

Perspective Transformation by Means of Parables

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Dedication

In Dr. MacRae's long seminary career, one of his distinctive emphases has been the importance of communication. Not only must the pastor or teacher know God's Word, he must also be able to communicate it clearly to others. One important means Dr. MacRae has used to this end is storytelling. In view of this emphasis, this paper is dedicated to him.

Introduction

The influence of mental images on human thought and action is vast. If anything, the aphorism "a picture is worth a thousand words" is an understatement. This is especially true today when motion pictures and television threaten to make the printed word obsolete. Yet long before the age of modern media, the value of word-pictures for holding and persuading an audience was recognized by orator and teacher alike.

In any given culture, some mental images or paradigms are so pervasive as to be accepted without argument. For such basic images, experience is interpreted in conformity with them so that they are rarely challenged.¹ Even in the proverbially objective realm of science, basic paradigms tend to control the interpretation of data. The collapse of one paradigm and its replacement by another constitutes a scientific revolution.² Consequently, the problem of our coming to truth may be much aggravated by the influence of false paradigms, which have to be broken for us to escape from them.

Sometimes a paradigm is broken merely by presenting an alternative. The new paradigm is so clearly superior that nearly everyone recognizes it immediately. Other paradigms must gradually win their way. Even in the best cases, however, those who have much to lose by a change in paradigm may be unwilling to accept it. Recall the ending of Hans Christian Andersen's tale, "The Emperor's New Clothes." As the ruler paraded down the street in his non-existent robes, the crowd pretended to see and appreciate them:

No one wished it to be noticed that he could see nothing, for then he would have been unfit for his office, or else very stupid. None of the emperor's clothes had met with such approval as these had.

"But he has nothing on!" said a little child at last.

"Just listen to the innocent child," said the father, and each one whispered to his neighbor what the child had said.

"But he has nothing on!" the whole of the people called out at last.

This struck the Emperor, for it seemed to him as if they were right; but he thought

to himself, "I must go on with the procession now." And the chamberlains walked along still more uprightly, holding up the train which was not there at all.

Several recent studies of the parables of Jesus have drawn attention to their function of breaking down paradigms or transforming perspectives.⁴ William Beardslee, for instance, compares the Gospel parables to Zen *koans*, a type of clever verbal harrassment used by Buddhist teachers to disorient their disciples. One well-known *koan* is "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"⁵ Eta Linnemann sees transformation of perspective as the most significant role of parable. In a tense confrontation between speaker and audience, the "narrator, who has at his disposal nothing other than the power of language, is able to prevail upon his listeners, because through the parable he offers them a new understanding of the situation."⁶ Somewhat similar views have been expressed by several others.⁷

Did Jesus use parables in this way? If so, how did they function to transform the perspectives of his hearers? In this paper we shall see that Jesus did use parables in this way, and we shall examine the function of the Synoptic parables for this purpose. Rather than survey the extensive secondary literature recently written on this subject, our approach will be to examine the parables themselves. For each relevant feature investigated, we shall give several examples from these parables and list others. In an appendix these features will be charted for sixty-four Synoptic parables. Biblical quotations will conform to the New International Version.

To date, most writers involved in this aspect of parable research have assumed a critical attitude toward the Gospels. For them, the context of each parable, its audience, and especially any interpretation given in the text, are automatically suspect. As a result they often claim that we cannot know the original circumstances of a parable, and sometimes they replace information supplied by the Gospels with speculative reconstructions of their own. Such a procedure denies the Bible's own claims to inspiration and rejects the historical evidence that the Gospels were written by apostles and their associates. In consequence much valuable information is discarded. We shall take the parables as they stand.

Presenting an Alternative Perspective

Surveying the Synoptic parables, it soon becomes clear that Jesus did not content himself with the mere destruction of perspective (as in a *koan*) but that he regularly presented an alternative perspective to his audience. This alternative paradigm or perspective can take various forms. We may conveniently classify these forms by distinguishing between parables which are analogues and parables which are examples. Under each of these categories, we shall further subdivide the parables into those which look at things from the same direction as the audience does and those which, so to speak, move the audience to a new location. Let us look at each of these cases in turn.

Analogue

In presenting an alternative perspective, the parable is naturally most suited to function as an analogue. A parable is usually either an extended simile or an extended metaphor, both of which

are analogies. Some relationship or incident from everyday life is presented as an analogue to some relationship in the spiritual realm or some event in salvation history –"an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." Jesus' presentation of this analogy affords his audience a new way of seeing these spiritual matters and therefore an opportunity to break away from some false paradigm which till then has held them in bondage.

