

The Parables of Jesus

by

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Introduction

"I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world." (Matthew 13:35)

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.

The use of parables and other figures of speech have been used as teaching tools since the beginning of time. Not only were parables used in biblical writings, but they were widely used in secular writings as well. If we are seriously interested in understanding the parables of Jesus then we must make an earnest effort to grasp the meaning of the parable, and what is taught by that parable. Understanding these enigmatic parables is not easy, but I do assure you, when you understand them, you won't regret one single ounce of energy that you've expended.

The ancient Jewish teaching technique that Matthew and the other Gospel writers employed throughout their gospels was known as the parable plus explanation. Each ancient Jewish parable, by definition, design and intent, had a real-life target. And that is exactly the way that Jesus taught His great truths while He was here in his earthly body.

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).

Gerald Paden has studied and taught the Parables of Jesus in the Sunset International Bible Institute for many years. His explanation of the parables, and his practical application of those parables will delight the reader of this book. Not every parable contained in the Gospels is discussed, however, those that are discussed will be a fair representation of all the parables in the Gospels. As you study the parables taught by Jesus, you will not only learn the great truths taught therein, but you will also gain a deeper understanding of the Lord himself.

The Parables of Jesus

Introduction

Even in prophecy Jesus would be known for His parables. In Matthew 13:34, after giving the three “seed” parables, and the one about “leaven,” the evangelist explained: “*All these things spake Jesus in parables unto the multitudes; and without a parable spake he nothing unto them,*” at least, not in that context. Then Matthew quoted Psalms 78:2, “*I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world.*” Mark informs us that “*with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it; and without a parable spake he not unto them; but privately to his disciples he expounded all things*” (Mark 4:33-34). So, Jesus spoke in parables, thus fulfilling Old Testament prophecy!

Parables were teaching tools even in Old Testament times. To confirm this fact read God’s famous parable on Israel as a vineyard of His planting. Isaiah called it a “song for my beloved” (Isaiah 5:1-7). Another example is Nathan’s parable to David about Uriah’s only “sheep” – Bathsheba. The prophet so “spun” the story that David could not miss the application: “*Thou art the man*” (2 Samuel 12:1-7). Though Jesus did not originate the use of parables as a teaching tool, He, nevertheless, perfected their use during His personal ministry. Ted Kell, a former SIBI instructor, said: “When we think of Parables, we think of Jesus.” “The parables comprise more than one-third of the recorded teachings of Jesus” said Neil Lightfoot, an Abilene Christian university professor.

What is a Parable?

In the Greek language the word “parable” is introduced with the prepositional prefix, “para” which means beside, or along side. It is then followed with the verb “ballo” which

means to cast, or throw down. Uniting those two components, it means to “relate” a story and then to “throw down” an easily understood spiritual application of it. Parables present comparisons, or similes. The story line of a parable is generally taken from real-life situations that are common to human experience. An often used definition says that: “A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” But that is a bit too general a statement, for some parables do not tell a story; rather, they are simply “sayings” or “adages.” For example: “Physician heal thyself” is called a parable in Luke 4:23. Peter called: “The blind leading the blind,” a parable in Matthew 15:15. And again: “*The things that proceed out of the man are those that defile the man*” is referred to as a parable” (Mark 7:15-17).

Parables most often seek to convey only one significant moral or spiritual lesson, or establish a principle. They are not like an allegory. In an allegory most all the elements in the comparison have definite significance and easily blend into the message. An allegory can teach a whole series of truths, contained in the same figure. The Apostle Paul gave an imposing analogy between the Old and the New Covenants. He introduced it by mentioning Abraham’s two sons, “one by the handmaiden (Hagar) and one by the free woman (Sarah).” In Galatians 4:24 Paul said: “*Which things contain an allegory: for these women are two covenants; one from Mount Sinai,*” and it represents Israel under the Law of Moses. Of course, the other is “Jerusalem,” which represents Christians under the New Covenant. Those under the Law were “slaves,” while those under the new covenant of Christ are “free.”

