

Study for the Month December 2010

The Parables of Jesus

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THE BIBLE SAYS: “All these things Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.” Matthew 13: 34, 35, N.K.J.V. See Ps. 78: 2.

Parable, says Dr. John D. Davis in *A Dictionary of the Bible* is:

“A method in which moral or religious truth is illustrated from the analogy of common experience. The comparison may be expressed, as by the word ‘like,’ or be implied. The limits between the parable and simile and metaphor are not well defined. Oftentimes there is hardly any difference, *except that the simile and metaphor are short and parable comparatively long*. ‘You are the light of the world’ (Matt. 5: 14) is a metaphor; ‘*like* a lamb dumb before the shearer’ (Isa. 53:7) is a simile; but ‘the kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was leavened’ (Matt. 13: 33), is a parable.

“The parable has certain advantages. One is, that this means of conveying truth makes it adhere to the memory much more than a plain didactic statement would do. For instance, no didactic statement as to the willingness of our Lord to receive penitent sinners would have an effect at all to that produced by the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32).

“A second advantage in a parable is that when it is needful for a prophet or preacher to censure a powerful personage, who will not allow himself to be directly found fault with, it is possible by a skillfully-framed parable to make him not merely to listen patiently, but condemn himself before he discovers that it is himself that he is condemning. This was done with much skill by the prophet Nathan when he went to reprove David for his great sin in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.” Read 2 Sam. 11: 1-27; 12: 1-15.

In her book, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, E. G. White makes a profound introduction as to what we should be looking for in studying His parables:

“In Christ’s parable-teaching the *same principle* is seen as in His own mission to the world. That we might become acquainted with His divine character and life, Christ took our nature, and dwelt among us [John 1: 14]. Divinity was revealed in humanity; the invisible glory in the visible human form. Men could learn of the unknown through the known; heavenly things were revealed through the earthly; God was made in the likeness of men [Rom. 8: 3]. So it was in Christ’s teaching: the unknown was *illustrated* by the known; divine truths by earthly things with which the people were most familiar.”

"The Scriptures says {Matt. 13: 34, 35 quoted}. Natural things were the medium for the spiritual; the things of nature and the life-experience of His hearers were connected with the truths of the written word. Learning thus from the natural to the spiritual kingdom, *Christ's parables are links in the chain of truth that unites man with God, and earth with heaven.*

"In His teaching from nature, Christ was speaking of the things which His own hands had made, and which had qualities and powers that He himself had imparted. *In their original perfection, all created things were an expression of the thought of God.* To Adam and Eve in their Eden home, nature was full of the knowledge of God, teeming with divine instruction. Wisdom spoke to the eye, and was received into the heart; for they communed with God in His created works. As soon as the holy pair transgressed the law of the Most High, the brightness from the face of God departed from the face of nature.

"The earth is now marred and defiled by sin. Yet even in its blighted state, much that is beautiful remains. *God's object lessons are not obliterated; rightly understood, nature speaks of her Creator.*

"In the days of Christ [He came 4,000 years after the fall of man] these lessons had been lost sight of. *Men had well-nigh ceased to discern God in His works.* [Evolution, Satan's counterfeit of creation, seeks to destroy God in His works]. The *selfishness* of humanity had cast a pall over the fair face of creation; and instead of manifesting God, His works became a barrier that concealed Him. 'Men worshipped the creature more than the Creator.' Thus the heathen became 'vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.' Rom. 1: 25, 21.

"So in Israel, man's teaching had been put in the place of God's. Not only the things of nature, but the sacrificial service and the Scriptures themselves,---all given to reveal God---were so perverted that they became the means of concealing Him.

"Christ sought to remove that which obscured the truth. The veil that sin had cast over the face of nature, He came to draw aside, to bring to view the spiritual glory that all things were created to reflect. His words placed the teachings of nature as well as of the Bible in a new aspect, and made them a new revelation." - pp. 17-19.