Same Location. A number of Jesus' analogies preserve the standpoint of the audience but propose a different way of seeing the situation. The listener is to stay where he is but see his situation in a new light. If the audience is directly involved in the particular truth or event Jesus is treating, then they are involved in the same way in the analogy he presents. If the audience is not directly involved, then they are not directly involved in the analogy either.

As an example of direct involvement, consider the parable of the Defendant (5):⁸ "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge . . ." Here Jesus, using second person pronouns, invites his audience to recognize their status before God as analogous to that of a person about to be hauled into court as defendant in a hopeless case. Better settle out of court!

In the parable of the Mote and Beam (7), the second person also occurs: "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" A judgmental person trying to deliver another from sin is as ludicrous as a fellow with impaired vision trying to do eye surgery! In both these cases the listeners are directly involved as sinners, so they are the "you" in each parable. God and the other brother remain in the third person as "adversary" and "brother," as there is no attempt to put the listener in the other person's place. Similar second person analogues occur in (28, 36) and (47).

Analogues in which the audience is directly involved may also be presented in the third person without change of direction as long as the narrative is constructed so the audience identifies with the proper person. In the parable of the Waiting Servants (49), the narrative starts with the second person and then shifts to the third: "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet . . ." Such analogues occur also in (37) and (54).

Unfortunately it is not always easy to tell with whom the audience is supposed to identify if there is no explicit indicator. In the parable of the Hidden Treasure (21), the audience will probably identify with the only actor, though there is nothing to tell us to do so; (22, 24) and (42) are similar. Probably it is safest to categorize these under our next category, "New Location."

In other cases, the audience is a spectator with regard to the spiritual matters in view, so all actors in the parable occur in the third person. For instance, in the Sons of the Bridechamber (11), John's disciples have asked Jesus why his disciples don't fast, so the bridegroom (analogous to Jesus) and the sons of the bridechamber (Jesus' disciples) appear in the third person. The situation is similar in the Strong Man Spoiled (15).

New Location. Most of Jesus' analogies, however, move his audience to a new standpoint. If the

listener is involved in the situation, he is invited to step outside to see it in a new light. If he is not involved, he is invited to step inside the situation. Tolkien calls this device "mooreeffoc":

And there is (especially for the humble) Mooreeffoc, or Chestertonian Fantasy. Mooreeffoc is a fantastic word, but it could be seen written up in every town in the land. It is Coffee-room, viewed from the inside through a glass door, as it was seen by Dickens on a dark London day; and it was used by Chesterton to denote the queerness of things that have become trite, when they are seen suddenly from a new angle.⁹

One example of this is John the Baptist's parable of the Axe at the Roots (1). Instead of trusting in their descent from Abraham, the audience is called upon to step back and see themselves as fruitless trees would be viewed by a farmer or axeman – good only to be cut down! In the parable of the Sower (17), the disciples are given an external view of the spread of the Gospel: they may expect varied results like those a farmer gets from grain falling on different types of soil. Other examples of this type are (2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 23, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 50, 53, 55, 57, 58, 59, 62) and (64).

Taking God's Place. A special case of this change of location is that in which the audience is invited to imagine themselves in God's place. This type is clearly seen in the parable of the Son Asking Bread (8): "Which of you, if his son asks for bread will give him a stone? . . . If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" This also occurs in (56) and (61), and – assuming women were present in the audience – in the Lost Coin (57).

In a number of other cases, the audience may be invited to look at the situation as though they were God by the device of identifying with the character representing him in the parable. For instance, one may tend to identify with the axeman in the Axe at the Roots (1), or with the landowner in the Tares (18). Other examples of this sort are (3, 12, 13, 18, 26, 30, 31, 34) and (50). More ambiguous are (14) and (25).

A case of special interest is the Prodigal Son (58). Will the audience (including many Pharisees) identify with the Father, or will they insist on identifying with the elder brother?