The Sermon on the Mount is cram-packed with parabolic words that, even when isolated from the text, still communicate significant Biblical facts: salt, light, city set on a hill, lamp, bushel, lamp-stand, house, adversary, judge, officer, prison, throne, footstool, feet, inner chamber, door, moth, rust, thieves, eye, darkness, birds, lilies, oven, mote, beam, dogs, pearl, swine, loaf, stone, fish, serpent, gate, way, sheep, wolves, fruit,

grapes, thorns, figs, thistles, tree, fire, rock, floods, wind and sand: 49 words in all!

Myths and fables have no part in the parables. There is a clear separation between religious truth and secular fables. A fable contains fantasy, unreal, and unnatural elements – not so of the parables. Jotham gave a parody about trees that sought to make one of them to be king over the whole forest (Judges 9:7-15). Amaziah sent to Jehoash messengers with the fable of the “thistle” that wanted to marry the “cedar;” but the wild beasts trampled the “thistle” (2 Kings.14:8-11). Fables place the unnatural into a natural scene, but it is easily understood that it contradicts reality.

Proverbs are somewhat like parables. “Proverbs are generally short, pithy sayings that utter a part of their meaning, and leave the rest to be inferred” by the reader, so writes Richard Trench in his book on the miracles and parables of Jesus.

There are at least forty-five parables recorded in the three synoptic gospels. Luke preserved the greatest number of the parables, and in particular, those that were of more graphic beauty and content. Matthew recorded those parables that related more directly to the Kingdom of Christ, and to the dynamics of its growth. He also gave more attention to the parables that dealt with the final judgment. Mark offered very few of the parables. His message seemed to be more interested in what Jesus did, than in what he taught. John did not write down any of the parables. He did come close, when he presented Christ’s message about Himself as the “shepherd” and His people as His “sheep.” In fact, in the American Standard Version, that discourse is called a parable. But the Greek has the word: “*paroimia*,” which is better translated as a “figure” (John 10:6). Jesus’ discourse on the “Living Bread” in John 6, offers a strong analogy between physical food, essential for physical life and spiritual food, which is equally essential for spiritual life. It was not a parable, but rather a doctrinal discourse on the significance of the Cross, and the

conditions by which its virtues are to be appropriated by believers. *“It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life”* (John 6:63). That statement by Christ is designed to avoid assuming any literal interpretation of His message.

Why Jesus used parables

1. To fulfill prophecy – Psalms 78:2.
2. To make truths clear to believers, and to hide them from the unbelieving. His intent was both to reveal and to conceal His teachings. After giving the “Parable of the Sower” in Matthew 13:10, the disciples asked Jesus *“why speaketh thou unto them in parables?”* His answer: *“Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but unto them it is not given.”* In Mark’s parallel context, Jesus added this thought: *“Know ye not this parable? and how shall ye know all the parables?”* (Mark 4:13). In other words, Jesus seemed to be saying, “If you can’t understand this most simple lesson, how then can you understand any of the parables, or as He said: “all the parables.”
3. Parables illustrate basic principles. It is easier to process new information when it is couched in things already understood.
4. Parables spur the hearers, or readers to deeper thought and reflection about kingdom business.
5. Jesus knew that parables easily attract attention. Everyone loves a good story – especially when it involves their conduct.
6. The lessons of parables are enduring; for they indelibly stamp on one’s memory the vital truths they contain.
7. Parables stimulate inquiry. They encourage the quest for the hidden meaning. They promote curiosity, and easily provoke further investigation. Thus, they arouse susceptible minds to deeper investigation and discovery. Parables test the character of the hearers. The sincere are

fascinated, while the profane and superficial are unappreciative.

8. Parables disarm the antagonist by limiting all hasty judgments, and preconceived ideas, or even prejudices.
9. Parables give out truths as men are “able to hear it,” allowing for their immaturity in spiritual matters to grow (Mark 4:33).
10. To give the hearer an opportunity to evaluate an accepted truth, even before the implications of the parable sink in.
11. Parables demand an answer, and encourage a verdict. In the Parable of the Two Sons, Jesus introduced it by saying: “*What think ye....*” (Matthew 21:28).
12. Parables made it easy for every man to recognize himself in the picture, and so take appropriate action, or else stand self-condemned.
13. Parables produce a sudden awakening to some urgent reality of life.
14. They elevate man’s thoughts from the mundane to the heavenly.
15. Jesus was thus able to guard truth from being summarily rejected.
16. Each parable leaves every person with clear options and alternatives, but at the same time, free to make his own choices.

