INTERPRETING THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Diocesan Certificate of Biblical Studies 26 October, 16 and 23 November 2019

LESSON 1

SEEDTIME &HARVEST

Parables of Growth and Promise

Part 1

OBJECTIVES

- 1 To introduce, define, and categorize the Parables of Jesus according to their common themes and historical contexts.
- 2 To acquire and apply a method and a set of skills for interpreting the Parables.
- 3To interpret and apply the meanings of the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4:1-20 and context.

I: The Stories Jesus Told

A: What Parables Are

Parables are:

- 1 Comparisons
 of a known to an unknown
- 2 Snapshots
 of the Kingdom of heaven
- 3 Narratives
 or extended comparisons.
 Only some parables are narratives / stories.

B: What Parables Are Not

- 1 Most parables are not allegories
 - 2 Parables are not moral generalisations

C: Why Jesus Spoke in Parables?

What Parables Do?

What Parables Do

- 1 Parables reveal the Kingdom to insiders (disciples)
- 2 Parables conceal the kingdom from outsiders
- 3 Parables proclaim the kingdom of God
- 4 Parables reflect. They hold up a mirror to human & divine nature

What Parables Do

- 5 Capture the reality at hand
- 6 Disturb, disrupt, deconstruct us and our world. Parables are dangerous.
- 7 Exaggerate, arrest, tease, and surprise
- 8 Engage the hearer and call for a response, a conversion!

D: Parables in Context

in literary context in historical context

PARABLES OF SEEDTIME & HARVEST The Presence & Promise of the Kingdom of Heaven

- 1 The Sower
- 2 The Seed Growing Secretly
- 3 The Mustard Seed
- 4 The Leaven
- 5 The Patch and Wineskins
- 6 The Friend at Midnight
- 7 The Father's Good Gifts

2 PARABLES OF SEARCH AND RESCUE: The Mission of the Kingdom / The Father's Great Love and Mercy for Sinners

- 8 The Physician and His Patients
- 9 The Two Debtors
- 10 The Lost Sheep
- 11 The Lost Coin
- 12 The Prodigal Son
- 13 The Pharisee and the Tax Collector
- 14 The Good Employer / Workers in the Vineyard

PARABLES OF COSTLY GRACE: Disciples of the Kingdom. Conditions of Discipleship. The Community of the Kingdom.

- 15 The Bridegroom and the Wedding Guests
- 16 The Salt of the Earth
- 17 The Lamp and the Basket
- 18 The Lamp of the Body
- 19 Mr. Crow & Sister Rose or Birds and Flowers
- 20 Log in the Eye
- 21 Eye of the Needle

PARABLES OF COSTLY GRACE: Disciples of the Kingdom. Conditions of Discipleship. The Community of the Kingdom.

- 22 The Treasure and the Pearl
- 23 Treasures New and Old
- 24 The Unmerciful Servant / Unforgiving Slave
- 25 The Good Samaritan
- 26 The Tower Builder
- 27 The Slave at Duty / The Servant's Reward
- 28 The Unjust Judge

PARABLES OF THE HOUR OF DECISION: The Challenge and Crisis of the Kingdom

- 29 The Defendant / Going Before the Judge
- 30 The Return of the Unclean Spirit
- 31 The Two Houses / Wise & Foolish Builders
- 32 Fire on the Earth
- 33 The Barren Fig Tree
- 34 The Narrow Gate / Closed Door
- 35 The Tower Builder
- 36 The King Going to War
- 37 The Children in the Marketplace
- 38 A Generation Unaware

PARABLES OF THE HOUR OF DECISION: The Challenge and Crisis of the Kingdom

- 39 The Two Sons
- 40 Gnat & Camel, Cup & Plate, Whitewashed Tombs
- 41 Things that Defile
- 42 The Wicked Tenants / Husbandmen
- 43 The Shrewd Steward / Unjust Steward
- 44 The Rich Man and Lazarus / Six Brothers
- 45 The Great Banquet & Supper
- 46 The Guest Without a Wedding Garment .
- 47 The Carcass and the Eagles
- 48 The Rich Fool

5 PARABLES OF THE FINAL HOUR / THE HOUR OF RECKONING: The Consummation of the Kingdom / The Parousia Parables

- 49 The Waiting Slaves / Servants
- 50 The Thief in the Night / Burglar
- 51 The Faithful & Wise Slave / Entrusted Servant
- 52 The Ten Maidens / Bridesmaids
- 53 The Talents
- 54 One Taken the Other Left

5 PARABLES OF THE FINAL HOUR / THE HOUR OF RECKONING: The Consummation of the Kingdom / The Parousia Parables

- 55 The Budding Fig-Tree
- 56 The Weeds and the Wheat or the Tares
- 57 The Dragnet / Seine-net
- 58 The Strong Man Bound / Despoiled
- 59 The Sheep and Goats or Last Judgment

All are parables of the kingdom!

- 1 Parables of Seedtime and Harvest
- 2 Parables of Search and Rescue
- 3 Parables of Costly Grace
- 4 Parables of the Hour of Decision
- 5 The Final Hour or Hour of Reckoning

E: How to Interpret a Parable

SEVEN GUIDELINES

- 1 Don't over-interpret
- 2 Focus on key points of reference (metaphors / symbols)
- 3 Don't push analogy too far
- 4 Don't historicise parables

SEVEN GUIDELINES

- 5 Remember the rules of storytelling
- 6 Listen with imagination
- 7 Let the story draw you into its reality (down the rabbit-hole)



Steps to Interpreting a STEPS PAPALETIONS

STEP 1: HEAR / RECEIVE / REFLECT ON THE STORY AS A STORY

QUESTION 1: Storyline

What is basic storyline or plot of the parable, if there is one? What are your first impressions as you read through the story? Is there anything odd, surprising, shocking, or contrary to normal expectations?

