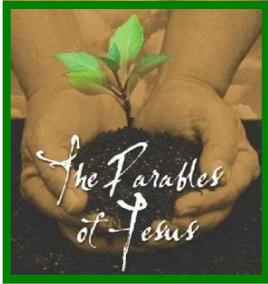


Jesus' parables often involve an element of surprise or an unexpected twist. We are taken off guard by the progression of the story. The parable moves from the very familiar and understandable aspects of experience to a sudden turn of events or a remarkable comparison which challenges the hearer and invites further reflection. For example, why should a shepherd go through a lot of bother and even risk his life to find one lost sheep when ninety-nine are in his safe keeping? The shepherd's concern for one lost sheep and his willingness to risk his own life for it tells us a lot about God's concern for His children who go astray.



How to read the parables

Jesus told his disciples that not everyone would understand his parables. "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not hear" (Lk.8: 10). Did Jesus mean to say that He was deliberately confusing His Listeners? Very likely not. Jesus was speaking from experience. He was aware that some who heard His parables refused to understand them. It was not that they could not intellectually understand them, but rather, their hearts were closed to what Jesus was saying. They had already made up their minds to not believe, God can only reveal the secrets of His kingdom to the humble and trusting person who acknowledges the need for God and for His truth. The parables of Jesus will enlighten us if we approach them with an open mind and heart, ready to let them challenge us. If we approach them with the conviction that we already know the answer, then we, too, may look but not see, listen but not hear or understand.

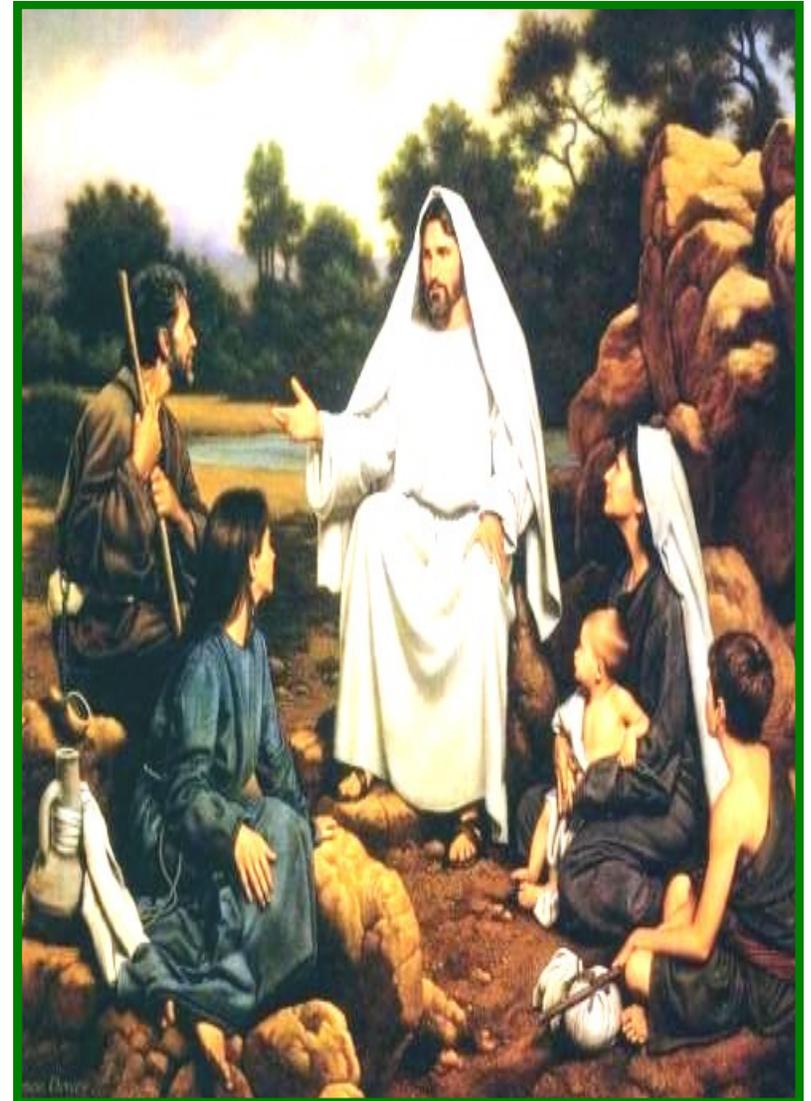
When reading the parables it is important not to get bogged down in the details of the story. The main point is what counts. Very often the details are clear enough, but some are obscure (for example, why would a rich man allow his dishonest steward to take care of his inventory LK. 16 1-8. A storyteller does not have to make every detail fit perfectly. Each parable will typically present a single point. Look for the main point and do not get bogged down in the details. In addition, Jesus often throws in a surprise or unexpected twist. These challenge the hearer and invites us to reflect. Jesus meant for His parables to provoke a response. If we listen with faith and humility then each will understand as he or she is able to receive what Jesus wishes to speak to each of our hearts.