The whole history of Israel, and of its worship ordinances were filled with veiled prophecies, types, ante-types, and shadows versus realities. That historical background prepared the people of Israel for teachings that made extensive use of pictorial, and descriptive representations as the parables do.

Rules for the interpreting the Parables

First: It is urgently important to avoid gratuitous allegories that tend to make every detail of the story to be meaningful. A post-apostolic writer, named Origen, offered this explanation

of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, a rendition that even Augustine accepted as being appropriate. “A certain man” was Adam; “Jerusalem” was the heavenly city of peace; “Jericho” was the moon (signifying death, because it wanes); the “thieves” are the Devil and his angels; “stripped him” means they robbed him of his immortality; “beat him” meant that they persuaded him to sin; “priest and Levite” represented the Old Testament, the “Samaritan” – which means Guardian in Hebrew, would be Christ; “binding the wounds” would be restraint from sin; “oil” becomes the comfort of hope; “wine” would be an exhortation to work with fervent spirit; the “beast” would be the fleshly body of Jesus; the “Inn” would be the church, the “morrow” would be the resurrection; “two pence” are love and life; the “Innkeeper” is the Apostle Paul.” Such a treatment makes the parable into an exaggerated allegory. It is evident that those interpretations, though interesting, are clearly arbitrary and speculative opinions.

Second: Parables must never become the primary source, or seed-bed of church doctrine. Clearly, the purpose of the parables is not dogma! They are illustrations of truths that are taught elsewhere in the New Testament, and illustrate truths that are easily verified from other Biblical sources. They can embellish, adorn and demonstrate, even in dramatic fashion, the message they seek to communicate. Therefore, any conclusion drawn from a parable that is not contained in principle in other Biblical texts is generally more speculation than exegesis, and is not a justified application.

Third: Generally, parables do not deal with ethical issues. Though some parables seem to contain illustrations that invade the arena of ethics, those are side issues, and do not define the purpose of the story. For example, the “Unrighteous Steward” (Luke 16:8) was commended by “his lord” for his shrewd dealings, but the lesson to be learned rather relates to our being as diligent in service to God as the people of the world are in their quest for material gain. In the “Hidden Treasure,” the man found it, then furtively “hid it,” and proceeded to buy the land.

His surreptitious, secretive action is not the message of the parable. It is rather his wisdom in “selling all that he had” so he could lay hold on the “treasure” of the Kingdom of God. In the “Prodigal Son” story, there is no mention of atonement being made for the sins of the wayward son; but from other Biblical sources it is clear that there can be no forgiveness without atonement. Legal and moral issues can be a part of the storyline of a parable without being the central message it brings.

Fourth: Interpreting a parable requires that the first priority be that of seeking to find, and then to expose the most obvious, salient, central truth or principle in the parable. When the major thrust of the story is understood, then all other related truths tend to fall into focus. Common sense certainly comes into play in this area.

Fifth: Applications drawn from a parable must be harmonized with all truths elsewhere taught. Explanations must agree consistently with all unchanging truth and eternal principles contained in Scripture.

Sixth: Never interpret the literal from the figurative, but allow the literal to explain the figurative.

Seventh: A parable needs to be understood in light of the circumstances, or the context from which it arises. It is important to take note of the discussion underway in the context; for this could give insights into the message to be learned. Some parables seem to underscore a number of lessons it teaches. The “Parable of the Sower” is one good example of multiple applications.

Eighth: Often Jesus gives the application He desired the audience to learn. There are many such examples. In the “Parable of the King’s son” the interpretation is given in the context: “*Many are called, but few are chosen*” (Matthew 22:14). The “Wise and Foolish Virgins” issues this admonition as the application: “*Watch therefore, for ye know not the day, nor the hour*” (Matthew 25:13). “*Joy in heaven over one sinner that repents*” is the evident object lesson of the three parables

in Luke 15. “The Parable of the Importunate Widow” is explained by Luke: “*He spake unto them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint*” (Luke 18:1). The application of the parable of the “Pharisee and the Publican” is contained in the prologue: “*He spake a parable unto certain men who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at naught*” (Luke 18:9). Obviously herein is a warning against self-righteous pride. Luke 19:11-27 covers the “Parable of the Pounds;” and its lesson is contained in the prologue: “*They supposed that the kingdom of God was immediately to appear.*” The “Parable of the Unmerciful Servant” answers the question: “*Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?*” Then, in the epilogue this admonition is all but self evident: “*So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if you forgive not every one his brother from his heart*” (Matthew 18:35).

