

Kingdom Parables

Introduction

I. What is a Parable?

A parable is an extended simile in which something common is compared with something uncommon or hard to understand.

Note that an allegory is an extended metaphor in which one thing is closely compared with another.

The word parable comes from the Greek word *parabolay* which literally means “to cast alongside.” Hence, it is a story cast alongside a divine truth that makes that divine truth more easily understood.

A. The Two-Fold Purpose of Parables

1. Parables are meant to conceal - See Matthew 13:11-17

God does not reveal himself to those who have rejected him and are willfully ignorant of divine truths. An excellent commentary on this concept is found in John 8.

At this juncture in Matthew, Jesus has been rejected by the religious leaders and the masses although they still follow him for the miracles he performs. Matthew chapter 13 begins a new mode of communication by Jesus in which he uses parables to conceal divine truth from those who do not want it.

It is interesting to note that Jesus did not defend himself before the Sanhedrin since they had already made up their minds to have him put to death. In that case, silence was divine judgment.

Matthew 13:14-15 is a quote from Isaiah 6:9-10 and is quoted also in Acts 28:26-28.

2. Parables are meant to reveal - See also Matthew 13:11-17

Parables reveal an otherwise hard-to-understand truth to those who have the parable explained.

Note that Jesus explained these parables to the disciples. The Parable of the Sower is explained in Matthew 13:18-23, the Parable of the Tares is explained in Matthew 13:37-43. That the disciples understood the other parables is stated in Matthew 13:51-52.

B. The Interpretation of Parables

Parables are meant to make truth easy to understand.

Parables are taken from common, everyday activities and events that the listeners of the parables would have easily identified with.

1. Some Basic Interpretive Rules
 - a. Identify the earthly details of the parables. At this point, find out the cultural event or activity that the parable refers to.
 - b. Identify the spiritual attitude and mind-set of the original hearers.
 - c. Identify the reason for the parable. This may be a single event or a discourse on a subject.
 - d. Identify the main point of the parable. Disregard superfluous details that have no bearing on the main point.
 - e. If details or symbols are explained by the parable, or by the speaker, seek no other definition.
 - f. Identify the impact of the parable on the hearers.

2. Other Interpretive Rules

Always put the parable into the context in which it was given. To remove the context from the parable is to destroy any hope of accurately interpreting the parable.

Always compare the point of the parable with the rest of Scripture. A parable will never contradict other teachings in the Bible.

Remember to seek the logical and simple interpretation of a parable. Parables are not to be allegorized (i.e. each point in the parable MUST refer to a point in the interpretation). To do so is to spiritualize and mysticize the scriptures.

Avoid exotic and obscure interpretations of parables.

II. The Kingdom Parables and Their Significance

The occasion of the Kingdom Parables was after Christ's rejection by the Jewish leaders as recorded in Matthew 12.

A. What is the Kingdom?

1. The Universal Kingdom

The universal kingdom can be best understood as the sphere of God's sovereign control. Since God created the universe and everything in it, he ultimately is in control of all.

Everyone who exists is automatically a part of the universal kingdom.

2. The Mediatorial Kingdom

The Mediatorial Kingdom is that sphere in which God reigns through selected human and/or divine agents.

The Mediatorial Kingdom is entered by the personal choice of individuals.

The Mediatorial Kingdom consists of both true and false believers. See the Parable of the Tares, the Parable of the Dragnet, and the metaphor of the Vine in John 15.

True members of the Mediatorial Kingdom will experience ultimate salvation and existence in the presence of God.

False members of the Mediatorial Kingdom, or those that have rejected it, will experience eternal judgment and separation from the presence of God.

a. Eras of the Mediatorial Kingdom

We can identify seven basic eras of the Mediatorial Kingdom. Each era is identified by four basic characteristics, the mode of God's rule, a command, a failure, and a judgment.

The failure is caused by mankind as a whole and not by individuals.

The path to salvation is the same in any era, believe all that God has revealed to that point.

1). Innocence

The mode: God directly spoke with man.

The command: Do not eat of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The failure: Eve and Adam ate.

The judgment: Man was expelled from the garden Spiritual death passed on to the entire human race.

2). Conscience

The mode: God mediated his rule through the consciences of individuals.

The command: Do right.

The failure: Man's conscience became seared and insensitive to God.

The judgment: The Genesis flood.

