

PONDERINGS ON JESUS' PARABLES

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Nothing can substitute for your direct pondering of Jesus' parables.

This Thinksheet, & a number before it, are intended only as aids to

your pondering....I suggest that as you read these ponderings of mine, you **mark** any you think you may profit from returning to.

1 In Gestalt dream-analysis, you imagine yourself everybody/everything in your dream. Try the same for parable-analysis. You'll be in the right ballpark: Jesus doesn't tell you a parable about somebody else. You're "it"!

2 Adolf Jülicher, grandfather of modern parable-studies, distinguished between parabolic material consisting of comparisons, likenesses (his word, *Gleichnisse*, section A, p.2 of this Thinksheet) & parables proper (section B). I suggest that you read any pair at random (say, #10 & #31) to see-feel-understand the difference. Then try any other pair. Now try to imagine the difference in settings: Would Jesus have been more apt to use section-A type with the disciples, or with the crowds? or the reverse? Which, when challenged by religious or political authorities?

3 Jesus did not invent the parable genre but "took possession of it,...using it as the vehicle for the highest truth of all" (Trench [1841], p.44). He refined the art as it came to him from his Jewish heritage & his pagan environment, the latter (as Hellenistic rhetoric [Eckhard Rau, V&R/90]) mainly indirectly through the Pharisees. As Luther said Christians shouldn't let the devil have all the good tunes (so Luther wrote hymns to some of them), Jesus used a medium (the parable genre) familiar to his polyglot audiences to convey his new-world-making message. Thus his parables were "stories designed to break open worldviews and make new understandings possible" (N.T.Wright, WHO WAS JESUS? [Eerdmans/92], p.97). Next p.: "Jesus used parables to say all this. If too many people [had] realized the doubly revolutionary implications [challenge to the pagan sociopolitical order, subversion of Jewish institutions & ethnic hopes], he wouldn't have lasted fifteen minutes."

4 While our Gospels have less concern for chronological sequence than we moderns have, I go with scholars who categorize the parables in three stages of Jesus' ministry:

.....before Mt.14, M.6, & L.9 (the feeding of the 5,000). Here are THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM (Robt. Farrar Capon's book on this period, Zondervan/85). Jesus as teacher-master-rabbi with his traveling band of disciples.

.....Mt.21, M.11, L.19 (the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem). Here are (the second of Capon's parables-trilogy) THE PARABLES OF GRACE (Eerdmans/88/89). Here is the very familiar Jesus, "good news" evangelist-preacher to all...

till Mt.26, M.14, L.22 (the beginning of the passion narratives, the saga of Jesus' final sufferings-death-resurrection). Here are (the third of Capon's parables trilogy) THE PARABLES OF JUDGMENT (Eerdmans/89). Jesus as prophet/confronter.

Capon's trilogy is as scholarly as any current work on the parables, & more readable--& delightful!--than any other. A sample of his style & substance (...JUDGMENT, p.15): "The usual distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith (a distinction that almost always ends us boosting the former and knocking the latter) is historically inaccurate, scripturally pointless, and fundamentally mischievous." If you want to read only a few but the best, read those three plus these two (in one vol.) from Kenneth E. Bailey, POET AND PEASANT and THROUGH PEASANT EYES: A LITERARY-CULTURAL APPROACH TO THE PARABLES IN LUKE (combined ed., Eerdmans/83).

5 In the current **debate** on the Gospels, the two media-prominent scholars are Raymond Brown (liberal conservative, as Capon & I) & Jn. Dominic Crossan, co-founder (1985) of the Jesus Seminar, which aims to "go public" with conclusions of radical scholars (eg, THE TRENTONIAN [N.J. newspaper], 12 Dec 93: "Scholars say Jesus had ghost writer"). In the 27 Mar 94 NYT 22L, Crossan says "the issue is whether the Passion accounts are prophecy historicized or history remembered. Ray Brown is 80%" for the latter, "I'm 80% in the opposite direction."

"The Parables have been interpreted as (a) vehicles of moral teaching, (b) weapons of self-defense, (c) calls to decision, (d) witnesses to Jesus' faith, (3) gifts of time, (f) invitations to a new reality, etc."--Rich. N. Soulen, HANDBOOK OF BIBLICAL CRITICISM (Jn.Knox/76), p.120. On this & his following page, Soulen reproduces Jülicher's two listings, which I reproduce here:

