

MATTHEW 13-14

The Parables and John's Death

February 11, 2024 HPC Trinity Class

When we read Jesus' parables our first question should not be, "What did Jesus mean?" but rather, "What did the individual evangelists mean?" That is, each one of the Synoptic Gospel writers had a certain slant or emphasis, which is reflected in each parable's telling.

(By the way, parables are short stories, not allegories. They are meant to be heard, not studied like a manuscript.¹ See the comparison table on the back page.)

Jesus' parables explain simple spiritual truths. Those who have already rejected Jesus and his Good News will hear only a simple story, but those who believe will be enlightened. Parables are not "codes," intended to say one thing but mean another. They are tools which allow us as believers to better understand our Lord and the Kingdom.



Parable of the Sower

(also in MK 4 and LK 8)

[READ MT 13: 3-9]

The rocky places = those who profess faith but do not possess Christ. These are the intellectuals who find Christianity fascinating...but impossible to believe. Their faith is shallow and their lives have not been transformed. When tested they wither.

Same seed, same sower, but different soil. Four different types of "soil" (people) are mentioned:

1. the *indifferent*—those who simply scoot through life, and this "Jesus thing" is just another item to be checked off of their lifetime to-do list. Easily eaten by the birds.
2. the *shallow*---those who have hidden agendas and other priorities. Their knowledge and desire for God are shallow and they soon wither.
3. the *cluttered* (This is many of us today!!)---those whose lives are too full to think of others or of God. Materialism is their god.
4. the *responsive*---those who gladly welcome the Word and who long to live it daily in faith and righteousness.

13:10-13---His disciples ask Jesus why he doesn't just come out and say it? Why couch the meaning in parables? Notice that they don't ask the meaning of this single parable; they are questioning Jesus' presentation methods.

- "secrets" (*mystērion*) meaning "hidden until revealed."

¹ Augsburg, pg. 166. Examples of allegories are "The Tortoise and the Hare," and "Animal Farm," where the emphasis is on myth and morality. Parables, however, usually emphasize a morality lesson, with less emphasis on the storytelling itself.

- How can a person have ears yet not hear, or have eyes yet not see? (v. 13)
 - Here's an example from banking: "When spin occurs at the predetermined time, all DDA and EFT transactions will post. Any funds not yet cleared will remain unposted."



Remember this from last week's lesson?
**Jesus' ministry was one of celebration
 but most did not listen;**
**John [the Baptist] called upon the people to mourn,
 but most did not repent.**

Jesus' concern here is that his followers might turn to him simply because of his miracles or his preaching but still not understand the full nature of what God was doing.

What's the point of this parable of the sower story?

Matthew never tells us specifically. However, both Jesus' original disciples and we should not be discouraged if our evangelical message falls flat sometimes. As the parable implies, the bulk of the crop will flourish.

Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (a.k.a. weeds or darnel). This tackles the question, "What about the plant that doesn't bear good fruit?"

[READ MT 13:24-26]

- This parable touches upon real-life circumstances. Ancient farmers who did not have good relations with their neighboring farmers would sometimes threaten them with something like, "I'll sow weeds (tares) in your field."
- The wheat represents the followers of Christ; the tares are Christ's enemies. Both plants



v. 30 is the judgement scene. The tares look like wheat until the harvest. Then the heads show the obvious difference.



Two points are made here: (1) The

Kingdom of God may seem to be obscure amidst the turmoil and confusion of this world. In the end, however, all will become apparent and justice will be done. (2) Saints and sinners share this same world. It is God's judgement as to who is to be saved, not ours.



Parable of the Mustard Seed (also in MK 4 and LK 13). [READ MT 13:31-32]

A mustard seed is very tiny and insignificant, but it can grow as tall as twelve feet and is strong enough to allow birds to perch on it. Likewise, the Kingdom of Heaven will grow abundantly.

The Parable of the Leaven (MT 13:33) is similar to that of the mustard seed story: small beginnings with exponential results. However, in this parable the emphasis is upon the leaven (i.e., "Kingdom of Heaven") permeating the world, not simply excessive growth, as seen with the mustard tree. The leaven's work is done invisibly, yet the result—a fully risen loaf—is amazing.