This book, for me, provides the clearest and most spiritual explanations of the Christ's parables, there are five reasons why Jesus taught in parables, namely:

- (1) Parable teaching was popular then and commanded the respect and attention, not only of the Jews, but of the people of other nations. It was the most effective method of instruction Jesus could have employed at that time.
- (2) Christ had "truths to present which the people were unprepared to accept, or even understand. By connecting His teachings with the scenes of life, experience, or nature, He secured their attention and impressed their hearts."
- (3) Daily, spies were sent by the jealous and scheming priests, rabbis, scribes, and elders, hoping to catch or trap Him into saying anything they could use against Him and report these to those who sent them so that they could accuse Him to the Sanhedrin—the ruling religious power. "In parables Jesus rebuke the hypocrisy of the wicked works of those who occupied high positions, and in figurative language clothed truth of so cutting a character that had it been spoken in direct

denunciation, they would not have listened to His words,” and would have prematurely ended His ministry.

- (4) Christ’s parable-teaching is an indication of what constitutes real “higher education. In all His teaching, Christ brought the mind of man in contact with the Infinite Mind. Unlike the wise men of this world, Jesus “did not dwell in abstract theories. He said nothing to gratify curiosity, or to satisfy man’s ambitions by opening doors to worldly greatness.” He taught them “to behold God as manifested in His *works*, in His *Word*, and by His *providences*.”
- (5) “Christ’s purpose in parable-teaching was in direct line with the purpose of the Sabbath.” “The Sabbath?” You may inquire. Yes, indeed, the seventh-day Sabbath! How? “God gave to men the *memorial* of His creative power, that they might discern *Him* in the works of His hand. The Sabbath bids us behold in His created works the *glory* of the Creator. And it was because He desires us to do this that Jesus bound up His precious lessons with the beauty of *natural* [in contrast to supernatural] things. On the holy rest-day, above all other days, we should study the messages that God has written for us in nature.”- COL, pp. 21, 22, 23, 25.

According to the *SDA Bible Dictionary, Commentary Series, Volume 8*, the lists of our Lord’s parables often differ because not all agree as to which of Jesus’ illustrations should be termed parables. Length is one of the important considerations (see Matt. 5: 14, 15), but some illustrations always considered as parables are very short (see Matt. 13: 44-48). Another factor is whether allegorical illustrations such as John 10: 1-6; 15: 1-8 should, strictly speaking, be counted as parables. Forty of the most important of our Lord’s parables are listed, classified, and analyzed in the following:

A. Divine Love, Mercy, and Justice

1. The Pearl of Great Price: Matt. 13: 45, 46

Principles Illustrated: The priceless value of redeeming love. The Savior in search of men; men seeking for salvation. **Compare to No. 11.**

2. The Lost Sheep : Matt 18: 18-24; Luke 15:3-7

Principles Illustrated: God’s love for those who know they are lost but know not how to return to Him. His unwillingness that any should perish. **Compare to Nos. 3, 4.**

3. The Lost Coin: Luke 15:8-10

Principles Illustrated: God’s love for those who not that they are lost. Diligence in seeking the lost. **Compare to Nos. 2, 4.**

4. The Prodigal Son: Luke 15: 11-32

Principles Illustrated: God’s love for those who have wandered from His love. The hard-heartedness of man compared in contrast with the love of God. **Compare to Nos. 2,**

5. The Barren Fig Tree: Luke 13: 6-9

Principles Illustrated: The relationship between divine mercy and justice. God’s dealings with the Jewish nation. **Compare to: Nos. 8, 15, 16, 21.**

(See also No. 31)

B. The Plan of Salvation

6. The Mustard Seed: Matt. 13: 31, 32; Mark 4: 30-32; Luke 13: 18, 19

Principles Illustrated: The extensive, quantitative growth of the kingdom of grace, the church. God begins in a small way to accomplish great results. Compare to: Nos. 9, 19, 20.

