

Lecture 16 – Parables: Definitions, Strategies & Interpretation

When He was alone, the twelve and the others asked Him about the parables. Mark 4:10 (NIV)

Key Terms

Parable (continued), simile, allegory, Blomberg's key theses

Objectives

- *To provide an introductory definition of a parable
- *To identify, compare, and contrast various types of parables
- *To outline, analyze, and evaluate Blomberg's thesis regarding interpretation of parables

Lead Questions

- *What are some different kinds of parables? What does the parable in Luke 11:1-13 teach about prayer?

Parables: Definitions, Strategies & Interpretation

I. Extra-Biblical Parables, and the Way They Work

- A. The parable of the bird: graphic language, surprise ending, illustrating need of context.
- B. Rabbinic parables: illustrative, but without surprise. Buttrressing traditional morality.

II. Definitions of Parables

- A. Greek παραβολή (*parabole*, "parable") includes proverb (Luke 4:23), riddle (Mark 8:33), comparisons (Matthew 13), long and short stories (Luke 13:6-9, 15:21-32).
- B. Definitions by theologians, emphasizing "full-length" parables. A parable is:
 1. "A figure of speech in which there is a comparison," (Stein, *Parables* 22).
 2. "An earthly story that conveys moral or spiritual principles," (Stein, *Parables* 15).
 3. A story with two levels of meaning: "The story level holds up a mirror by which reality is perceived and understood" (Snodgrass, 594).
 4. "A metaphor drawn from life arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, leaving the mind in enough doubt about its significance to tease it into active thought" (Dodd, *Parables*).

III. Types of Parables and Multiple Strategies of Parables

- A. Varieties of parables. Jesus uses strategies appropriate to time, audience, goals.
 1. Various literary styles: short similes, example stories, full story, allegory.
 2. Various topics: parables of judgment, of grace, of decision, etc.
 3. Parables analyzed by referent: kingdom, people (adversaries and allies).
- B. Kingdom parables and people parables
 1. Kingdom parables are allegorical, clear to disciples. Decoding necessary. Example: two sons, tenant farmer. Method: decode original meaning, then apply it today.
 2. People parables are low level allegory. One character is everyman. May be open ended.
- C. Settings of parables
 1. Time Last week: confrontational. Earlier: more didactic.
 2. Audience: Instruction of 12 tends to be more clear, motivational, and illustrative.
- D. Categories combining interest in referent, method, time and recipient

<u>Type/Topic</u>	<u>Method</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Prime Audience</u>
Kingdom	allegorical, clear in end	middle ministry	disciples
Everyday people	translucent, open-end	middle ministry	crowds encounters
Controversy	explicit, punch-line	late, last week	opponent

E. Examples

1. Kingdom: the sower, unforgiving servant, mustard, king at war, virgins, talents
2. People (Luke 9-19): rich fool, lost sheep, coins, sons, shrewd manager, persistent widow
3. Controversy: Pharisee and tax collector, two sons, wicked tenant farmers.

IV. Interpretation of Parables, with Review of Blomberg

A. Introduction to Blomberg's Key Theses

1. Most Christian interpreters have taken the parables as allegories until the 20th century.
2. They were fundamentally correct in doing so, even if flawed by a lack of restraint.
3. Earlier theologians only erred in allegorizing too many of the features of the parables.

B. Defense

1. Allegorical interpretation begins with Jesus' teaching.
2. There is a continuum between simile, metaphor, and allegory.
3. Even confirmed opponents of allegorical interpretation cannot avoid it in practice.

C. Theme: Responsible exegesis can continue even if parables are allegorical. Principles:

1. Allegory is a rhetorical device which gives a symbolic dimension. It need not lead to embellishments the author could never have intended.
2. Spotting allegory: An extravagant unrealistic detail may point to another level of meaning.
3. The rule of proportional analogies prevents unbridled speculation: Allegorical elements of a parable should be cast in.
4. The form, "A is to B as a is to b with respect to x."
 - a. Example, the banquet (Luke 14). The giver of the banquet is to the invitees as Jesus is to the Jews, thus: The expected guests did not come to party, so host invited outcasts in their place.
 - b. Good Samaritan: Jesus is to the lawyer as the good Samaritan is to the man in the ditch, in that one who seems to be an opponent (or, an unexpected person) comes to his rescue.
5. The formulation only sets the stage for objective evaluation of possibilities.

D. How many points?

1. Parables have as many points as they have major characters. Typically three:
 - a. The master, king, or ruler is God-like; his actions point to God, Father or Son, somehow.
 - b. Faithful and an unfaithful subordinates represent disciples or foes of Jesus and K.
 - c. But matters are not so simple. See Matt. 20 where grumbling workers resemble Peter.

Parables of Luke 11 and 12

Gospel of Luke is mostly about people.

The travel narrative, from Luke 9:52 - 19:10, contains the most popular, loved parables.

Luke 11:1-13 and Prayer

I. Introduction: Methods of Prayer and Conditions for Prayer

II. How to Pray: The Proper Words

- A. Father
- B. A hallowed name
- C. Kingdom
- D. Daily bread
- E. Forgiveness and temptation

III. How to Pray: The Proper Attitude

- A. "Who of you" introduces impossibility.
- B. A friend who refuses to help
- C. A misunderstanding of the parable

D. Verse 8 outline

If he will not give to him,	the sleeper
having arisen	the sleeper
because he is his friend	the sleeper
yet because of his shamelessness	the sleeper - not the asker
having arisen	the sleeper
he will give to him as much as he needs	the sleeper

E. Shamelessness

F. Who do the characters stand for?

G. The heart issue: losing confidence in the goodness of God.

H. Why God may not answer our reasonable prayers.

In what ways should this parable give the Christian believer confidence in prayer?