Example

Much rarer among the parables are those which teach by giving samples of the behavior to be imitated or avoided rather than by analogue. This class is restricted to the Gospel of Luke and is usually viewed as consisting of the Good Samaritan (46), the Rich Fool (48), the Rich Man and Lazarus (60), and the Pharisee and the Publican (63).¹⁰ I would add two others: the Lowest Seats (51) and Advice on Invitations (52). Some might be inclined to deny that these are parables, since they do not fall within the range of the English word "parable." However, the Hebrew concept

behind the NT usage is broader, and three of these are explicitly called "parable": (48) in Luke

12:16, (51) in 14:7, and (63) in 18:9. Jülicher calls them "illustrative instances."¹¹ Boucher suggests that they are cases of extended synecdoche rather than simile or metaphor.¹²

Same Location. As in the case of analogue, we can distinguish between cases involving no change of direction and those which shift. An example of the former is (51), where the guests at a banquet are advised not to pick the most prestigious places at the table lest they be embarrassed when the host arrives. This, we are told, is a sample of the more general lesson "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled . . ." It applies directly to the banquet guests without change of direction. It also comes home powerfully to us by demonstrating that our selfishness and greed really contradict our claim to believe in a God who abases the proud and exalts the humble. Parable (52) also falls in this category.

New Location. The other four example-parables – (46, 48, 60) and (63) – give a shift in location. They invite us to step back and look at our own lives from outside. Do we pass by those in trouble without getting involved? Are we concerned about our own security and pleasure more than about those who are poor? Do we look down on others from our spiritual superiority? These are powerful pictures to shatter our complacent self-images, yet each provides an alternative lifestyle for us to imitate.

Criticism of Audience Perspective

Usually Jesus' parables are more than just illustrations; they provide an alternative perspective to that held by some or most of his audience. In fact, most of Jesus' parables are at least an implicit criticism of the audience's perspective. Many others are explicit in their criticism, and some reduce the audience perspective to absurdity.

Explicit Audience Criticism

We may define explicit audience criticism in a parable as the case in which the audience's perspective actually shows up in the parable to be set in contrast to Jesus' perspective. An example of explicit criticism is the Prodigal Son (58), where the elder brother is present to espouse the Pharisaic position while the father gives Jesus' view. As G. V. Jones observes:

. . . no Pharisee with any perception could miss the point. The elder son is not identified with any particular group . . . he is merely a character in the story; yet he was not included for a literary purpose, but in order that the listeners might be brought to pass judgment upon themselves through perceiving the correspondence between the situation in the story and that of real life.¹³

By contrast, the criticism in the Lost Sheep (56) and Lost Coin (57) is implicit, as only God's perspective is given.

Not only Jesus' opponents, but also the crowd and Jesus' disciples receive explicit criticism as well. In the Tower Builder (54), the multitudes following Jesus are warned that they are in for a tougher time than they expect. The foolish builder who doesn't count the cost and therefore cannot finish the tower represents the audience's perspective, while Jesus recommends prudence

and foresight in view of the troubles (persecution?) ahead. In the Unmerciful Servant (29), Jesus' rebukes Peter's desire to withhold forgiveness. Peter's view is represented by the servant forgiven ten thousand talents who refuses to forgive another a mere hundred denarii. God's view of the matter is represented by the king. Other examples of explicit audience criticism occur in (7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18?, 25, 27, 30, 39, 48, 51, 52, 55, 61, 63) and (64).

Implicit Audience Criticism

Implicit audience criticism occurs in those cases where the perspective of the audience does not find explicit pictorial representation in the parable. Cases (56) and (57) were mentioned above, in both of which Jesus criticises his opponents' non-evangelistic perspective. Another example is the Strong Man Spoiled (15), where Jesus argues his exorcisms correspond to a soldier (?) plundering a strong man's household. The Pharisaic view – that Jesus' exorcisms are more like a stage-play – does not appear.

Jesus also uses implicit audience criticism with the crowds and his disciples. To the crowds Jesus presents the Barren Fig Tree (50) as God's justification for bringing destruction on Israel (with a more general application to sinful mankind). The gardener's request to spare the tree for another year is the reason why all have not perished as yet. No sample of the audience's perspective (say, fruitful fig trees) appears. To his disciples Jesus' parable of the Friend at Midnight (47) pictures the importance of persistence in prayer, but their inclination to give up does not find expression.

Besides the examples mentioned above, parables (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 16, 17, 21?, 22?, 26, 28, 31, 32, 33, 34, 38, 45, 46, 53, 59, 60) and (62) appear to be cases of implicit criticism of the audience perspective.

In other cases, parables appear to be either illustrations of spiritual truths or advance protection against false perspectives that will arise in some situation still future to Jesus' earthly ministry. The Fan in Hand (2), for instance, appears to be a vivid illustration of the judgment to come, which the average Israelite or Pharisee of the time would presumably find in agreement with his own theology. The controversial aspect here would be John's teaching regarding who is in danger of this judgment. The same can be said for the Dragnet (23) and possibly the Sheep and the Goats (41). Other parables which are probably basically illustrative are (19, 20) and (24).