STEP 2: THE SITUATION-IN-LIFE QUESTION 2:

What was the most likely situation in the ministry of Jesus in which this parable was originally spoken? This is the "setting-in-life" question. It includes the occasion in the life of Jesus that called forth the parable, the immediate literary context, the larger biblical background, and the historical-cultural background, especially on items in the story.

STEP 3: FORM A JUDGMENT ON THE ACTION IN THE STORY

QUESTION 3: Form a Judgment

How does the parable invite the hearer to form a judgment and about what? In other words, what conclusion do you think Jesus wished his hearers to draw from this parable?

STEP 4: DETERMINE THE ORIGINAL MEANING OF THE PARABLE IN CONTEXT (from story to kingdom)

QUESTION 4: Comparison & Contrast

What, if anything, is being compared or contrasted internally within the parable, and how does this correspond to something about God and the kingdom of heaven?

STEP 4: DETERMINE THE ORIGINAL MEANING OF THE PARABLE

QUESTION 5: Meaning in Jesus' Context

What is the essential meaning of the parable in its original context? How does it apply to those who stood in that situation and heard the parable firsthand from Jesus?

STEP 5: APPLY THE MEANINGS OF THE PARABLE FOR TODAY

QUESTION 6: Meaning in Literary Context

How does the author of this Gospel apply the meanings of the parable to the believers to whom he is writing? What it meant?

How do you apply the meanings of this parable to believers or pre-believers today?

What it means?

For your personal life, your church, your community, your culture, your nation? This is the take-away. What are some practical implications for discipleship, witness, and mission?

STEP 1: HEAR / RECEIVE / REFLECT ON THE STORY AS A STORY

QUESTION 1: Story-Line

What is basic story-line or plot of the parable, if there is one? What are your first impressions as you read through the story? Is there anything odd, surprising, shocking, or contrary to normal expectations?

II: THE SOWER: A Call to Responsible Hearing

A: STEP 1 Hear the Story of the Sower

STEP 1: HEAR / RECEIVE / REFLECT ON THE STORY AS A STORY

QUESTION 1: Story-Line

What is basic story-line or plot of the parable, if there is one? What are your first impressions as you read through the story? Is there anything odd, surprising, shocking, or contrary to normal expectations?

Mark 4:1-3

Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. ² And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³ "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow.

Mark 4:4-7

And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.

ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION

Mark 4:8-9

And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

⁹ And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

B: STEP 2 The Sower setting-in-life

STEP 2: THE SITUATION-IN-LIFE QUESTION 2:

What was the most likely situation in the ministry of Jesus in which this parable was originally spoken? This is the "setting-in-life" question.

Hints: Mark 2:7; 3:13-19, 31-35; 4:1; 6:1-6; Matthew 13:2; Luke 8:4; John 6:60-66.

What is the setting-in-life (occasion) of the Parable of the Sower?

Setting-in-life includes common and current ideas.

Sirach 40:15 The children of the ungodly put out few branches; they are unhealthy roots on sheer rock.

Jeremiah 4:3 Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns.

Ecclesiastes 11:6 In the morning sow your seed, and at evening do not let your hands be idle; for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

C: STEP 3 Form a Judgment on the Action in the Story

STEP 3: FORM A JUDGMENT ON THE ACTION IN THE STORY

QUESTION 3: Form a Judgment

How does the parable invite the hearer to form a judgment and about what? In other words, what conclusion do you think Jesus wished his hearers to draw from this parable?

D: STEP 4 From Story to Kingdom

STEP 4: DETERMINE THE ORIGINAL MEANING OF THE PARABLE IN CONTEXT

QUESTION 4: Comparison & Contrast

What, if anything, is being compared or contrasted internally within the parable, and how does this correspond to something about God and the kingdom of heaven?

QUESTION 5: Meaning in Jesus' Context

What is the essential meaning of the parable in its original context? How does it apply to those who stood in that situation and heard the parable firsthand from Jesus?

What is the main point of the Parable of the Sower?

- 1 The sure and certain coming of the kingdom of God
- 2 A call and challenge to responsible hearing of the Word of God

EISTEP 5 The Sower and the Soil what it means

STEP 5: APPLY THE MEANINGS OF THE PARABLE FOR TODAY

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How does the author of this Gospel apply the meanings of the parable to the believers to whom he is writing? What it meant?

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INVITATIONS TO RESPOND AND PRAY

- 1 Hearts that Hurry
- 2 Hearts that Harden
 - 3 Hearts that Choke
 - 4 Hearts that Hear

INVITATIONS TO RESPOND & 1 Hearts that Hurry

Mark 4:4 And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

Luke 8:5 ... some fell on the path and was trampled on...

Mark 4:15 These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.

Matthew 4:4 People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. NLT

2 Hearts that Harden

Mark 4:5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil.

:16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy.

:17 And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. ESV

Hebrews 3:7-8 Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as on the day of testing in the wilderness.

3 Hearts that Choke

Mark 4:7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.

:18-19 And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, ¹⁹ but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing.

Elder Paisios of Mount Athos: If one is to work on one's fallow soul, one must first weed out all the thorns, its passions, and then plant virtues in their place. However, this process is an arduous one and requires a strong will and great patience.

4 Hearts that Hear

Mark 4:8-9 Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." 9 And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!

:20 And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.

Emil Brunner: Reception does not depend upon God, neither on the sower, nor on the seed; it depends on man's decision.

Luke 8:15 But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.

INVITATIONS TO RESPOND AND PRAY

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