When Peter mentioned to the Lord: “*Lo, we have left all, and followed thee; what then shall we have?*” Jesus answered, those who have left family, possessions, houses and land “shall receive a hundred fold, and shall inherit eternal life.” Jesus then gave this addendum: “*But many shall be last that are first; and first that are last*” (Matthew 19:27-30). It seems that Jesus perceived their need for more information on that topic. So, He then told the “Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard,” from which He insisted on the same general application: “*So the last shall be first, and the first last*” (Matthew 20:1-16). In the “Parable of the Rich Fool,” this application is contained in the introduction: “*Take heed, and keep yourselves from all covetousness,*” and then reinforced in the epilogue: “*So is he that lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God*” (Luke 12:13-21). Perhaps the most specific application Jesus ever gave to a parable is that found in the “Parable of the Tares.” When the disciples came to Him, and said: “*Explain unto us the parable of the tares of the field.*” Jesus explained that “*He that sowed the good seed is the Son of man; and the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one, and the*

enemy that sowed them is the devil; and the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels” (Matthew 13:36-39).

Ninth: Special attention needs to be given when the parable relates to Kingdom legislation, or to the Kingdom itself, to its policies, to its morals, to its difference from earthly kingdoms, and to the dynamics of its growth patterns, and ultimately to its assignments, and to its place on the day of judgment.

Tenth: Many of the parables discuss God’s judgment on the wicked, the false, the uncommitted, the hypocritical, the unbelieving and the self-righteous. Listen to Jesus’ words to that later group: *“You are they that justify yourselves in the sight of men; but God knows your hearts: for that which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God”* (Luke 16:15). That rationale on God’s judgment followed the “Parable of the Unrighteous Servant” (Luke 16:1-13). One more urgent lesson contained in this parable is: *“No servant can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and mammon.”*

Eleventh: The student of the parables must notice if the obvious intent of the parable is to promote humility and condemn pride; to promote diligence and condemn sloth; to promote fruitfulness and condemn barrenness.

Twelfth: Be honest with the text and avoid attempts at originality.

Thirteenth: Be diligent in study and prayerfully research the message.

Fourteenth: Make the first application to yourself personally. Let the Lord instruct you first! Be a disciple at His feet!

Fifteenth: Compare other versions of the same parable in other gospel accounts, when they are available.

Sixteenth: It would be good to note the difference in the body (“*corpus*”) and the soul (“*anima*”) of the story. The “*corpus*” contains the details of the parable, and the “*anima*”

contains its meaning. In the final analysis, the “anima” is what the Master Teacher looks for!

The first parable that appears chronologically in the New Testament is called: “The Children of the Bride Chamber.” Therefore it will be the first one we study. It will be important to read the three evangelists’ rendition of the parable at the beginning. The parables will be addressed under the headings as listed in the Table of Contents:

General Format for Studying the Parables

1. Identification and reading of the Parable, especially in all the recorded accounts of it.
2. Define its general context, and expose its most obvious lesson.
3. Discuss the content, for modifying details.
4. Seek to make evident applications:
 - First to the first hearers, in the context of Jesus’ day.
 - Then to the context of the church today.
5. Deal with problem areas, if there are any.

Conflicts of the New and Old

Children of the Bride Chamber, New Patches on old Garments,
New Wine in Old Wineskins, The Hidden Treasure

When Jesus appeared on the scene, the Jews of that day had a physical and nationalistic view of the kingdom to be restored to them under God's Messiah. Their interest was more in salvation from Rome than in salvation from sin.

But that was not the view of the kingdom which God had (John 18:36). As a result Jesus did not fit the role which the Jews expected from their Messiah. He did not come to patch up Judaism nor to be poured into Judaism's mold.

He came to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21) ... to establish a new and better covenant (Hebrews 8:6-13)... and to create a new, spiritual Israel and Kingdom (John 18:36).

In these first four parables, Jesus will draw a contrast between the concept the Jews had of the coming kingdom with the reality of the Messianic Kingdom.