On the other hand, the exhortations to watchfulness and faithfulness found in the Householder and Thief (37), the Waiting Porter (44) and the Waiting Servants (49) appear to be advance warnings for each generation of believers to live in the light of the Lord's sudden return. Each parable attacks in advance those false perspectives which deny a miraculous return or final judgment. Naturally, those who prefer such perspectives will tend to see these parables as unauthentic creations of the early church! Similarly the Vultures and Carcass (35) seems designed to protect believers against false "second comings," reminding us that the real thing will be easily recognized, even to be seen from quite a distance. The Fig Tree Heralds Summer (36)

similarly points to definite signs preceding the Lord's return.

Absurdity

Among the explicit and implicit examples of audience criticism, some are striking in their use of absurdity as a weapon against the false perspective. Linnemann mentions this use of the parable in rabbinic circles as well, though she characterizes such arguments as "superficial."¹⁴

Jesus makes considerable use of this device, and not only against his opponents. The absurdity of Tasteless Salt (3), of hiding a lit lamp (4), of trying to do eye surgery with impaired vision (7), and of feeding one's son a stone (8), are each directed at Jesus' own disciples, or at least at would-be disciples. The foolishness of patching with unshrunk cloth (12), putting fermenting wine in dried-out wineskins (13), building without a proper foundation (9), and fasting at a wedding party (11) are directed either at the crowds or at reasonably neutral inquirers like John's disciples.

Yet Jesus reserves his strongest denunciations for his opponents. They are blind men trying to lead others (27); stubborn children whom no game can please (14); faultfinders who even blame a physician for visiting the sick (10); tenant farmers who think they can get the landlord's property by killing his heir while the landlord still lives (32); builders who don't recognize the chief stone in the architect's plans (33); and rebellious subjects who spurn a royal feast by killing those who bring the invitation (34).

Admittedly there is a danger in using absurdity. When one seeks to make intelligent opponents look foolish, it is easy to fall into caricature and misrepresentation. Yet if Christianity is true, then opposition to Jesus is basically foolish no matter how sophisticated or rationalized it may be. The absurdity in Jesus' parables is thus both fitting and profound. In the universe that really exists, where the God of the Bible is the omnipotent and righteous judge, all sin is irrational and deserves to be presented as absurd so that we may see it in its true colors.

Other Features Relevant to Transforming Perspective

In order that our outlook be transformed, it is not enough that our false perspectives be criticized and we be given the true picture. We must also understand what we hear, and to hear we must listen. As Scripture tells us, the work of the Holy Spirit is crucial in all this. In this paper, however, we are confining ourselves to the means Jesus uses in his parables to aid attention and understanding, rather than dealing with the unseen activity of the Spirit.

Jesus is first of all a gifted storyteller.¹⁵ He constructs interesting plots with memorable and realistic characters in a few bold strokes. Unnecessary detail is eliminated; there are few actors and usually only one scene. Characterization and emotion are directly relevant to the plot. Vividness is provided by concrete details, direct discourse, and thoughts spoken aloud. The listener's interest is aroused by questions invoking his judgment, by advice, suspense, surprise and mystery. His memory is activated by the parable's vividness, parallelism and repetition. Because he was interesting, even Jesus' enemies listened with attention.

In this paper, we have space to examine only three features Jesus used: involvement, surprise and

mystery.

Involvement

Naturally, the intrinsic interest of a story tends to involve the listeners. Jesus makes use of everyday images of home life, society and agriculture with which his audiences were familiar. Yet he does so in such a way that the stories are not boring, trite or commonplace. He also makes considerable use of second person constructions to pull the listener into the story,¹⁶ sometimes giving advice, sometimes asking questions, and occasionally inviting imaginative empathy.

Advice. In the parable of the Defendant (5), Jesus advises his audience to make friends with their accuser before their (hopeless) case comes to trial. In the Fig Tree Heralds Summer (36), he tells his disciples to learn how to recognize an approaching event by the signs which precede it. In the rather cryptic parable of Fire, Salt and Peace (43), his disciples are urged to have salt in themselves. At the end of the Good Samaritan (46), Jesus advises the lawyer to "go and do likewise." We are urged to imitate the Dishonest Steward (59) in making friends for ourselves by means of the unrighteous mammon. In general, the advice is part of the parable when the perspective involves no change of direction, and part of the application when the standpoint is changed. Other parables employing advice are (6, 7, 37, 44, 49, 51, 52) and (61), not counting a number (e.g., 10, 17) with advice in the near context.

