

# Parables 101 – Tools for Interpretation

## What are Parables?

- A. Parables are stories
  - 1. They are stories/narratives about common everyday situations
  - 2. However, the stories are turned upside down
  - 3. The conclusion is not usually expected –e.g. “the last will be first, & the first last.” (Mt. 20:16)
  - 4. They are stories with a message, a “punchline” e.g. You “Go and do the same.” (Lk. 10:37)
  - 5. They often create more questions than answers
  - 6. Stories remain with us more than mere teachings

## The Purpose of the Parables

- A. They are stories primarily about Jesus and his kingdom
  - 1. This new reality is about new human relationships with Jesus as the king
  - 2. They are about what life in the kingdom of God is like
  - 3. They are mainly a non-direct form of speech
- B. They create interest and deal with issues
- C. They force people to think deeply and differently
- D. They are meant to change behavior
- E. Many are not interpreted
- F. They teach spiritual truth and demand a response.

## Principles or guidelines for interpretation

- A. Read to hear and understand
- B. Read within the context of the culture of that time
- C. Should they be allegorized?
  - 1. What is an allegory?
  - 2. In the past the parables were excessively allegorized
  - 3. Parables may be allegorical, some more, some less
  - 4. Every detail should not be allegorized
- D. Understand the people they directed to, what is the context?
  - 1. Large crowds i.e. parable of the Sower
  - 2. Smaller groups (tax collectors & sinners with Pharisees & scribes) i.e. prodigal son
  - 3. Those who can hear and those who cannot – “He who has ears to hear, let him hear”
- E. A Parable’s interpretation should not contradict the Bible’s explicit teaching
- F. Realize not all scholars agree
- G. Be willing to hear,
  - 1. Go deeper, wrestle with the parable, meditate on it
  - 2. Talk about it with others, ask questions.
  - 3. How does this depict the kingdom of God?

## Tools for Interpreting Parables – ask these questions

- A. What's the main point? What was Jesus' main point?
- B. How many main characters? How many points ~ number of characters
- C. How did Jesus conclude this parable? Is there a 'punchline'?
- D. What does this tell us about God's kingdom?
- E. What do the main characters represent/symbolize?
- F. What question does this Parable answer?
- G. What's the message for us today? (implications/applications)

## Conclusion

- A. We are challenged to have "ears to hear" that means:
  - 1. Go deeper, wrestle with the parable, meditate on it
  - 2. Be prepared to be confused.
  - 3. Talk about it with others, ask questions.
  - 4. Don't ignore the parable or else the meaning will be concealed from you
  - 5. How does this parable depict the kingdom of God? How do I see Jesus the king in His Kingdom?