

## **TEACH YOURSELF PARABLES: INTRODUCTION**

To be able to read and fully understand the parables, we need a good understanding of what a parable is, and what the parables are for.

### **WHAT IS A PARABLE?**

A parable is a short story that teaches a deeper moral lesson by using a simple narrative of common day life as an example. “Parable” is not a religious word. It is just a type of story in the same way that a fable is another type of story. Christ teaches many of our Christian ideals with parables.

### **WHO TAUGHT THEM?**

Jesus is the only teacher to use parables in the New Testament.

### **WHO WERE THEY TAUGHT TO?**

Christ taught parables to a wide variety of people. A parable can be made to teach any type of lesson, so Jesus would create parables to fit any type of person He encountered. Christ taught parables to His disciples, believers, skeptics, and unbelievers.

### **WHAT ARE THE PARABLES ABOUT?**

The parables are about many different topics, but they can be loosely divided into major themes.

1. He taught His disciples parables about the coming kingdom. Jesus was referring to the Church that would soon be established. So many of His parables to the disciples describe what the Church will be like. **(Mat 13:44-46)**
2. He condemned the scribes and Pharisees with parables. Jesus had many problems with their behavior, and Jesus would describe why their behavior was so evil with parables. **(Mat 21:23, 45-46)**
3. Mostly, the parables are about general Christian morals we need to adopt. Jesus taught parables about forgiveness, being a good example, and prayer etc. **(Mat 18:35, Lk 12:15, Jn 15:8)**

### **WHY DID JESUS TEACH IN PARABLES?**

Jesus wants us to think, and come to a righteous conclusion because of our conviction and desire.

Jesus wants us to obey Him out of love. He has no desire for followers that meet the required minimum. **(Mat 13:10-13)**

Often times, people would come to Jesus with a simple question. A “yes” or “no” response would tell the inquirer what they needed to know, but would it cultivate a personal conviction? Instead of saying “yes” or “no”, Jesus would respond with a parable that would require the listener to reflect and come to their own conclusion. Parables are meant to make the listener follow a concept and moral guide, rather than a simple requirement. For example, Peter asked, “How many times must I forgive my brother?” Instead of Jesus responding with an amount, He explains that we need to infinitely forgive each other because God has already forgiven us. **(Mat 18:21-23, Lk 12:13-15)**

Another reason Jesus teaches with parables is because they are a really great way of describing complex intangible spiritual ideas with simple physical everyday comparisons. How can we describe a spiritual relationship with an everlasting God? By describing a father son relationship. **(Lk 15:31-32, Lk 17:10)**

### **WHAT IS A PARABLE NOT?**

Parables will teach a specific lesson. Sometimes there can be various side lessons, but one parable is not supposed to explain everything about Christianity. We can’t take one parable about prayer, and use it to teach about how we treat our brothers. Doing so will lead to contradictions. For example, sometimes Jesus uses sinful characters to teach His main point. When we read the parable, we learn the main point, and move on. It is not meant to condone the sinful behavior.

A parable is not an allegory. An allegory is a story where every object represents a real historical figure. Not every figure in a parable is supposed to represent something. Applying meaning to every figure will lead to contradictions. For example, in two parables about prayer, the representative of God is a reluctant unmerciful character. The point is the God wants us to be persistent in our prayers. This parable is not meant to teach us about God being reluctant to help. **(Lk 18:4-5)**

#### **THE CONTEXT OF A PARABLE:**

The context of a parable is the surrounding verses that will tell us where, when, to whom, and why the parable is being taught. Jesus said many parables in many different situations to many different people. These things make up the context of the parable. Knowing the context will help us better understand the meaning of each parable. **(Lk 7:36-39)**

#### **THE TYPICAL PARABLE:**

Since Jesus spoke many different parables in different settings, they will vary in style, but they typically follow a certain format.

First, we can read the **context**. This will be the verses that tell us who, where, when, and why this parable is being taught. Sometimes it is simply the immediate preceding verses. This makes it very easy to understand the context. Other times we need to go even a chapter away to fully understand the setting and circumstance.

Next, comes the **parable** itself. This will be a short story that will give us a simple visual of a series of events. The story can be as long as 10 to 15 verses, and other times it is only one or two. The story will contain people that are doing everyday things. The story itself is easy to understand, but sometimes knowing what it represents is difficult. It is important to first get a firm grasp on the story, and then try to understand its meaning. Doing so will help us avoid confusion.

After the parable is told, there are usually one or two sentences that tell us what the **moral** is. This will tell us what we are supposed to learn from the parable. Sometimes after knowing what the intended lesson is, we can immediately understand all the symbolism of the parable. Other times we might still be confused. After careful study, the parable usually becomes very clear. It is important to remember that the parable teaches one specific moral. So all of the images in the parable should point to that single moral. This will help us understand what the figures represent. **(Lk 15:9-10, Mat 18:35)**

Only a few times does Jesus include the **explanation** of the parable. It is definitely a blessing to hear the explanation in our savior's own words, but know that Jesus usually expects us to be able to figure out the meaning of the parables by ourselves. The parables are meant to be simple enough that any earnest believer can decipher them. **(Mat 13:36-37)**

Sometimes Jesus also includes the appropriate relevant **application**. He will explain how the moral should affect the audience. When His application is included, we need to use this as the key to our interpretation. **(Lk 7:44-47, Lk 10:36-37)**

This is the typical format of how a parable is seen in the Bible. Be confident that Jesus believes you can understand the teaching. Jesus did not teach in parables to confuse people. He taught in parables to make things simpler. Let us learn from these simple stories the beautiful infinite truths of God's word.