Questions. To draw the audience into the parable, Jesus will also ask them questions, sometimes rhetorical, sometimes actually seeking a verbal response.

The parable of the Son Asking Bread (8) rhetorically asks the men of the audience how they would respond to their son's request. In the Sons of the Bridechamber (11), John's disciples are asked to judge whether fasting is appropriate for wedding attendants at the festivities. In (54) Jesus asks the crowd if they would start building a tower without estimating its cost and checking their own resources. In (61), he asks the disciples how they would treat their slave at dinnertime, as guest or servant? Other examples of rhetorical questions occur in (14, 15, 19, 20, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33, 38, 43, 47, 55, 56, 57) and (62).

Other questions asked by Jesus actually received verbal responses. Which of the two sons (31), asks Jesus, did the will of the father? In the parable of the wicked Tenants (32), Matthew reports that some in the audience answered Jesus' question concerning what the owner will do when he learns the tenants have killed his son. Likewise, Simon the Pharisee answers Jesus' question in the Two Debtors (45), as does the lawyer in the Good Samaritan (46).

Other second person constructions. Jesus also uses the second person to refer to his audience in cases other than the question or command, apparently to encourage involvement. In the parable of the Tasteless Salt (3), Jesus speaks directly to his disciples: "you are the salt of the earth." In the parables of Weather Forcasting (28), Jesus involves his audience: "When you see . . ." and "When it is evening, you say . . ." The parable of the Fig Tree (36) is similar. Neglecting cases where Jesus merely says, "I say to you," the other examples are (6, 29, 51) and (52).

Surprise

Another device Jesus uses in his parables to attract and hold attention is surprise: a sudden twist in the plot, an improbable feature, an exaggeration. This is an extremely common feature, occurring in about half the parables. The absurdities catalogued previously under audience criticism belong to this category.

Yet not all the surprises involve the foolishness of characters representing sinners. Some of the surprises picture the amazing grace of God: a father runs to welcome his prodigal son (58), receiving him with splendor and feasting;¹⁷ a king forgives an enormous debt (29); a householder invites beggars to fill up his banquet hall (53). Others picture the severity of God's judgment: the king cancels his forgiveness when the forgiven servant shows himself unforgiving (29); the improperly-dressed wedding guest is bound hand and foot to be thrown out (34); the foolish virgins are excluded from the feast merely for being late (39). These surprises of foolishness, grace and severity seem rather improbable or exaggerated in the parable's story. Yet when we move from story to meaning, we find they are realistic.

Still other surprises are intended to shake the audience into reexamining themselves and their view of things. This is probably the purpose of having the Samaritan be the hero in (46) and the publican in (63). The surprise of the Axe at the Roots (1) and the Defendant (5) is to see oneself as lost, rather than the other fellow. One of the surprises of the Dishonest Steward (59) is Jesus' advice to imitate the crook! (presumably in taking appropriate action now in view of our brief tenure as stewards).

The surprise in the parable attracts our attention. It should not be surprising, then, that it is in the surprise itself that the main point of the parable often lies. As Jones says of the landowner's payment scheme in the Vineyard Workers (30): "It is natural to resent the apparently flagrant unfairness of the economic policy described; yet it is precisely here that the meaning of the parable is focused."¹⁸

It is noteworthy that Jesus himself occasionally draws attention to a surprising feature by having one of the parable's characters react to it. This is seen clearly when the all-day vineyard workers object to equal pay for the latecomers (30). It also appears in the elder son's objection to celebrating the prodigal's return (58) and in the bystanders' response to the servant with ten pounds being given another (64). Possibly this is one of the functions of the servants who desire to pull up the tares in (18) and of those who report their unforgiving fellow-servant in (29).