A. Similitudes and Similes (*Gleichnisse*)

| | | | |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| [1. Concerning Salt | Mt. 5:13; | Mk. 9:49-50; | Lk. 14:34-35 |
| **[2. Concerning Light(s) | Mt. 5:14, 16; | Mk. 4:21; | Lk. 8:16; 11:33 |
| [3. The Eye as the Light of Life | Mt. 6:22-23; | | Lk. 11:34-36 |
| 4. Concerning the Fig Tree | Mt. 24:32-33; | Mk. 13:28-29; | Lk. 21:29-31 |
| 5. The Servant's Wages | | | Lk. 17:7-10 |
| 6. The Playing Children | Mt. 11:16-19; | | Lk. 7:31-35 |
| [7. The Petitioning Son | Mt. 7:9-11; | | Lk. 11:11-13 |
| [8. The Pupil and His Teacher | Mt. 10:24-25; | | Lk. 6:40 |
| [9. The Blind Leading the Blind | Mt. 15:14; | | Lk. 6:39 |
| [10. On What Defiles a Man | Mt. 15:10-20; | Mk. 7:14-23 | |
| [11. On Revealing What Is Hidden | Mt. 10:26-27; | Mk. 4:22; | Lk. 8:17; 12:2-23 |
| [12. Concerning Two Masters | Mt. 6:24; | | Lk. 16:13 |
| [13. The Tree and Its Fruit | Mt. 7:16-20; 12:33-37; | | Lk. 6:43-45 |
| [14. The Householder | Mt. 13:51-52 | | |
| [15. The Eagles | Mt. 24:28; | | Lk. 17:37 |
| *16. The Watchful Householder | Mt. 24:43-44; | | Lk. 12:39-40 |
| 17. The Faithful and Wise Servant | Mt. 24:45-51; | | Lk. 12:41-48 |
| 18. The Coming of the Householder | | Mk. 13:33-37; | Lk. 12:35-38 |
| [19. On Healing Oneself | | | Lk. 4:23 |
| [20. The Physician and the Sick | Mt. 9:12-13; | Mk. 2:17; | Lk. 5:31-32 |
| [21. The Bridegroom | Mt. 9:14-15; | Mk. 2:18-20; | Lk. 5:33-35 |
| [22. Old Cloth and Old Wine Skins | Mt. 9:16-17; | Mk. 2:21-22; | Lk. 5:36-39 |
| 23. On Building Towers and Going to War | | | Lk. 14:28-33 |
| [24. On Beelzebul | Mt. 12:22-30; 43-45 | Mk. 3:22-27; | Lk. 11:14-26 |
| 25. On the Way to the Judge | Mt. 5:25-26; | | Lk. 12:57-59 |
| 26. Places at the Feast | | | Lk. 14:7-11, 12-14 |
| [27. On Crumbs under the Table | Mt. 15:26-27; | Mk. 7:27-28 | |
| B. Parables Proper (<i>Parabeln</i>) | | | |
| 28. A House Built on Sand | Mt. 7:24-27; | | Lk. 6:47-49 |
| 29. The Importunate Friend | | | Lk. 11:5-8 |
| 30. The Unjust Judge | | | Lk. 18:1-8 |
| 31. The Two Debtors | | | Lk. 7:36-50 |
| 32. The Unmerciful Servant | Mt. 18:21-35 | | |
| *33. The Lost Sheep and Lost Coin | Mt. 18:10-14; | | Lk. 15:1-10 |
| 34. The Lost Son | | | Lk. 15:11-32 |
| 35. The Two Sons | Mt. 21:28-32 | | (Lk. 7:29-30) |
| *36. The Wicked Tenants | Mt. 21:33-46; | Mk. 12:1-12; | Lk. 20:9-19 |
| *37. The Great Supper (2) | Mt. 22:1-10 (11-14); | | Lk. 14:15-24 |
| 38. The Unfruitful Fig Tree | | | Lk. 13:6-9 |
| 39. The Ten Virgins | Mt. 25:1-13 | | (Lk. 13:23-30) |
| 40. The Laborers in the Field | Mt. 20:1-16 | | |
| 41. The Pounds | Mt. 25:14-30; | | Lk. 19:11-27 |
| 42. The Unjust Steward | | | Lk. 16:1-12 |
| *43. The Sower | Mt. 13:3-9, 18-23; | Mk. 4:3-9, 14-20; | Lk. 8:5-8, 11-15 |
| *44. The Seed Growing Secretly | | Mk. 4:26-29 | |
| 45. The Wheat and the Tares | Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43 | | |
| *46. The Dragnet | Mt. 13:47-50 | | |
| *47. The Mustard Seed and the Leaven | Mt. 13:31-33; | Mk. 4:30-32; | Lk. 13:18-21 |
| *48. The Treasure and the Pearl | Mt. 13:44-46 | | |

Key: [Metaphor or Simile omitted by Jeremias from the category "Parable."

(Added by Jeremias

** Treated as two separate *Gleichnisse* by Jülicher.

* Parallels in the Gospel of Thomas: #16: 85:7-10; 98:6-10. #33: 98:22-27. #36: 93:1-18. #37: 92:10-35. #43: 83:3-13. #44: 85:15-19. #46: 81:28-82:3. #47: 84:26-33; 97:2-6. #48: 98:31-99:3; 94:14-18. #52: 92:3-10.