

PARABLE EXERCISE INSTRUCTIONS

Purposes of the Exercise

1. To help students understand the difference between an allegory and an authentic parable of Jesus.
2. To foster appreciation of the distinctive nature and evocative power of Jesus' authentic parables.
3. To illustrate the process through which parables have sometimes been transformed into allegories in the gospels.
4. To engage students in the process of interpreting both parables and allegories.

Procedures

1. Distribute Handout 1 and compare the allegory to the parables; allow questions and discussion.
2. Distribute Handout 2. Have the students (perhaps in groups)
 - a. compare the two versions of the story;
 - b. decide which version is dependent upon which;
 - c. propose allegorical interpretations of the elements in the one they consider secondary.
3. Distribute Handout 3 to show allegorical interpretation of the Matthean version or simply use it in leading the discussion.
4. Have the students look up the Matthean version in context and read 22:11-14, which continues the allegory by picking up on the phrase "both good and bad" in v. 10. The scene in vv. 11-14 symbolize the judgment of the church. Those without wedding robes are unrighteous church members (see Revelation 19:8). Then look at 13:47-48 to see a parallel allegory that helps confirm this interpretation.

Parables Exercise

Handout 1: Parable vs. Allegory

Matthew 21:33-41

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country.

When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way.

Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.

So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

Matt. 13:44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Matt. 13:45-46 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

landowner=God;
vineyard=Israel [see Isaiah 5:1-7]

tenants=leaders of Israel

slaves=prophets

son/heir=Jesus

out of the vineyard=outside Jerusalem, where Jesus was crucified

killed him=crucifixion of Jesus

miserable death=destruction of Jerusalem (70 C.E.)

Allegory: *Specific elements in the story symbolize specific realities outside the story, in the world already known to the audience. An allegory reminds people of what they already know. We understand it by decoding it.*

The field is simply the setting for find the treasure, not the symbol of some particular place. "Someone" (Greek: anthropos, "a person")=any human being. Finding the treasure is like encountering the kingdom. The hearer must decide how finding the treasure and selling all symbolizes the kingdom.

The merchant is any human being. Finding the pearl is like finding the kingdom; the reader must again decide how the finding the pearl and selling all symbolizes the kingdom.

Parable: *Makes its impact as a whole; individual elements do not signify specifics outside the story. (The kingdom is symbolized neither by the treasure nor the pearl but by the total situation—finding something unexpectedly and selling all to get it.) The parable creates new knowledge by encouraging us to think differently about something. We understand it not by decoding it but by allowing it to engage our imagination. The hearer has to imagine how the situation is like the kingdom. **So what do these two parables say about the kingdom/rule of God?***

Parables Exercise

Handout 2: The Allegorization of a Parable

LUKE 14:15-24

“Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the slave returned and reported this to his master.

Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ And the slave said, ‘Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.’ Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’”

MATTHEW 22:2-10

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business,

while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them.

The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.”

Parables Exercise

Handout 3:

The Allegorization of a Parable

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In Matthew, great dinner becomes a wedding banquet for king's son: king=God; son=Jesus

In Matthew, invitees mistreat and kill slaves; slaves=prophets rejected by the people

In Matthew, the king kills the murderers and destroys their city=destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. by Roman troops.

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