MT 13:34-35---**Why did Jesus use so many parables in his preaching?**

- This fulfills the words of Psalm 78:2.
 - **What are those "hidden things?"**
 - The acts of God's redemption as seen in his Son: teaching, miracles, death, and (most importantly) his resurrection.²
- This was also a common and effective teaching method in Jesus' time.³

Break time: Jesus goes back indoors leaving the crowd outside. However, his disciples follow him, saying they did not clearly understand his parable about the weeds.

[READ 13:37-43]



Parable of the Hidden Treasure (Pearl of Great Price). [READ 13:44-46]

Notice the way the sentence is worded: Jesus isn't saying the Kingdom is like the treasure; he's saying that *discovering* the Kingdom is like discovering a treasure. The second short parable is structured the same: the pearl is not being compared to the Kingdom; it's *discovery* is the connecting point.

Parable of the Net (MT 13:47-50). This is similar to the Parable of the Wheat & Tares. This parable, though, would probably be of keener interest to all who heard it, being that this was spoken in the fishing village of Capernaum, and at least five of his disciples were professional fishermen. [READ 13:47-50]



This is the only reference in the NT of a *sagēnē*, which literally means "drag net." (This was different than the simple weighted "casting net" used by only one fisherman.) The preferred method of deploying this was to stretch the net between two boats. Then both boats head toward shore, with the resulting catch snagging anything in its path, both good fish and bad, large and small. The worthless ones (*sapron*) were cast away.

² Carson, pg. 322.

³ Known as the Greek chiasmic style, the statement is repeated in reverse order. It may be one sentence or an entire book, such as the Book of Ruth. A simple example is MK 2: 27: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." Chiasms made for easier memorization.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net across the world, being pulled toward the final reckoning.⁴ As in the wheat parable, we are not to be deceived by the good and bad existing together in the same culture, nor are we to execute the judgment of God.

13:51---Jesus asked if his disciples had grasped all of this. They all said “yes,” but later prove otherwise (MT 15:16).

13:54---The name of Jesus’ hometown is not mentioned. It appears that he now called Capernaum home. However, Luke 4:16 labels Nazareth as the place “where he had been brought up.”⁵ **[READ MT 13:54-58]**

Based on the Greek verb tense, this was not a simple weekend visit by Jesus. Rather, the stay was much longer, more like an extended ministry.⁶ Jesus impresses the hometown folks when speaking in the synagogue, but they couldn’t believe this was the same kid who grew up here. (Again, hearing but not understanding.)

13:55-57--They knew all of his family by name and that he was the son of a carpenter.

- Mark (MK 6:3) says that Jesus was not just the son of one but was also a carpenter himself. He could have easily been both; in those days the oldest son usually continued the trade of the father.
 - *Tektōn* can be translated as “carpenter” or “builder.”
Most of the houses in that region were made of mud brick, so “builder” may be the better translation.
 - The early Christian philosopher Justin Martyr (@150 A.D.) wrote that Jesus was a maker of plows and yokes.
 - The definite article in Greek (“the carpenter’s son”) implies that there was only one carpenter in town.
 - But his “homies” had probably also heard of his supposedly self-proclaimed Messiahship, which rankled them even more.⁷



[READ MT 13:58]---Matthew says Jesus “did not do many miracles” here because of Nazareth’s attitude and unbelief. In the Book of Mark the words are harsher: “could not do any miracles” (MK 6:5), though this may be an exaggeration by Mark. His “could not” phrase is not dependent upon the people’s belief because he has reported other events where the people exhibited no faith: feeding of the 5,000 and the healing of the Gadarene demoniac. In MT the words “could not” are related to Jesus’ mission---just as Jesus could not turn stones to bread without violating that mission (MT 4:1-4).

⁴ Augsburg, pg. 180.

⁵ MT 2:23 adds that Joseph took his wife and baby Jesus “to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.”