7. The Tares: Matt. 13: 24-30

Principles Illustrated: Character decides destiny. The purpose of probationary time; tares do not eventually become wheat. **Compare to: Nos. 9, 29, 40.**

8. The Wicked Husbandmen: Matt. 21: 33-43; Mark 12: 1-12; Luke 20: 9-19.

Principles Illustrated: God's eternal purpose will triumph in spite of man's unfaithfulness. Israel would forfeit its role as the chosen nation. **Compare to: Nos. 5, 15, 16, 21.**

C. The Reception of Truth

9. The Sower, the Seed, and the Soils: Matt. 13: 3-9, 18-23; Mark 4: 3-20; Luke 8: 5-15

Principles Illustrated: The reception of truth by different classes of hearers. **Compare to: Nos. 6-8, 19.**

10. The Great Banquet: Luke 14: 16-24.

Principles Illustrated: The danger of neglecting or rejecting truth. God cannot accept a divided heart. Compare to: Nos. 6-8, 21.

11. The Hidden Treasure: Matt. 13: 44.

Principles Illustrated: The transcendent value of truth and the effort necessary to secure it. Compare to: No. 1.

12. New Cloth and New Wine: Matt. 9: 16, 17; Mark 2: 21, 22; Luke 5: 36-39

Principles Illustrated: Truth versus traditionalism. The danger of preconceived opinions.

13. The Two Debtors: Luke 7: 41-43

Principles Illustrated: Appreciation of, and gratitude for, the love and mercy of God.

14. Building a Tower; A King Going to War: Luke 14: 28-33

Principles Illustrated: Counting the cost of discipleship.

15. Seven Unclean Spirits: Matt. 12: 43-45.

Principles Illustrated: The necessity of a positive attitude toward truth; the unpardonable sin. The condition of the Jewish leaders. Justification incomplete without sanctification. **Compare to: Nos. 5, 8, 15, 17, 21, 26.**

16. The Two Sons: Matt. 21: 28-32.

Principles Illustrated: Deeds count, not words; profession without practice is hypocrisy. **Compare to: Nos. 5, 8, 15, 17, 21.**

17. **Building on the Rock or the Sand:** Matt. 7: 24-27; Luke 6: 47-49.

Principles Illustrated: The perception of the truth not an end in itself but a means to the end of a transformed life. The folly of knowledge without obedience. **Compare to: Nos. 15, 15, 21, 26.**

18. **The Rich Fool:** Luke 12: 16-21

Principles Illustrated: The danger of worldly-mindedness; the folly of living for material things.

(See also Nos. 1, 29, 32, 34)

D. The Transformation of Character

19. **The Growing Seed:** Mark 4: 26-29

Principles Illustrated: Faith and works: human effort cooperating with infinite power in Christian growth. **Compare to: Nos. 6, 7, 9, 20.**

20. **The Leaven:** Mat. 13: 33; Luke 13: 20, 21.

Principles Illustrated: The intensive, qualitative growth of the kingdom of heaven. Power from above is implanted in the heart and transforms the life. **Compare to: Nos. 6, 9, 19.**

21. **The Man Without a Wedding Garment:** Matt 22: 2-14.

Principles Illustrated: The importance of Christ's righteousness. [The nature of the Investigative Judgment]. **Compare to: Nos. 5-8, 10, 15-17, 25.**
(See also Nos. 15, 17, 34)

E. Prayer

22. **The Friend Calling at Midnight:** Luke 11: 5-13

Principles Illustrated: Perseverance in prayer. Asking in order to give to others.

23. **The Unjust Judge:** Luke 18: 1-8.

Principles Illustrated: Perseverance, earnestness, and confidence in prayer.

F. Humility Versus Pride

24. **Choosing Place of Honor:** Luke 14: 7-11

Principles Illustrated: Humility toward one's fellow men; honoring others.

25. **The Pharisee and the Publican:** Luke 18: 9-14.

Principles Illustrated: Humility before God; the danger of pride and self-righteousness. (See also No. 38).

G. Utilizing Present Opportunities

26. **The Nobleman and the Pounds:** Luke 19: 11-27.

Principles Illustrated: The improvement of talents and opportunities. Working while waiting for the kingdom [for Christ's coming]. Faithful service the basis of reward.

Compare to: Nos. 5, 27, 37.

