

Jesus' Parables

Part I, An Introduction

What is your favorite parable?

What is a parable?

Most commentators are reluctant to give a definition, but here is perhaps the most appropriate: "An earthly story with a heavenly meaning." Will not work in every case, but covers the majority.

Interpretation of Parables

Two Basic Approaches

Spiritual Significance in everything (allegory)	Teaching one main point
1	4

A Bit of History of Interpretation of Parables

Allegory – an allegory gives meaning to every single point. Started from the very beginning in 2nd century.

Reformers – "Scripture alone", they stopped using allegory, EXCEPT with parables.

Jülicher – a liberal theologian (bad) who pointed out that each parable has a single main point (good); 1888AD

Solid Principles for Interpreting Parables

The Tertium Principle – there is one point of comparison between a parable and spiritual truth. All details must serve that point.

The Whole Bible Context Principle or “Analogy of Faith” – nothing in a parable can contradict the Bible, no new doctrines from an “unclear” passage like a parable; look at immediate context (“Why did Jesus say this? To whom? Did he explain meaning?”)

An interesting, and for the most part good, commentary on the history of the interpretation of parables can be found at:

<http://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/parables-i/biblical-hermeneutics/robert-stein>

Jesus on His Parables

What Jesus has to say about parables in Matthew

13:10-17

10-12a – Purpose was to teach more about God’s kingdom; make the rich richer

12b-15 – Those who reject God will reject these as well, and thus be spiritually impoverished

16-17 - Parables are blessings in which we can rejoice; here we learn what even the prophets would have loved to learn.

Parables of Jesus

Nearly all are from Matthew and Luke

Jesus spoke many more (John 21:25; Matthew 13:34)

Why a Parable?

What is the benefit of a parable? What does a parable do?

As a story, it gets you involved; you contemplate other possibilities

For example, the Parable of the Good Samaritan could have been given in a one word answer to a question (Luke 10:29), but Jesus instead told a somewhat lengthy story.

Why?

Then why not all parables?

A parable also has limitations. It must be based on some already known information. It takes a lot of time to convey information. It is not as precise as straight talk.

A parable is one very useful tool in the toolbox of teaching.

The Parables of Jesus

This is not a comprehensive list of all the statements of Jesus which could be considered parables. It contains all explicit references to parables and many of the comparisons Jesus spoke which strongly resemble parables. This does not include Jesus' "I Am" statements which do, in some ways, resemble parables.

I have attempted to fit the subject matter of the parables into broad themes. Most of them have a more focused point than the broad theme listed in the subject column.

Much of this information is from the *Thompson Chain-Reference Bible*, Chain Index #2679.

Parables which occur in only one of the Gospels:

Parable	Reference	Subject	Notation
Weeds	Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43	End Times	✓
Hidden Treasure	Matthew 13:44	Faith	✓
Fine Pearl	Matthew 13:45-46	Faith	✓
Net	Matthew 13:47-50	Church/End Times	✓
Unmerciful Servant	Matthew 18:21-35	Forgiveness	✓
Workers In the Vineyard	Matthew 20:1-16	Faith/End Times	✓
Two Sons	Matthew 21:28-32	Sanctification	✓ (v.33)
Wedding Banquet	Matthew 22:1-14	Faith/End Times	✓
Ten Virgins	Matthew 25:1-13	End Times	✓
Talents	Matthew 25:14-30	End Times/ Sanctification	✓
Sheep and Goats	Matthew 25:31-33	End Times	—
House Divided	Mark 3:23-30	Faith	✓
Growing Seed	Mark 4:26-29	God's Word/Faith	✓
Householder	Mark 13:32-37	End Times	○
Blind Leading Blind	Luke 6:39-40	Sanctification	✓
Two Debtors	Luke 7:41-47	Forgiveness	○
Good Samaritan	Luke 10:25-37	Love for Neighbor	○
Friend At Night	Luke 11:5-8	Prayer	○
Rich Fool	Luke 12:13-21	Sanctification	✓
Wise Servant	Luke 12:31-48	Sanctification/End Times	✓ (v.41)
Barren Fig Tree	Luke 13:6-9	Sanctification	✓
Seat Of Honor	Luke 14:7-11	Faith/Sanctification	✓
Great Banquet	Luke 14:15-24	Faith, Call to	○
Lost Coin	Luke 15:8-10	Repentance	✓ (v.3)
Lost Son	Luke 15:11-32	Repentance	✓ (v.3)
Shrewd Manager	Luke 16:1-15	Sanctification	○
Rich Man and Lazarus	Luke 16:19-31	Faith/God's Word	○

Unworthy Servants	Luke 17:7-10	Sanctification	○
Persistent Widow	Luke 18:1-8	Prayer	✓
The Pharisee and the Tax Collector	Luke 18:9-14	Repentance	✓
Ten Minas	Luke 19:11-27	End Times/ Sanctification	✓

Parables which occur in more than one of the Gospels:

House On A Rock	Matthew 7:24-27 Luke 6:46-49	Faith/Sanctification	—
New Cloth	Matthew 9:15-16 Mark 2:19-21 Luke 5:34-36	Faith/New Covenant	✓
New Wine	Matthew 9:15,17 Mark 2:19,20,22 Luke 5:34-35, 37-39	Faith/New Covenant	✓
Sower	Matthew 13:1-23 Mark 4:1-20 Luke 8:1-15	Faith/God's Word	✓
Mustard Seed	Matthew 13:31-32 Mark 4:30-32 Luke 13:18-19	Faith	✓
Yeast	Matthew 13:33 Luke 13:20-21	Faith	✓
Unclean Food and the Heart	Matthew 15:10-20 Mark 7:14-23	Sanctification	✓
Lost Sheep	Matthew 18:10-14 Luke 15:1-7	Repentance	✓
Wicked Tenants <i>(The story is not identical in all three accounts.)</i>	Matthew 21:33-46 Mark 12:1-12 Luke 20:9-19	Faith	✓
Fig Tree	Matthew 24:32-33 Mark 13:28-29 Luke 21:29-31	End Time	✓

✓ - This symbol indicates parables which specifically use the word “parable” or “the kingdom of heaven is like...”

— - This symbol indicates that the text designates this as a parable in some way other than explicitly saying it is a parable or like the kingdom of God.

○ - This symbol indicates that nothing in the text specifies this as a parable.