

The Parables of Jesus
An Encyclopedia Article
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Introduction:

The parables of Jesus have become a hallmark of his teachings.

Throughout his ministry Jesus taught in parables, they formed around one third of his teaching.

Typically in a memorable and engaging story, they teach a lesson that can still be relevant today.

Some would argue that Jesus' birth story has become a parable too, as it illustrates the atonement of Christ.

When people talk about the ministry of Jesus they often talk about the miracles he performed, but his ministry was based on his unique teaching style.

The basic meaning is simple enough that it is taught to children, however trying to fully understand with accuracy what Jesus wanted you to undertake from the parables is much more complex.

What is a parable:

The word parable is a Greek word, meaning the placing of things, side by side for comparison's sake, or in our terms today a figure of speech.

Jesus was not telling us that these stories were real, but the message behind them was.

Parables were very common in Jewish tradition, so it would have been something Jesus had learnt in his life, before his ministry began.

Parables were usually short and did not include any unnecessary information helping them to remain memorable and shareable.

They usually featured human characters, whereas fables anthropomorphized animals, plants or even objects in their stories.

As Jesus frequently taught parables, understanding them is essential to understanding Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

Overview:

In History the church fathers spent a long time doing an exegetical analysis on the parables of Jesus and the significance of them. In the mid 1960s scholars like Amos Wilder proposed that the parables be treated as poetic language. There was argument that behind every parable was a metaphor.

The parables tell us using symbols what God's reign is like, the parables became paradigms for the language of God.

Jesus took illustrations from his daily life that attracted the listeners' attention, there were twists in the tales that would surely make the listeners pay attention, we can see this with the story of the prodigal son, where he emerged as the more sympathetic character than his brother who stayed at home.

The challenge was frequent in the parables, the challenge for the kingdom of God. Often Jesus asked his listeners what they thought

Matthew 13:51-52 Jesus said to them 'have you understood all these things'

The History Of Parables:

A Parable was used to communicate an idea to a congregation of people. Parabolic story telling dates to ancient times, even before Jesus and has been used across many different cultures, religions and historical points of time.

Jesus made good use of an already long standing tradition when he gave his sermons, as a way to teach wisdom, just as his ancestors had done before him.

Philosophers like Aristotle used Parabolic story telling, Buddhists used parables in the Jataka Tales, the stories of the life of Buddha, which illustrate virtues and ethical principles through their engaging narratives.

The parables of Israel were uttered by prophets even in the oldest books of the old testament, a predecessor of Jesus's teachings.

The essence of a parable lies in its ability to convey a moral lesson through a relatable narrative.

In the gospels:

The Parables of Jesus (Yeshua) are found in all three of the synoptic Gospels and even found in the non-canonical gospels, especially the gospel of Thomas, however there are no parables in John's gospel of Jesus, instead the writer of the gospel of John concentrates on a mystical thesis of Jesus's life, death and resurrection.

In Mark's gospel the parables fit Mark's narrative of the kingdom of God and the coming Messiah, Isaiah 6 is quoted and Jesus in turn uses Isaiah in his parables to prove he is the Messiah.

The writer of the gospel of Mark summarises Jesus's many parables as him speaking the word of God.

In Matthew's gospel of Jesus there are twenty three parables, The writer for Matthew also incorporates the parables found in Mark's gospel as well as many seemingly new parables. Luke's Gospel has the same parable as Mark and Matthew with the parable of the sower and the canonical gospel of Thomas also has this parable.

The gospel of Luke does hold some of the most well known parables such as the good samaritan and the prodigal son.

The fact that some parables had to be explained by Jesus to his disciples showed they did not understand them and raises the question of the purpose of these stories at all.

Jesus told his disciples 'to those outside, all things are treated in parables, that seeing they may see but not perceive.' Mark 4:11-12

This became the standard explanation of why Jesus's ministry was not received by Israel.

Summary and closing:

Jesus told the parable of the sower from a boat to a crowd along the shores of Galilee, this is where Jesus was said to have performed a miracle by walking on water, it is believed that Jesus felt at home here and that this was where he grew up.

His ministry is thought to have begun here, on the shores.

Teaching was done away from the Roman authorities of Jerusalem.

Jesus told his listeners about a farmer sowing his seeds, but not all fell in good places, however those that did produced a crop bigger than what was sown.

Jesus said 'whoever has ears, let them hear' - Matthew 13:9

Jesus's disciples asked him why he taught in parables and Jesus replied 'because the knowledge of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not them' - Matthew 9:11.

Jesus tells the disciples that people's hearts are calloused, if they were not he would heal them, 'for this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears' Acts 28:27.

Jesus' picture of the kingdom of God was not clear to all, however Jesus' parables were a radical call to love people and see humanity in all, the themes of love, passion and redemption have become timeless.

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