The Children of the Bride Chamber

(Matthew 9:14-15; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35)

Central theme: *Good news of the Kingdom*

Main lesson: *Contrast between the Old and the New*

Setting: In Galilee, immediately after "Levi" (Matthew) was called to apostleship. He gave a great feast and a great multitude of publicans and sinners came (Luke 5:29). John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting (Mark 2:18). Obviously that gave rise to the question they asked of Jesus: "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples fast not?"

Fasting was used extensively in both Testaments. The Law of Moses required only one day of “afflicting oneself,” that was generally characterized by fasting, often with “sack-cloth and ashes.” That would be on the Day of Atonement (Lev.16; and 23). A variety of reasons justified fasting: such as personal mourning over sins committed, or mourning over the loss of a loved one, or simply to express greater devotion to spiritual matters (See: I Corinthians 7:5), and for personal discipline to gain spiritual benefit. Fasting was never intended as a display of piety before a public audience. Jesus’ teaching on that subject is sufficient to expose the hypocrisy of such a practice (Matthew 6:16-18). Neither in the Old or the New Testament was fasting ever ritualized into an act of worship!

The volatile Jews easily misinterpreted the fasting of other people. When John the Baptist came “*neither eating nor drinking*” the Jews said: “*he has a demon*” (Matthew 11:18), but when Jesus “*came eating and drinking,*” those same Jews said: “*Behold, a gluttonous man and a wine bibber*” (Matthew 11:19). The Pharisee of Luke 18:12 boasted of “fasting twice a week;” apparently he assumed that would be a sure sign of deep piety! To many Jews religion was not joyous, but rather was measured more by the grievous burdens it imposed. In Matthew 23:4 Jesus mentioned that “*the Scribes and the Pharisees...bind heavy burdens and grievous to be born, and lay them on men’s shoulders,*” and that was abusive. Their practice was further aggravated by the fact that “*they themselves would not move them with their finger*” (Matthew 23:4). The text for this parable reads:

“Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the sons of the bride chamber mourn, as long as the bride groom is with them? but the days will come, when the bride groom shall be taken away from them, and then will they fast.”

Explanation of the details

In the same context, when the Pharisees saw that Jesus “*was eating with the sinners and publicans,*” they asked His disciples: “*How is it that he eats and drinks with publicans and sinners?*” Jesus heard their question and proceeded to answer it himself: “*They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners*” (Mark 2:17). In Matthew 9:13, Jesus added this rationale, quoted from Hosea 6:6, “*But go ye and learn what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice.*” Fasting has meaning only when there is a just reason for it.

Then Jesus answered the second question posed at Matthew’s banquet; and His answer contains the parable itself. Since fasting was often occasioned by seasons of sadness and mourning, Jesus’ parable seems to respond to the question in that vane. The Jews seem to be asking: “What right do your disciples have for celebration?” To them, this seems to be a time of mourning.

Application

The answer is simple! The bridegroom is here! So this is a time for joyful banquet and not sorrowful mourning! In His response to the question, He built on the analogy of a marriage. For the friends of a groom to fast when he appeared to claim his bride would have been a travesty back then, and even now! See the banquet at the marriage feast of Cana (John 2); such feasts could last as many as seven days. John the Baptist gloried in that fact that he was “*the friend of the bridegroom, that stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice: this my joy is made full*” (John 3:29). What the groom was to the bride in this figure, Christ is to His disciples. Even in Isaiah, it was stated of Israel that: “Thy maker is thy husband, Jehovah of hosts is his name, and the Holy One of Israel (Jesus) is thy redeemer, the God of the whole earth shall he be called” (Isa.54:5). Of course, in the New Testament, Christ is often depicted as the husband of the bride, His church (Eph.5:21ff; Rev.19:9-10; 21:1-2). The “good

news” (gospel) introduced an atmosphere of sheer delight in those who heard it. When the Samaritans heard the gospel, and were baptized, Luke stated that “there was much joy in the city” (Acts 8:8). After his baptism, the Ethiopian Eunuch “went on his way rejoicing” (not fasting! Acts 8:39). Paul wrote that: “*The kingdom of heaven is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*” (Rom.14:17). He also listed, the “fruit of the Spirit” which include “love, joy and peace” (Gal.5:22). That says that rejoicing is the mood of kingdom people and of the King himself.