27. The Talents: Matt. 25: 14-30.

Principles Illustrated: Same as No. 26; also, helping other to prepare for our Lord's return. **Compare to: Nos. 26, 34, 37.**

28. The Dishonest Steward: Luke 16: 1-9.

Principles Illustrated: The diligent use of present opportunities in preparation for the future life. Compare to Nos. 26, 34, 37.

29. The Rich Man and Lazarus: Luke 16: 19-31.

Principles Illustrated: Eternal destiny is decided in the present life; there is no second probation. The danger of preoccupation with material things. **Compare to: Nos. 7, 18.**

H. The Christian and His Fellow Man

30. The Good Samaritan: Luke 10: 30-37.

Principles Illustrated: True religion consists in active service for others; on this, eternal destiny depends. Contact with suffering humanity frees the soul of selfishness.

Compare to: No. 39.

31. The Unforgiving Servant: Matt. 18: 23-35.

Principles Illustrated: Mercy toward, and forgiveness of, others. Our forgiveness by God contingent on our forgiveness of others. **Compare to: No. 5.**

32. Treasures Old and New: Matt. 13: 52.

Principles Illustrated: Familiarity with old truths; alertness for new truth. Adapt truth to the needs of the hearers. **Compare to: No. 9.**

33. The Faithful Steward: Luke 12: 42-48.

Principles Illustrated: Conscientious supervision of the affairs of God's household.

I. Awaiting the Lord's Return

34. The Ten Virgins: Matt. 25: 1-13

Principles Illustrated: Personal preparation for our Lord's return; His coming seemingly delayed. Our need of the Holy Spirit. [Prophecy fulfilled in the midnight cry of the summer of 1844 of the Advent movement. See "Midnight Cry" chapter and compare to "Loud Cry" chapter of the Vol. 4, Spirit of Prophecy, 1884 edition, of *Great Controversy*]. **Compare to: Nos. 27, 35, 36.**

35. The Watchful Servant: Mark 13: 34-37.

Principles Illustrated: Watching for the Master's return [Note: see your study on "What to Watch our For"]. Compare to: Nos. 34, 36.

36. The Watchful Servants; the Vigilant Homeowner: Luke 12: 35-40.

Principles Illustrated: Preparation for our Lord's sudden return. Living up to the light that we have; personal accountability for truth. **Compare to: Nos. 7, 34, 35.**

37. Laborers in the Vineyard: Matt. 20:1-16.

Principles Illustrated: God measures service by the willingness and fidelity with which it is rendered. Rewards are based on our Lord's gracious generosity and on the spirit which motivates our service for Him. **Compare to: Nos. 8, 26, 27, 38.**

38. Unprofitable Servants: Luke 17: 7-10.

Principles Illustrated: Faithfulness to duty. God's claim on all our services. Compare to No. 37.

39. The Sheep and the Goats: Matt. 25: 31-46.

Principles Illustrated: The significance of practical religion. The supreme test of the reality of our religion is what it leads us to do for others. **Compare to: No. 30.**

J. The Final Judgment; Eternal Rewards

40. The Dragnet: Matt. 13: 47-50.

Principles Illustrated: The final separation of the bad from the good. Not all the wicked eventually become righteous [Universalism]. **Compare to: Nos. 7, 29.**
(See also Nos. 7, 21, 27, 29)

Use the above as a guide in your personal study of Christ's parables in conjunction with the book, *Christ's Object Lessons*. You will find that the inspired pen has a lot more to say than what is suggested, quite naturally.

A MODERN DAY PARABLE

The psalmist wrote: "And I said, 'Oh, that I had wings *like* a dove! For then I would fly away and be at rest. Indeed, I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. Selah. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest.'" Psalm 55: 6, 7. And again, "Hear my cry, O God; attend to my prayer. From the end of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the Rock that is higher than I. For you have been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy." Psalm 61: 1-3.

