What Is A Parable? {concluded}

by Bill Crews

the duties of men or things of God, particularly the nature and history of God's kingdom are figuratively portrayed ... 3. a pithy and instructive saying, involving some likeness or comparison and having perceptive or admonitory force; an aphorism, a maxim…"

A parable, unlike a fable (which attributes human characteristics and actions to animals, plants and inanimate things) is a story or statement involving people and things and actions that were true to life and familiar to those who were listening. Its purpose was to bring out, illustrate and emphasize a spiritual lesson or lessons. At times Jesus explained the meaning. At times He did so when asked by His disciples. But usually He simply told the parable, allowing the listeners to ponder the meaning. A common and abbreviated way of putting it: "A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." A definition not quite broad enough.

All of the New Testament parables were spoken by Jesus and appear in Matthew, Mark and Luke. There are none in John, Acts or the epistles (although the latter do contain rhetorical allegories and similes). The Revelation is filled with metaphorical language (signs and symbols), but contains no parables. Mark contains only one parable (the Seed Growing in Secret, 4:26) not found in Matthew or Luke; the others, the Sower, the Mustard Seed and the Wicked Husbandmen, are also in Matthew and Luke. Matthew and Luke contain two in common, the Leaven (Matt. 13:33 and Lk. 13:20-21) and the Lost Sheep (Matt. 18:12ff and Lk. 15:3ff; not necessarily spoken on the same occasion). Ten parables are peculiar to Matthew: the Tares, the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl of Great Price, the Draw Net, the Unmerciful Servant, the Laborers in the Vineyard, the Two Sons, the Marriage of the King's Son, the Ten Virgins and the Talents. Seventeen parables are peculiar to Luke: the Two Debtors, the Good Samaritan, the Friend at Midnight, the Rich Fool, the Watchful Servants, the Barren Fig Tree, the Chief Seats, the Great Supper, the Rash Builder, the Rash King, the Lost Coin, the Lost Son(s), the Unrighteous Steward, the Unprofitable Servant, the Unrighteous Judge, the Pharisee and the Publican and the Pounds.

The parables of Christ are striking and designed to make a deep impression, thus making it easier to remember the lessons they were designed to teach. They are drawn from such categories as building or construction, farming, tending animals, cooking and housekeeping, finding treasures, fishing, stewardship, weddings, marriage and other feasts, masters and slaves, employers and employees, worshiping God in prayer, persistence in prayer, inheritances, relation of the old covenant to the new and other matters. The lessons they teach have to do with individual responsibilities, duties toward others, the mercy of God, forgiving and being forgiven, the concern of God for the lost, the worth of citizenship in the Lord's kingdom, the results of preaching the gospel, the nature of the Lord's kingdom and being prepared for the coming judgment. Many are introduced with the words: *"the kingdom of heaven (or God) is **like** …"* The kingdom would be open to Gentiles as well as Jews. As the end of His ministry drew near and the time for His crucifixion came closer, the parables became more pointed in their depiction of the unbelieving Jewish leaders.

In the next article we will consider the Lord's reasons for teaching in parables and some things that will aid in understanding their lessons.

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