

Living In The Kingdom 4 - The Parables Of The Kingdom

The Kingdom of God is a spiritual reality, however the Bible tells us that it is not a completely strange and unknowable spiritual reality. In fact there are very deep analogies between the principles of Creation and the principles of the Kingdom and some of these deep analogies are set out in the parables of Jesus.

An analogy is when something is “like” something else in a way that “maps onto” the other thing, so that inferences can be drawn or conclusions can be made.

So when we say that Christ is the Head of the Church which is His bride then we are using human marriage (the known thing) as a “map” that tells us how God’s love for His Church (unknown thing) operates. Because the map is very close we can press that particular analogy a long way and talk about faithfulness, love, submission, sacrifice etc. Some analogies are very poor analogies and not very useful e.g. saying the earth is like a basketball.

The parables often start with a key phrase that indicates the analogy e.g. “the Kingdom of God is like unto...” so we know the two things which are being compared e.g. the Kingdom of God and a field or a dragnet. And the analogy can only be pressed as far as the similarity is valid. For instance it would be incorrect to say that the Kingdom of God is constructed from soil (field) or is carried in a fishing boat (dragnet).

Parables are mainly found in the Synoptic Gospel (Matthew, Mark and Luke) which are written for solely Jewish audiences (Matthew) or combined Jewish and Gentile audiences (Mark, Luke). John’s gospel has no parables and was written primarily for Greek-speaking churches in Ephesus and Asia Minor (Turkey) and thinks in terms of symbols rather than in terms of similarities and parables.

So the key thought is that parables are like maps of the Kingdom of God, however “the map is not the territory” and they only give us partial information and can only be pressed so far. In this lesson we will examine the parables in Matthew chapter 13.

Definitions: *An **Analogy** is a relation of similarity between two or more things, so that an inference (reasoning from premise to conclusion) is drawn on the basis of that similarity. So if item or person or process A is known to have certain characteristics, and if item or person or process B is known to have at least some of those characteristics, the inference is drawn that B also has those other characteristics. If the cases are not similar enough to warrant the inference, then it is a false analogy.*

The Law of Correspondence of Heaven and Earth: Matthew 16:19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (see also Matthew 18;18)

Discussion:

When the Bible says that God is a Shepherd seeking the lost sheep is that a good analogy or a poor analogy?

In what ways is God like a shepherd seeking the lost sheep (Luke 15) ?

In what ways is God not the least bit like a shepherd?

What do we mean by “the map is not the territory”?

PARABLES & SPIRITUAL SENSITIVITY

(10) Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" (11) And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. (12) For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. (13) This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

(14) Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: ""You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." (15) For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'

(16) But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. (17) For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Discussion: How is it "blessed" to be spiritually perceptive? What happens to those who "have more"? on the other hand what happens to those who are "dull of hearing?"

SOWER

Matthew 13:1-52 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. (2) And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. (3) And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. (4) And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. (5) Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, (6) but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. (7) Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. (8) Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. (9) He who has ears, let him hear."

SOWER EXPLAINED

(18) "Hear then the parable of the sower: (19) When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. (20) As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, (21) yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. (22) As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. (23) As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it.

Discussion:

How is the parable of the Sower the master parable which gives us the keys to Jesus' use of analogy?

What is its meaning? What does it tell us about the spiritual life?

In this parable, how do heaven and earth correspond to each other?

TARES

(24) He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, (25) but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. (26) So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. (27) And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' (28) He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' (29) But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. (30) Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

TARES EXPLAINED

(36) Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." (37) He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. (38) The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, (39) and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. (40) Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. (41) The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, (42) and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (43) Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Discussion:

What does the parable of the wheat and the tares tell us about the nature of the Kingdom of God?

How does it build upon the symbolism in the parable of the sower?

How does this parable introduce a more complex mapping of the spiritual world and the natural order?

What does it tell us about the nature of evil?

Why is God patient with evil?

MUSTARD SEED

(31) He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. (32) It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

Background: The mustard tree was a rapidly multiplying "pest" that grew everywhere and took over entire fields as the mustard seed was blown by wind. It was against the law to plant it anywhere near someone else's field.

Discussion:

How is the mustard seed's growth like the Kingdom of God?

How is the Kingdom of God a "pest" to the kingdoms of this world?

THE HIDDEN BUT POWERFUL AND VALUABLE KINGDOM

LEAVEN

(33) He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."

HIDDEN THINGS

(34) All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable.

(35) This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world."

TREASURE

(44) "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

THE PEARL

(45) "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, (46) who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Discussion: All these parables indicate that the Kingdom is secret, hidden or obscure in some way. They also show people discovering it, or the Kingdom being revealed by its leaven-like influence. They also indicate the great value of the Kingdom.

Have we made Christian truth "too easy and too cheap"?

Why does God want us to seek Him out and to "pay a price" of some sort for the Kingdom?

What price did the disciples pay in order to learn about the Kingdom from Jesus?

Is there a connection between the price we are prepared to pay for truth and our joy at finding it?

ULTIMATE SEPARATION

(47) "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind.

(48) When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. (49) So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous

(50) and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Discussion:

What does this parable tell us about the end of the age?

How do the angels sort out the good from the bad?

What is meant by "sorting the good into containers"?