



GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

22 – An Introduction to Parables

Announcements:

3/21 @6:30 -

Men's Discipleship

3/23 @7:00 -

*Corporate
Prayer*

3/24 @6:30 -

Grace Group

3/27 @7:00 -

Sunday School

ICE BREAKER: What is your favorite Parable?

READ: Matthew 9:14-17

On Sunday we noted that Jesus had come to proclaim that he was doing something new. However, in saying that we need to be very careful. It seems that people slide to one of two extremes. On one extreme is the ancient heresy of Marcionism (named after Marcion). He saw the difference in the New Testament and the Old and decided: “these are so different there must be two different gods operating, the angry and wrathful god of the Old Testament and the loving and kind god of the New. On the other extreme are the Judiazers we read about in Scripture who believed that the covenantal people of God never changed, and all Christians must follow Jewish law. The truth, it turns out, is somewhere in the middle. What makes this middle ground especially

hard to find in this particular case is Jesus gives us the truth in a parable. Later in Matthew we will deal extensively with parables, but as this is our first, we need to make some comments on how to study/apply/learn from parables. So let's dive in.

One of the first things we should note about parables, is that they are intended to, in some sense, obfuscate the message to some people. One thing we might miss in the series of stories that lead up to this is *who* is coming to Jesus with concerns. In the healing of the paralytic the opposition is some “scribes” (Matthew 9:3). In the calling of Matthew and dining with sinners passage the opposition was “the Pharisees” (Matthew 9:11). But here it is “the disciples of John”. And so it is here that Jesus doesn't just give a rebuke, but because these are some with repentant hearts, who seem to be seeking understanding, Jesus teaches them, in a parable. As Jesus would say later “to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given” (Matthew 13:11, sermon to come later...). So what Jesus is saying is that to some people, the secrets of how the kingdom works will be hidden, and they are hidden in parables. So the first thought is twofold: 1) parables are hard, but 2) for those in the kingdom, parables have life giving truth.

DISCUSS: Why is it important that we understand that parables are directed for those in the kingdom and filled with kingdom truths?

So with this in mind, we can evaluate the two major ways that people over time have sought to mine the kingdom truths out of parables. The first is often called the allegorical method, but the easier way to remember it is the: everything means something method. This way of reading parables seeks to make each and every little detail mean something particular in each and every parable. I was recently reading a commentary on the book of Revelation by William Hendricksen, and in an attempt to show why this sort of reading can be problematic in *all* of Scripture he offered the following analysis of “the Good Samaritan” (to refresh your memory you could read that parable in Luke 10:25-37):

“The man who was on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho represents Adam, the head of the human race. He left the heavenly city and traveling down to the city of earth he falls into the hands of robbers; that is, he is overpowered by Satan and his evil angels. These robbers strip him of his garment of original righteousness. They also beat him, leaving him full of wounds, half dead (half dead in sins and trespasses!). The priest and the Levite represent the law and the sacrifices. They cannot save the sinner. They are powerless to help. But the Good Samaritan, namely, Jesus Christ, is traveling that way and helps the poor sinner. This good Samaritan dresses his wounds with the oil of the Holy Spirit and with wine, namely the blood of his passion. He then put the poor man on his own mule, that is, on the merits of his righteousness. He then takes the poor man to an inn, that is, to the church. The next day, the Good Samaritan gives the host two shillings, that is, the Word and the Sacraments, in order that he might provide for the spiritual needs of the poor sinner. Then the Good Samaritan promises to return later, which is the second coming.”

There are a host of reasons why this is a dangerous way to read parables. One is it leaves the door open to countless layers of deciding how to exactly fit the pictures together. But the biggest danger is that it causes us to actually miss the whole point of this parable! Jesus wants us to ask: Who is my neighbor? This leads us to the preferable way to read parables: we should first ask “what is the point Jesus is trying to make?” Then we can see how different pictures can support that thought. In the good Samaritan we have seen that the point is that even a Samaritan might be my neighbor, and that strict religiosity might rob us of the ability to see that (hence the Levite and the Priest). So in the two parables that we read in Matthew, the new cloth and the wineskins, asking: what is the main point Jesus is making can help us steer clear of the two extremes we mentioned above.

DISCUSS:

Note: this is high level stuff and frankly, quite difficult. If you are struggling, look at commentaries, talk to brothers and sisters in Christ who can help you, seek the Lord for guidance (really, do these three in the opposite order...) and ultimately, don't be discouraged!

1. What is the main point of the parable of the new Cloth? (hint: What is the end result, and how might this fit with the larger context of what is in view)
2. What is the main point of the parable of the Wineskins? (similar hint as before, but here what is different?)
3. How do we apply these truths to our lives?