Jesus then said: “but the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then will they fast” (Matthew 9:15). For His disciples, when Jesus was crucified, and buried, so was their hope for the new world order He had promised. Since the Leader of the “movement” was dead, so was the “movement” itself dead. Read the account of Cleopas and his friend when they made that melancholy journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus in Luke chapter 24. Then you will see that those were days suited for mourning on the part of the disciples. Clearly, Jesus was thinking of the very sadness the disciples would feel when He was killed, for He said: “*A little while, and you behold me no more; and again a little while, and you shall see me.*” The disciples asked among themselves what this “a little while” business meant. Jesus saw that they could not decipher the statement among themselves, so He told them: “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, that you shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: you shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy*” (John 16:20). Then after presenting the analogy of a woman’s pain in child bearing, “*she remembers no more the anguish, for the joy that a man is born into the world*” (vs.21). He then returned to the apostles who were distressed at His announced departure; He assured them: “*And you therefore now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one takes away from you*” (John 16:22).

Though there are several interesting things that are illustrated in this parable, it seems appropriate to make the application relate only to the “joy of living in the Kingdom of Christ.” An overview of Paul’s insistence that the brethren of Philippi “rejoice always, and again I say rejoice” (Phil.4:4) easily becomes the central lesson of this parable.

New Patches and Old Garments

(Matthew 9:16; Mark 21; Luke 5:36)

General Theme: *Good News of the Kingdom*

Main Lesson: *Conflict between the Old and the New covenants*

Setting: Same as the preceding parable: the banquet in Matthew’s house, and the questions about fasting. Since fasting had become such a significant part of Jewish practice in Jesus’ time, it seems that Jesus wanted to show that His new covenant Kingdom would not be governed by old covenant law, nor its practices, nor its customs.

“And no man puts a piece of undressed cloth upon an old garment; for that which should fill it up takes from the garment, and a worse rent is made.” (Matthew 9:16).

Explanation of the details

In this parable it is evident that Jesus wanted to establish the fact that His new Kingdom would not be “a new patch” on the Old Covenant, nor an abridgement of it, nor an amendment to it, nor an adjunct of it! It would not be a syncretism of Judaism, nor of Israel’s Law, nor of the rituals of that Law. Christianity would be a totally new garment, suited to its new privileges and blessings. To try to mix the two would ruin the distinct purpose of each.

Patching a hole in an old garment requires the use of an equally old piece of cloth. To use a piece of unwashed cloth, that was not pre-shrunk, would create a larger hole. Such a

process is ill-advised, even to the point of the absurd. Obviously, the same kind of undesired result would come from any attempt to patch up the Old Covenant with New Covenant elements. That was the very thing Paul in Galatians accused the Jews of trying to do, to mix Judaism with Christianity, (see: Gal.5:2-4).

Application

Judaism was the “old garment;” it was already worn out! Even before the Law of Moses was given, God promised Moses that “*I will raise them up (Israel) a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee; and I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him*” (Deut.18:18). That is the reason the author of the Book of Hebrews said that Moses was “*a testimony of those things which were afterward to be spoken*” (Heb.3:5). In other words, Moses bore witness to the fact that the legislation he gave was not God’s final revelation for His people.

The Prophet Jeremiah informed Israel and Judah, about the year 627 B.C., that God would “*make a new covenant*” with them. And in the announcement of the new covenant, Jeremiah said that God, then and there: “*made the first covenant old.*” From that time forward that “old” one got older; it was soon “waxing aged” and was ultimately destined to “vanish away.” It literally “vanished” in the context of the cross of Calvary (Jer.31:31-34; 2 Cor.3:1-11). Hebrews 8:7-13 contains the New Covenant perspective of the Old Covenant. That chapter deserves a full exegetical overview of the whole context, especially as its teaching impacts this parable under study here.

So the Law of Moses, with all its ordinances, precepts, commandments, types, shadows, patterns, feast days, and blue prints are now abrogated. Paul wrote that Jewish food regimens, like those in: “meats, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a Sabbath day” are simply a “shadow of things to come; but the body is Christ’s” (Col.2:16). Shadows do not have independent existence, they

are simply a reflection of preexisting reality, or, are prophetic of future events.

