

8. I don't get it?

(The Parables: Do you get the point?)

Introduction

Parables have often been misinterpreted!

1. The parables in history

Activity: Read Mark 4:10-12. This give us a clue as to why the parables have been misinterpreted!

People thought there was a deeper, hidden meaning for the inner circle – e.g. Augustine!

- Jesus told parables *to* people (e.g. Luke 15:3)
- to be understood (e.g. Luke 19:11)

We need to understand the context.

(btw: Mark 4:10-12, Jesus explained that his ministry was a *puzzle* to those on the outside!)

2. The types parables

a) True Parables

- a story with a plot, beginning, end

e.g. Lost Sheep, Prodigal Son, Good Samaritan, Great Banquet, Vineyard Workers, Rich Man and Lazarus, Ten Virgins

b) Similitude

- what is said of the subject is always true
- everyday life illustrations to make a point

e.g. Yeast in the Dough, Mustard Seed

c) Metaphors “You are the salt of the earth”

d) Epigrams “Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?”

3. The purpose of parables

- They are not just illustrations of teaching.
- They are not just revealing the truth.

Parables are:

messages calling for a response from the hearer

This makes them hard to interpret!

e.g. Explaining a joke means it can lose its impact.

In the same way as the first hearers, we need to catch the points of reference in the parables.

3. Understanding parables (exegesis)

Activity: Read Luke 7:36-50 - the parable of the debtors. Note: The parable is in Luke 7:40-42.

1) Find the points of reference

e.g. Money lender, two debtors.

2) Look out for the unexpected turn

e.g. Both debts are cancelled

Activity: What would have been the response of Simon and the woman?

3) Put yourself in the place of audience

How would the original hearers of the parable identified with the story *as it was being told*?

Activity: Try the method with Luke 10:25-37 (Good Samaritan) or Luke 15:11-32 (Prodigal Son)

Note: If no audience is specified, it might be possible to determine who they are.

Question: Who might the audience be in Matt 20:1-16? (Parable of Labourers)

4. The Kingdom of God is like...

The Kingdom of God is NOT like a mustard seed, treasure in a field or a merchant!

IMPORTANT: Read it like this: “It’s like this with the kingdom of God...”

Remember: these parables are not teaching but call for an (urgent) response from the listener. The kingdom is at hand – here, now!

Activity: Read these four parables in the light of the urgency of the hour: Mark 4:3-20 (Sower), Luke 12:16-20 (Rich Fool), Luke 16:1-8 (Shrewd Manager), Matt 13:44-46 (Hidden Treasure/Pearl)

5. Applying the Parables

Exegesis should make the point clear.

However, try translating the parables into our context – to highlight our own unforgiveness, pride, anger, etc.

Beware of false pride: “Thank you God that we are not like the pharisee in the story.”