearers.

-Other purposes:

1) Reveal/Conceal truth (Lk. 19:11-12; Matt. 13:1-17)—he conceals because he wants to make sure that only the interested survive in parables and he wants to “deceive into truth” (Kierkegaard).

2) Engender memory (Lk. 10:25-37).

3) Persuade—or not (Matt. 21:45)—sift; alienate.

4) Fulfill prophecy (Matt. 13:35).

5) Lay claim to deity (Matt. 22:2).

SESSION 7

Historical Background: the Dress of the Parable

-Bailey helps us greatly here.

-Issues at stake:

- 1) Where the parable flies to fantasy and leaves “true-to-life.”
- 2) Where we are culturally unable to hear (Lk. 15:12, 13, 25).
- 3) Skipping details—“down” (Lk. 10:30).
- 4) Assessing cultural background—Tonya from Russia.
- 5) When background becomes foreground.

-Parables where it matters:

- 1) Wadis (Matt. 7:24-27).
- 2) Wine making (Matt. 9:17).
- 3) Soils (Matt. 13:3-8).
- 4) Squatter’s rights (Matt. 13:44; 21:33-44).
- 5) Darnel seeds (Matt. 13:24-30).
- 6) Closets in ancient houses (Matt. 13:52).
- 7) Hiring people late in the day (Matt. 20:1-16).
- 8) Wedding customs (Matt. 22:2-14; 25:1-13).
- 9) Hospitality (Lk. 11:5-8; 18:2-8).
- 10) Managers (Lk. 16:1-8).

SESSION 8

Special Features

- 1) Pay attention to the cousin of parables—narrative. Though Jeffrey Arthurs reminds us that parables aren't "pure" narratives.
- 2) Pay attention to keeping the story within the story of the Gospel. See "Where are the Subversive Stories" (handout).
- 3) Pay attention to end stress.
- 4) Pay attention to referents and strange twists—conclusions don't seem to follow; syllogisms broken.
- 5) Pay attention to retaining or re-inventing the shock value.
- 6) Pay attention to Christology—find Jesus.

NEXT LEVEL: SUPPLEMENT TO SESSION 8
WHERE ARE THESE SUBVERSIVE STORIES
Mark Scott

NOTE #1: Justifiable lists can be found in books that interpret the parables as well as places such as the *NIV Study Bible* under Lk. 15 (1570-1571) or the Snodgrass article in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (595). In chronological order:

<u>Parable:</u>	<u>Matthew</u>	<u>Mark</u>	<u>Luke</u>
Lamp Under the Bowl	5:14-15	4:21-22	8:16; 11:33
Wise & Foolish Builders	7:24-27		6:47-49
New Cloth on Old Garment	9:16	2:21	5:36
New Wine in Old Wineskins	9:17	2:22	5:37-38
Sower and the Soils	13:3-8, 18-23	4:3-8, 14-20	8:5-8, 11-15
Wheat and Tares	13:24-30, 36-43		
Mustard Seed	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19
Yeast	13:33		
Hidden Treasure	13:44		
Valuable Pearl	13:45-46		
Fisherman's Net	13:47-50		
Owner of the House	13:52		
Lost Sheep	18:12-14		15:4-7
Unmerciful Servant	18:23-34		
Workers in the Vineyard	20:1-16		
Two Sons	21:28-32		
Tenants	21:33-44	12:1-11	20:9-18
Wedding Banquet	22:2-14		
Fig Tree	24:32-35	13:28-29	21:29-31
Faithful and Wise Servant	24:45-51		12:42-48
Ten Virgins	25:1-13		
Talents (and minas)	25:14-30		19:12-27
Sheep and Goats	25:31-46		
Growing Seed		4:26-29	
Watchful Servants		13:35-37	12:35-40
Moneylender			7:41-43
Good Samaritan			10:30-37
Friend in Need			11:5-8
Rich Fool			12:16-21
Unfruitful Fig Tree			13:6-9
Lowest Seat			14:7-14

<u>Parable</u>	<u>Matthew</u>	<u>Mark</u>	<u>Luke</u>
Great Banquet			14:16-24
Cost of Discipleship			14:28-33
Lost Coin			15:8-10
Lost (prodigal) Son			15:11-32
Shrewd Manager			16:1-8
Rich Man and Lazarus			16:19-31
Master and his Servant			17:7-10
Persistent Widow			18:2-8
Pharisee and Tax Collector			18:10-14

NOTE #2: The above list does not include passages such as:

The Strong Man Bound	12:29-30	3:22-27	11:21-23
Father and Children's Requests	7:9-11		11:11-13
Two Ways and Two Doors	7:13-14		13:23-27
Thief in the Night	24:42-44		12:39-40
Good and Bad Trees	7:16-20		
Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:1-18)			
True Vine (Jn. 15:1-8)			

Or passages such as small similes, e.g. Mk. 7:17

SESSION 9

Walking Through Some Parables

1) Luke 15:1-32

2) Matt 22:1-14

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WITH YOUR LIFE,
BUT NOT SURE WHERE TO START?
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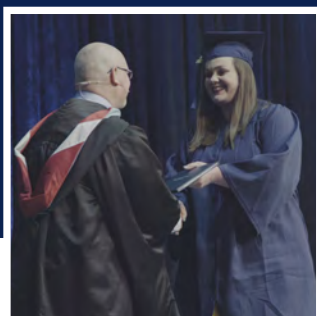
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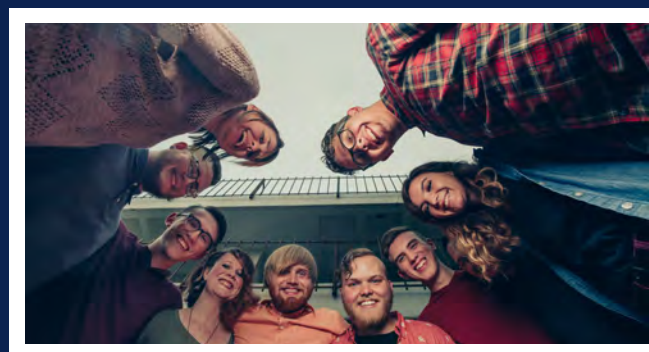


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