The New Covenant is based on a totally new authority, with a new universal dimension, polity, fellowship, destiny, scope and mission. Even the prophets of ages past promised “a new song” (Psa.41:10), a “new covenant” (Jer.31:31), “new things” (Isa.42:9), “*a new heavens and a new earth*” (Isa.65:17), and a “*new heart and a new spirit*” (Ezek.36:26). It seems evident that Revelation 21:6 is in reference to the Lord’s “new” order, for He said: “*Behold, I make all things new.*” The next parable we will examine discusses putting “New wine in old wine skins” definitely illustrate the same truths as this parable does.

Paul was particularly critical of the Jewish converts to Christ, who wanted to impose elements of the Law of Moses on Gentile converts. His uncompromising statement about those who believed circumcision was essential to salvation should settle that issue once and for all. “*I testify to every man that receives circumcision, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you are fallen from grace*” (Gal.5:3-4).

In conclusion, this parable assures Christians that there is absolutely nothing in the Law of Moses that is incumbent upon them today.

New Wine in Old Wineskins

Matthew 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37-39

General Theme: *Good News of the Kingdom*

Main Lesson: *Incompatibility of the Old and the New Covenants*

Setting: Actually, it is the same as that of the Children of the Bride Chamber, with the question regarding fasting. The question came from the disciples of John; but in the former parable it came from them and from the Pharisees.

“New Cloth” and “New Wine” are known as Twin parables. They present the same truth, but with a different figure, and perhaps with a new emphasis. Such grouping of analogous parables is not unusual for Jesus. The “Pearl of Great Price” and the “Hidden Treasure” are examples of His practice. So is the presentation of the three allied parables of Luke 15: “The Lost Sheep”, “The Lost Coin”, and the “Lost Son.”

“Neither do men put new wine into old wine-skins: else the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, but they put new wine into fresh wine-skins, and both are preserved.”

Explanation of the details

It was natural, and prudent to put new wine into new wine skins. The new wine is ready to begin the fermentation process, and thus begin to increase in volume. The new wine skins are pliable, able to expand without the threat of bursting. But once the fermentation is completed, and the skins have lost their flexibility or plasticity, then it is easy to understand the rationale of the parable. In the final analysis, new wine in old wine skins would break the skin and waste the wine.

So, in the context of a discussion about fasting, this parable again insists that Old Testament practices lose their significance in New Testament times. *“The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”* (John 1:17). Since the Law of Moses was a “shadow” system, then the word “truth,” in that verse, speaks of reality, which is available only in Christ. In Christ there is “new wine”: which gives “new life”, with new meaning, new relationships, and with its own “new wine skins” of doctrines, rituals, life-style, value systems, and mission.

In Christ we are a “new creation” (2 Cor.5:17; Gal.6:15); we are *“one new man in Christ”* (Gal.3:28; Eph.2:15); we are the “New Jerusalem” (Rev.21:2; Heb.12:22); we follow a “new commandment” (John 13:34); we wear a “new name” (Rev.2:17); we *“walk in newness of life”* (Rom.6:4); and in *“newness of Spirit”* (Rom.7:6).

Application

From this parable it is easy to see the reluctance of people to give up old, time-honored ways. The fact that Jesus gave these three parables at the same time may well indicate that He was aware of how resistant people are to abandon old patterns, and to adopt totally new systems. Traditional mores, built around ancient “old paths,” being deeply ingrained with habitual roots, do not easily give way to the novelty of the new, uncharted ways of the New Covenant. Jesus is aware that the settled, acquired taste of the old way tends to treat as suspect the new flavors of His new economy. In fact, in that very context, He said: “*No man having drunk old wine desires new; for he says, The old is good.*” (Luke 5:39).

Certainly, Christ’s message was revolutionary! But it was not iconoclastic in the destruction of, or denial of its Hebrew roots. It was justly said: “*Salvation is of the Jews*” (John 4:22). Romans 11:17-21 insists that the “*wild Gentile olive tree*” was grafted into the original “olive tree of Israel,” and therefore “*became a partaker with them (Israel) of the root of the fatness of the olive tree.*”

Therefore, Jewish Christians could still be “*zealous of the law*” (Acts 21:20), and enjoy some of the customs of the “old wine,” as long as they did not try to impose those practices on others as a prerequisite to salvation in Christ (Gal.2:3-5; Rom.12:1-12).