This very surprise also fixes the parable in our minds to be remembered long after we would have forgotten a blander story. What sticks in our memory from the Wicked Tenants (32) is (a) the landowner sending his son after the way his slaves were treated; and (b) the tenants thinking that killing him will get them the property: i.e., the foolishness of sin and the great grace of God. "It is the improbable trait in the parable that drives the meaning home."¹⁹

Mystery

Since the time of Jülicher it has been fashionable in critical circles to deny the presence of mystery in the authentic parables of Jesus, despite the explicit teaching of Mark 4:11-12 and its parallels.²⁰ Instead, Jülicher proposed that Jesus' parables were non-allegorical, made only one point, and were intended to be easily understood. From this it would follow that many of the Gospel parables have been reworked (if not invented altogether) since the time of Jesus; that allegorical interpretations like that supplied with the Sower (17) are not genuine; and that complex parables which make more than one point (such as the King's Wedding Feast (34) and the Prodigal Son (58)) are at best the fusion of two authentic parables.

None of this is necessary. It is clear from the LXX that in Jewish usage *parabole* is the equivalent of *mashal*, and that *mashal* includes the riddle or dark saying (Prov 1:6). The OT parables of the Ewe Lamb (2 Sam 12:1-4), the Widow's Sons (2 Sam 14:5-7) and the Escaped Prisoner (1 Kings 20:39-40) depend upon a certain degree of mystification to succeed. Besides all this, both ancient Jewish and early Christian interpreters (including the Gospel writers) agreed that parables could be mysterious.²¹

Admittedly, Jesus' purpose for mystification in Mark 4 and parallels is a hard saying, though no more so than Isa 6:9-10 from which it is drawn. This writer suspects that the reason God hid the meaning of certain parables from the crowd involved a combination of at least two factors: (a) their judicial hardening as a punishment for resisting Jesus' earlier ministry; (b) the setting up of a situation in which Jesus would be rejected and crucified to provide our redemption. In any case, the presence of mystery in some of Jesus' parables is the clear teaching of Scripture, and (as Morton Smith²² has pointed out) it is also a natural conclusion to be drawn from the wide divergence among modern interpreters over the meaning of some of the Gospel parables!

Yet mystery is not confined to the parables given from the Sower (17) onward, nor are all the later parables mysterious. There must be at least one other function of mystery in Jesus' parables besides that given in Mark 4.

Given the tradition of the three OT parables mentioned above, we should not be surprised to find mystery used as a device to gain the hearer's judgment for a matter before he realizes he is judging himself. In each of these cases, neither David nor Ahab realized how the story related to himself until the storyteller provided the interpretation. Jones sees something of this sort happening in the Unmerciful Servant (29), the Good Samaritan (46), and the Rich Man and Lazarus (60), where the application is sprung on the listener in the final verse after previously obtaining his "approving interest."²³ To these we can add the Two Sons (31) and the Two Debtors (45), and probably the Wicked Tenants (32) and the Rejected Stone (33), though by this point the Jewish Leaders had begun to realize that Jesus was referring to them (Matt 21:45).

If our suggestion on Mark 4 (above) has any merit, another reason for mystery might be the concealment of future events from those whose actions could otherwise interfere with their fulfillment. Paul twice speaks of the ignorance of the leaders in opposing Christ, saying of

himself, "I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief" (1 Tim 1:13), and of others "if they had [understood], they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2:8). The latter of these two statements occurs in a discussion of God's secrets which are known only by revelation. Such a reason for mystery has OT precedent, for example, in the book of Daniel, which contains a number of cryptic allegorical visions, plus the command to seal up the book until the end (Dan 12:4). This would explain the mysterious reference to the bridegroom being taken away in (11), to the slain son in (32), and to the rejected stone in (33), all referring to Jesus' death.

In a somewhat similar vein, the whole matter of Jesus' two comings with an interval between could not be broached before the crucifixion, yet the recognition that Jesus taught this mysteriously in his parables would be a great comfort to his disciples later. This would explain the cryptic nature of the parables of the kingdom (17-23), dealing with the interval between the two comings. It might also explain what some of the "new things" are that the householder would bring out of his treasury in (24), i.e., further understanding of these parables by his disciples in the light of later developments. The departure of the nobleman to a distant land to receive a kingdom and return (64) would also fit in this category. Naturally, those who deny supernatural prediction will not be enthusiastic about such proposals.

Most of the parables also have little mysteries about them, not the least of which is whether and how far to press the details. For instance, what are we to make of the "discard" and "trampling" of the tasteless salt (3)? Is this merely pictorial or also to be interpreted? What of the "last cent" in the Defendant (5)? The "both destroyed" of the wine and wineskins (13)? Is the leaven (20) good or evil? What are the "plants" in Plants Uprooted (26)? The "wedding garments" of the King's Wedding Feast (34)? The "oil" of the Ten Virgins (39)? The "bankers" of the Talents (40)? For that matter, what does it mean to be "salted with fire" (43)? Perhaps Raymond Brown is right in suggesting that the parables are designed to leave "enough doubt to challenge the hearers into active thought and inquiry,"²⁴ an activity that might eventually succeed in overturning some of their false but cherished paradigms.