O God! Help Me Gain A Loftier Spiritual Flight and Height

E.G. White wrote: "Have you ever watched **a hawk in pursuit of a timid dove?** Instinct has taught the dove that in order for the hawk to seize his prey, he must gain a loftier flight than his victim. So she rises higher and still higher into the blue dome of heaven, ever pursued by the hawk, which is seeking to obtain the advantage. But in vain. The dove is safe as long as she allows nothing to stop her in her flight, or draw her earthward; but let her once falter, and take a lower flight, and her *watchful* enemy will swoop down upon his victim. Again and again we have *watched* this scene with almost breathless interest, all our sympathies with the little dove. How sad we should have felt to see it fall a victim to the cruel hawk!

The Lesson: "We have before us a warfare—a lifelong conflict with Satan and his seductive temptations. [James 4: 6-10]. The enemy will use every argument, every deception, to entangle the soul; and in order to win the crown of life, we must put forth earnest, persevering effort. [Rev. 2:10; 3: 11; 1 Cor. 9: 25-27; 2 Tim. 4: 8; 1 Pet. 5: 4;

James 1: 12]. We must not lay off the *armor* or leave the *battlefield* until we have gained the victory, and can triumph in our Redeemer. [See Eph. 6: 10-18; 1 Cor. 9:7; 2 Cor. 10: 3-6; 1 Tim. 1: 18, 19].

“As long as we continue to keep our eyes fixed upon the Author and Finisher of our faith [Heb. 12: 2] we shall be safe. But our affections must be placed upon things above, not on things on the earth [Col. 3: 2]. By faith we must rise higher and still higher in the attainments of the graces of Christ [Gal. 5: 22-25]. By daily contemplation of His matchless charms, we must grow more and more into His glorious image. [Rom. 8: 28-31; 1 Cor. 15: 46-50; Col. 1: 27] While we thus live in communion with Heaven, Satan will lay his nets for us in vain.” – *My Life Today*, p. 105.

“We must not lay off the armor or leave the battlefield.”-- The whole spiritual armor of God is defined by Paul in Ephesians 6: 10-18. Study each carefully and know how each must be obtained, and retained. It is not safe to lay off even just one part of this armor daily! The battlefield is the heart, the mind. And this is only true while we are still alive and rational. We must not give up the struggle. We must continue “earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Thus faith is far more than just a profession. It is a battle and a march with Christ as our Commanding General, One who has never lost a battle—although at times it appears He did.

Moreover, we must not render ourselves irrational or weakened by any pernicious habit or practice, or worse shorten our useful lives as some have done in desperation and frustration. The warfare with Satan and his angels and human agencies is a life-long conflict. The battle against self, our sinful desires and weaknesses, is a the most difficult one. We shall have trials, temptations, reversals, and tribulation at every step of the way to heaven, until we die, until Jesus comes. This painful part is totally unavoidable once we enlist under the blood-stained banner of Prince Immanuel. But the victory is assured.

“Satan will lay his nets for us in vain.” - “Christ will never abandon the soul for whom He has died. The soul, may leave Him, and be overwhelmed with temptation; but Christ can never turn from one for whom He has paid the ransom of His own life. Could our spiritual vision be quickened, we should see souls bowed under oppression and burdened with grief, pressed as a cart beneath sheaves, *ready to die in discouragement*. We should see *angels* flying swiftly to aid these tempted ones, who are standing as on the brink of a precipice. The angels of heaven force back the hosts of evil that encompass these souls, and guide them to plant their feet on the sure foundation. The battles waging between the two armies are as real as those fought by the armies of this world, and on the issue of the spiritual conflict eternal destinies depend

“To us, as to Peter, the word is spoken, “Satan has desire to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not.’ [Luke 22: 31-34, 54-62]. Thank God we are not left alone.

“We are coming to the crisis. Let us stand the test manfully, grasping the hand of Infinite Power. God will work for us. We have only to live one day at a time, and if we get acquainted with God, He will give us strength for what is coming tomorrow, grace sufficient for each day, and every day will find its own victories, just as it finds its trials. We shall have the power of the Highest with us, for we shall be clad with the armor of Christ’s righteousness. We have the same God that has worked for His people in ages past. Jesus stands by our side, and shall we falter? ----No, as the trials come, the power of God will come with them. God will help us to stand in faith on His Word, and when we are united [with Him], He will work with special power in our behalf.” – *My Life Today*, p. 94.