* (excerpted from: www.rc.net)

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What is a Parable ?



***"He began to teach them many things
in parables." (Mark 4:2)***

What is a Parable

He began to teach them many things in parables." (Mark 4: 2)

Communicating with images and stories

*Like the rabbis of his time, Jesus used simple word-pictures, called parables, to help people understand who God is and what his kingdom or reign is like. Jesus used images and characters taken from everyday life to create a miniature play or drama to illustrate his message. This was Jesus' most common way of teaching. His stories appealed to the young and old, poor and rich, and to the learned and unlearned as well. Over a third of the Gospels by Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain parables told by Jesus. Jesus loved to use illustrations to reach the heart of his listeners through their imagination. These word-pictures challenged the mind to discover anew what God is like and moved the heart to make a response to God's love and truth. Like a skillful artist, Jesus painted lively pictures with short and simple words. A good picture can speak more loudly and clearly than many words. Jesus used the ordinary everyday to point to another order of reality-- hidden, yet visible to those who had "eyes to see" and "ears to hear". Jesus communicated with pictures and stories, vivid illustrations which captured the imaginations of his audience more powerfully than an abstract presentation could. His parables are like buried treasure waiting to be discovered (Matthew 13: 44).

How can ordinary everyday images and stories, such as hidden treasure, a tiny mustard seed, a determined woman looking for her lost coin, a barren fig tree, a pearl of great price, and some uninvited wedding guests, portray timeless and extraordinary truths? Jesus taught by use of comparisons. "To what shall we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use for it? It is like a mustard seed..." (Mark 4: 30-31). God's kingdom or reign is like what happens in Jesus' stories. The comparisons have to do with a whole process and not simply with an object or person alone. While His parables are rooted in a specific time and place, they nonetheless speak of timeless realities to people of every time and place. They underline the fact that God works in every age and he meets us in the ordinary everyday situations of life.

What is a parable?

A parable is a word-picture which uses an image or story to illustrate a truth or lesson. It creates a mini-drama in picture language that describes the reality being illustrated. It shows a likeness between the image of an illustration and the object being portrayed. It defines the unknown by using the known. It helps the listener to discover the deeper meaning and underlying truth of the reality being portrayed. It can be a figure of speech or comparison, such as "the kingdom of God... is like a mustard seed... or like yeast" (Luke 13: 19, 21). More commonly it is a short story told to bring out a lesson or moral. Jesus used simple stories or images to convey important truths about God and His kingdom, and lessons pertaining to the way of life and happiness which God has for us. They commonly feature examples or illustrations from daily life in ancient Palestine, such as mustard seeds and fig trees, wineskins and oil lamps, money and treasure, stewards, workers, judges, homemakers, wedding parties and children' games. Today we have to do some *homework* to understand the social customs described.

Jesus' parables have a double meaning. First, there is the literal meaning, apparent to anyone who has experience with the subject matter. But beyond the literal meaning lies a deeper meaning -- a beneath-the-surface lesson about God's truth and His kingdom. For example, the parable of the leaven (Mt. 13: 33) describes the simple transformation of dough into bread by the inclusion of the yeast. In like manner, we are transformed by God's kingdom when we allow his word and Spirit to take root in our hearts. In turn we are called to be leaven that transforms the society in which we live and work. Saint Jerome, an early church father and biblical scholar remarked: "The marrow of a parable is different from the promise of its surface, and like as gold is sought for in the earth, the kernel in a nut and the hidden fruit in the prickly covering of chestnuts, so in parables we must search more deeply after the divine meaning."