Conclusions

Having completed this brief survey of the parables of Jesus, it indeed appears that most of them are designed to alter the perspective of his listeners. Only a few appear to be purely illustrative. A few others seem to be designed as antidotes to future problems or, equivalently, to alter the perspective principally of future readers. The existence of this last category should not be unexpected for those who believe in the God of the Bible, who knows the end from the beginning.

Jesus accomplishes this alteration of perspective by grasping our attention through vividness, involvement, surprise and mystery; by showing up our own perspectives as false and foolish; and by presenting the true perspectives in a memorable way.

Since Jesus first spoke these parables, nearly two thousand years have passed. Our culture today is largely industrial rather than agricultural, and far more specialized and (we suppose)

sophisticated. Yet his parables have not lost their power to expose our own pretensions as being as insubstantial as the Emperor's new clothes.

References

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11. A. Jülicher, "Parables," *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (1899) 3:3566.
12. Boucher, *Mysterious Parable* 22.
13. G. V. Jones, *The Art and Truth of the Parables* (London: SPCK, 1964) 114.
14. Linnemann, *Parables* 20.
15. See, e.g., R. E. Brown, "Parables of Jesus," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967) 10:985-86; Linnemann, *Parables* 12-16; Ricoeur, "Kingdom in Parables" 166.
16. Cf. Flesch's concepts of "personal words" and "personal sentences;" e.g., Rudolf Flesch, *How to Write, Speak and Think More Effectively* (New York: New American Library, 1960) 303.
17. Ricoeur, "Kingdom in Parables" 167.
18. Jones, *Art and Truth of Parables* 116.
19. Ibid., 117.
20. A. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1888-99); his views are sketched in English in his article "Parable" in *Encyclopaedia Biblica*.
21. An excellent response to Jülicher is Boucher, *Mysterious Parable*, esp. chap. 1.
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Appendix: Classification of Parables

Key to Notations and Abbreviations:

Parable & Location: Parable number, name & location given by chapter & verses, first in Matthew, then Mark, then Luke; 0 = not in particular Gospel.

Parable Type: M = metaphor; S = similitude; P = narrative parable; E = exemplary parable; A = allegorical features.

Audience: C = crowd; D = disciples; O = opponents; * = not same occasion in different Gospels.

Standpoint: G = God's; N = new (change in standpoint); S = same (no change).

Criticism: I = implicit; X = explicit; R = *reductio ad absurdum*.

Other Features: A = advice; M = mystery; Q = question; S = surprise.

Parable (Location)	Type	Audience	Perspective	Criticism	Other
1. Axe at Roots (3:10;0;0)	S	CO	NG?	I	S
2. Fan in Hand (3:12;0;0)	S	CO	N		
3. Tasteless Salt (5:13;9:50;14:34-35)	S	CD*	NG?	IR	SM
4. Lamp & Bushel (5:15;4:21;8:16&11:33)	S	CDO*	N	IR	S
5. Defendant (5:25-26;0;12:57-58)	S	CD*	S	I	SMA
6. Eye as Light of Body (6:22-23;0;11:34-36)	S	CD*	N	I	A
7. Mote & Beam (7:3-5;0;6:41-42)	S	CD	S	XR	SMA
8. Son Asking Bread (7:9-12;0;11:11-13)	S	CD*	G	XR	SQ
9. Wise & Foolish Blders (7:24-27;0;6:47-49)	S	CD	N	XR	S?
10. Physician Heals Sick (9:12;2:17;5:31-32)	M?S?	DO	N	XR	S?
11. Sons of Bridechamber (9:14-15;2:18-20;5:33-5)	SA?	C	S	XR	SMQ
12. New Patch (9:16;2:21;5:36)	S	C	S?G?	XR	SM
13. New Wine (9:17;2:22;5:37-39)	S	C	NG?	XR	SM