3). Human Government

The mode: God mediated his rule through human governments.

The command: Glorify God and recognize his rule.

The failure: Nimrod and the Tower of Babel.

The judgment: The confusion of tongues.

4). Promise

The mode: God mediated his rule through the Patriarchs.

The command: Believe God.

The failure: Unbelief.
The judgment: The law given at Sinai.

5). Law

The mode: God mediated his rule through divine commandments.
The command: Obey the law.
The failure: Disobedience and the redefinition of the divine commandments.
The judgment: The crucifixion and destruction of Israel.

6). Grace

The mode: God rules through his Spirit and the true Church.
The command: Believe God and accept his offer of pardon.
The failure: Men will grow worse and worse.
The judgment: The Tribulation and destruction of the nations at the Second Coming.

7). Millennium

The mode: God mediates his rule directly.
The command: Obey.
The failure: General rebellion after Satan is loosed for a season.
The judgment: The Great White Throne and the commencement of the eternal state.

3. The Promised Kingdom

The promised kingdom is the Millennial Kingdom as described above.

God promised Israel the Kingdom throughout the Old Testament.

Because of Israel's rejection of Christ, the complete fulfillment of the Kingdom promises have been postponed to a later date. In fact, this postponement will continue until Israel recognizes Christ as the Messiah.

This Kingdom was offered by Christ but was rejected because of the spiritual attitudes that were required before it could be realized. The Jews desired a political kingdom based on force, not a spiritual kingdom based on love. The Jews wanted the physical Kingdom without the spiritual requirements demanded by God.

The Promised Kingdom will be realized at a future point when Israel as a whole recognizes the Christ as the Messiah.

4. The Eternal Kingdom

The Eternal Kingdom can be also understood as the Eternal State.

The Eternal Kingdom begins after the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment as described in Revelations 20.

In the Eternal Kingdom we will be face-to-face with God and enjoy his presence and blessing forever. All who have rejected God will be cast into the Lake of Fire for eternity.

B. What is the Significance of the Kingdom Parables?

Of the 28 major parables, 17 refer to the intermediate Kingdom of God known to us as the Church age. This is also known as the "Age of Grace" era in the Mediatorial Kingdom as outlined above.

The purpose of these parables is to describe the conditions and characteristics of this intermediate Kingdom that was not seen by the Old Testament prophets.

The Church Age is also referred to many times as a "mystery." This word means "something that has been concealed but is now revealed to a selected few." A close parallel would be our word "secret."

Christ, having been rejected by the Jewish leaders, now reveals to the disciples the character of the intermediate Kingdom. This is the purpose of these, and the other, Kingdom Parables.

Christ wanted the disciples to know what to expect after his crucifixion and the Second Coming. It is interesting to note that the disciples did not understand the gap between the crucifixion and resurrection until just before Christ's ascension.

III. Discussion of Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven

Many would have us believe that the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven are two separate concepts. That is not true.

The term "Kingdom of Heaven" occurs exclusively in Matthew in the New Testament. He uses the term 31 times.

The term "Kingdom of God" occurs 68 times in the New Testament. It occurs 4 times in Matthew, 15 times in Mark, 31 times in Luke, 2 times in John, and 14 times in Acts and the Epistles.

In several locations, it is used in parallel passages to Matthew where Matthew uses "Kingdom of Heaven" and the other uses "Kingdom of God." Some examples are:

Matthew 13:11 - Luke 8:10
Matthew 19:23 - Luke 18:24

A study of the gospels will show that where Matthew uses the term "Kingdom of Heaven", the others synoptics often use "Kingdom of God." Hence we conclude, that as far as the Holy Spirit is concerned, these two concepts speak of the same thing.

IV. Overview of Method of Interpretation

In each of our studies on the Kingdom Parables, we will follow a standard methodology. This methodology is outlined as below:

- **Central Point of the Parable**

A brief statement giving the central theme although this is found only after interpreting the parable.
- **Significant Elements of the Parable**

Identification of the important elements of the parable along with the cultural significance and meaning of each element.
- **Insignificant Elements of the Parable**

Identification of the superfluous elements in each parable that have no bearing on the central point and should not be considered in the interpretation.
- **Interpretation of the Parable**

Interpretation of the parable with particular emphasis based on its spiritual meaning.
- **Application of the Parable**

Application of the parable in our daily life and in our understanding of the Interim Kingdom of God.