⁶ Ibid, pg. 182.

⁷ “Even though a man has read Scripture and learned the Mishnah, but not as an apprentice of a master, he is a commoner.” Babylonian Talmud

John the Baptist is killed [READ MT 14:1-5]

John didn't denounce Herod for divorcing his first wife; he denounced him for marrying a woman who was already married to his brother. (Herodias was also Herod's niece, the daughter of Herod's half-brother---which was OK per Jewish law at the time.)

- vs. 3-12 are flashbacks and explain Herod's astonished cry, "This (Jesus) is John the Baptist" risen from the dead. One could easily skip from v. 2 to v. 13.
- Josephus, the famous non-biblical historian of the time, believed that Herod's actions were largely motivated by politics. As far as leadership goes, Herod Antipas was a very weak, insecure ruler. [READ MT 14:6-12]

Salome⁸ was quite young, only 12-15 years old. The text does not say so but her dance was probably very sensual. The Herodian family had a tradition of parties that were outrageously immoral. Add to this the low morals of dancing girls of this era.

John was being held at the Machaerus fortress. Based upon how quickly the severed head reached Herod, the birthday feast must have also been at that fortress.

- Roman law permitted executions without trial. Jewish law forbid it.

Feeding of the 5,000 (Also in MK 6, LK 9, and John 6—the only miracle of Jesus to appear in all four gospels) [READ MT 14:13-14]

According to Luke the "solitary place" was the region belonging to Bethsaida, on the NE shore of Galilee. The crowds ran on foot along the bank, watching Jesus' boat make its way to an open space.

[READ MT 14:15-18] "YOU (emphatic) give them something to eat." The disciples would indeed end up giving the crowd food, but not conjuring it out of nothing.

v. 19—Jesus looked to heaven, thanked God, and broke the loaves. All of this was considered a daily routine in a Jewish household and was performed by the head of the household.

v. 20-21---All ate and afterwards twelve baskets (*kophinos*) of leftovers were collected.

The point? God will provide. If 5,000 men were present with their wives and children, the total crowd that was fed could have been 15,000+.

Consider this: Late 19th century theologians tried to explain this miracle by stating that all were fed because the people shared their lunch baskets with one another.

⁸ Herodias' daughter is not named in the Bible, only by Josephus.

Jesus walks on water

[READ 14:22-24]

It's getting late now. The boat leaves with the disciples but Jesus stays ashore to pray.

- Jesus "immediately" made his helpers leave. "Compelled" or "insisted" would be the mood. Jesus wanted them out of there ASAP.

A storm comes up.

- The boat was near the middle of the Sea of Galilee by this time, which wasn't far. This sea is only about 8 miles wide. Strong winds from the west are common here and the boat was "buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it."

[READ 14:25-33]

Jesus walks on the lake toward the boat during the "fourth watch," which is 3 a.m. to 6 a.m.

- The Romans calculated time in four watches; Jews used three. Although Matthew is writing to primarily a Jewish audience, he borrows the phrase "fourth watch" from Mark, which had been written primarily for non-Jewish readers.
- Peter walks on water toward Jesus but loses courage and faith as he goes. Jesus catches him and they join the others in the boat.
- The storm immediately stops.
- The climax of the story is when Jesus' disciples confess that he truly is the Son of God.

vs. 34-36---Gennesaret was a fertile plain on the NW side of the lake. The people knew of Jesus and flocked to him. The miracles continued.

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Allegory vs Parable

Comparison Table

Characteristics	Allegory	Parable
Meaning	A representation of an abstract principle using plants, animals, forces of nature, and inanimate things as characters	A short story, poem, or prose used to illustrate a lesson (religious or moral) by analogy or comparison
Length	Usually a book- or feature-length	Considerably shorter
Characters	Uses plants, animals, forces of nature, and inanimate things	Uses human characters to send the message
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· The Animal Farm (book)· The Avengers (film)· The Breakfast Club (Television show)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· The parable of the Prodigal Son· The parable of the Good Samaritan 