Parable (Location)	Type	Audience	Perspective	Criticism	Other
14. Childr in Marketplace (11:16-19;0;0)	S	C	NG?	XR	Q
15. Strong Man Spoiled (12:29;3:27;11:21-22)	S	CO	S	I	Q
16. Empty House (12:43-45;0;11:24-26)	S?	CO	N	I	M
17. Sower (13:3-8;4:4-8;5:5-8)	SA	CD	N	I	M
18. Tares (13:24-30;0;0)	PA	CD	NG?	X?	SM
19. Mustard Seed (13:31-2;4:30-2;3:18-19)	SA?	CD	N		MQ
20. Leaven (13:33;0;13:20-21)	SA?	CD	N		MQ
21. Hidden Treasure (13:44;0;0)	P	D?	N?S?	I?	SM
22. Pearl (13:45-46;0;0)	P	D?	N/S?	I?	SM
23. Dragnet (13:46-50;0;0)	SA	D	N		M
24. Householder's Trsure (13:52;0;0)	S	D	S	I?	M
25. Defilement (15:11;7:15;0)	SA?	CDO	G?	X	SM
26. Plants Uprooted (15:13;0;0)	M?S?	D	NG?	I	M
27. Blind Leading Blind (15:14;0;6:39)	S	CDO*	N	XR	SQ
28. Weather Forecasting (16:2-3;0;12:54-55)	S	CO*	S	I	SQ
29. Unmerciful Servant (18:23-25;0;0)	P	D	N	X	S
30. Vineyard Workers (20:1-16;0;0)	P	D	NG?	X	S
31. Two Sons (21:28-32;0;0)	S?P?	CO	N	I	Q
32. Wicked Tenants (21:33-41;12:1-9,20:9-16)	PA	CO	N	IR?	M?
33. Rejected Stone (21:42-4;12:10-11;20:17)	S?P?	CO	N	IR	SMQ
34. King's Wedding Feast (22:1-14;0;0, cp #53)	PA	CO	NG?	IR?	SM?

Parable (Location)	Type	Audience	Perspective	Criticism	Other
35. Vultures & Carcass (24:28;0;17:37)	M?S?	D*	N		M
36. Fig Tr Heralds Smmr (24:32-3;13:28-9;21:29-31)	S	D	S		A
37. Householder & Thief (24:42-44;0;12:39)	S	C?D*	S		SMA
38. Unfthful Uppr-Srvnt (24:45-51;0;12:40-42)	P	C?D*	N	I?	SQ
39. Ten Virgins (25:1-13;0;0)	PA?	D	N	X	SMA
40. Talents (25:14-30;0;0, cp #64)	PA	D	N	X	SM
41. Sheep & Goats (25:32-33;0;0)	M?S?	D	N		
42. Blade, Ear & Grain (0;4:26-29;0)	SA?	CD	N?S?		M
43. Fire, Salt & Peace (0;9:49;0)	M?	D	N?		MQA
44. Waiting Porter (0;13:34-36;0, cp #49)	S	D	N		A
45. Two Debtors (0;0;7:41-43)	PA?	O?	N	I	SQ
46. Good Samaritan (0;0;10:30-37)	E	CO	N	I	SQA
47. Friend at Midnight (0;0;11:5-8)	P	D	S	I	SQ
48. Rich Fool (0;0;12:16-21)	E	C	N	X	S
49. Waiting Servants (0;0, cp #44;12:35-38)	S	D	S		SA
50. Barren Fig Tree (0;0;13:6-9)	P	C	NG?	I	
51. Lowest Seats (0;0;14:7-11)	E	C?O?	S	X	SA
52. Advice on Invitations (0;0;14:12-14)	E	C?O?	S	X	SA
53. Great Supper (0, cp #34;0;14:15-24)	P	C?O?	N	I	S
54. Tower Builder (0;0;14:28-30)	S	C	S	X	Q
55. King at War (0;0;14:31-33)	S	C	N	X	Q

Parable (Location)	Type	Audience	Perspective	Criticism	Other
56. Lost Sheep (18:12-14;0;15:3-7)	S?P?	CO	G	I	Q
57. Lost Coin (0;0;15:8-10)	S/P?	CO	NG?	I	Q
58. Prodigal Son (0;0;15:11-32)	P	CO	NG?	X	SM
59. Dishonest Steward (0;0;16:1-9)	P	DO	N	I	SA
60. Rich Man & Lazarus (0;0;16:19-31)	E	DO	N	I	
61. Unprofitable Servants (0;0;17:7-10)	S	D	G	X	QA
62. Unjust Judge (0;0;18:1-8)	P	D	N	I	SQ
63. Pharisee & Publican (0;0;18:9-14)	E	D?O?	N	X	S
64. Pounds (0,cp #40;0;19:11-27)	PA	CD	N	X	S