



# Parables

THE DISTINCTIVE VOICE OF JESUS

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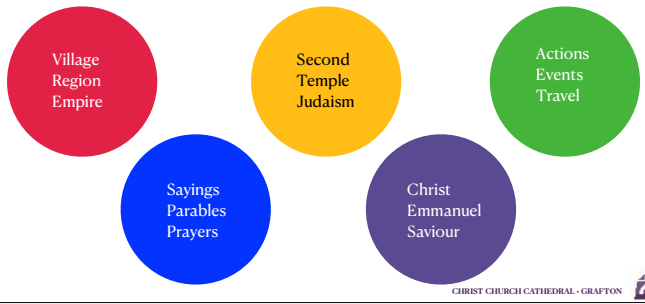
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## Perspectives on Jesus



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## The sayings come first

*In the beginning was the word ...*

- Immense historical value
- Represent why Jesus 'got out of bed in the morning'
- Remembered, repeated, preserved
- Major genre of early Christian literature
- Comprise unique legacy of Jesus
- Still meaningful today



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## Sayings come in many forms

*Jesus was a master of oral performance*

- **Stories:** legends, midrash, myth, reports
- **Sayings:** wisdom, prophetic, eschatological, torah, epiphanies
- **Pronouncements**
- **Religious instruction:** how to pray, how to live
- **Conflict** and confrontation
- **Allegory, metaphor and parable**

Parables are Jesus' signature routine

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## Parables

Literary DNA

- Use metaphor or simile
- Exploit everyday life or nature
- Counter intuitive twist
- Never explained or interpreted
- Self-contained narratives
- Clearly oral compositions
- Minimal words used
- Concrete & vivid images

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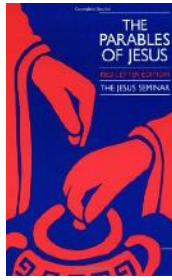
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# Parables attributed to Jesus

legacy of an oral poetic

- How many parables?
- More than 40 (a common answer)
- Around 60 examples
- 33 unique examples
- Only 26 found in NT gospels
- Never in Gospel of John
- Feature in Matthew & Luke



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# Not all sayings are parables

but every parable is a memorable saying

“... every scholar who is schooled in Heaven’s imperial rule is like some toastmaster who produces from his cellar something mature and something young.”

Matthew 13:52 (The Five Gospels)

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## Parables by Gospel

Sayings Gospel Q	Thomas	Mark	Matthew	John	Luke
Leaven	Leaven	Mustard Seed	Leaven		Leaven
Mustard Seed	Mustard Seed	Seed and Harvest	Mustard Seed		Good Samaritan
Lost Sheep	Treasure	Tenants	Treasure		Unknowing Steward
Feast	Lost Sheep	Sower	Mustard Seed		Mustard Seed
Entrusted Money	Feast	Returning Master	Lost Sheep		Lost Coin
	Feast		Feast		Lost Sheep
	Seed and Harvest		Prodigal Son		Unjust Judge
	Tenants		Unmerciful Servant		Feast
	Rich Farmer		Tenants		Tenants
	Sower		Entrusted Money		Rich Farmer
	Empty Jar		Sower		Entrusted Money
	Assassin		Planted Weeds	0	Pharisee & Publican
	Planted Weeds		Closed Door	Secret James	Sower
	Fishnet		Fishnet	Ear of Grain	Barren Tree
	Children in the Field			Grain of Wheat	Returning Master
				Palm Shoot	Rich Man and Lazarus
					Classed Door
					Tower Builder
					Harvest King
5	14	5	14	3	20

SOURCE: The Jesus Seminar, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: Faber, 1988)




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## Parables

33 parables identified by the Jesus Seminar

Leaven	M, Lk, Th	Returning Master	M, Lk, Ed
Good Samaritan	Lk	Assassin	Th
Unknowing Steward	Lk	Rich Man and Lazarus	Lk
Vineyard Laborers	M	Planted Weeds	M, Th
Mustard Seed	M, Mk, Lk, Th	Ear of Grain	Acts
		Classed Door	M, Lk
Lost Coin	Lk	Tower Builder	Lk
Treasure	M, Th	Warring King	Lk
Lost Sheep	M, Lk, Th	Fishnet	M, Th
Prodigal Son	Lk	Grain of Wheat	Acts
Unjust Judge	Lk	Palm Shoot	Acts
Feast	M, Lk, Th	Children in the Field	Th
Feast	M, Th		
Seed and Harvest	M, Th		
Unmerciful Servant	M		
Tenants	M, Mk, Lk, Th		
Rich Farmer	Lk, Th		
Entrusted Money	M, Lk, Ed, Th		
Pharisee and Publican	Lk		
Sower	M, Mk, Lk, Th, 1Cor		
Barren Tree	Lk		
Empty Jar	Th		

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# What we learn from the parables

'scholars schooled for the kingdom'

- Central theme: **empire of God**, a.k.a. **Heaven's imperial rule, commonwealth of God**
- Wisdom is best approached via metaphor
- Embrace the questions & do not seek 'the' answers
- Use the **red** & **pink** parables as a benchmark for interpretation of the **grey** and **black**
- Focus on the single big idea
- Look past the cultural packaging (for example)

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"There was a judge in a certain town," he said, "who had neither fear of God nor respect for anyone. In the same town there was also a widow who kept on coming to him and saying, "I want justice from you against my enemy!" For a long time he refused, but at last he said to himself, "Even though I have neither fear of God nor respect for any human person, I must give this widow her just rights since she keeps pestering me, or she will come and slap me in the face."

Luke 18:2-5 (NJB)

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## The 5 red parables

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### 1. The Leaven

Matt 13:33b; Luke 13:20b-21. Thom 96:1

Heaven's imperial rule is like leaven which a woman took and concealed in fifty pounds of flour until it was all leavened.

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### 2. The Samaritan

Luke 10:30-35

There was a man going from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, and went off, leaving him half dead. Now by coincidence a priest was going down that road; when he caught sight of him, he went out of his way to avoid him. In the same way, when a Levite came to the place, he took one look at him and crossed the road to avoid him. But this Samaritan who was traveling that way came to where he was and was moved to pity at the sight of him. He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring olive oil and wine on them. He hoisted him onto his own animal, brought him to an inn, and looked after him. The next day he took out two silver coins, which he gave to the innkeeper, and said, "Look after him, and on my way back I'll reimburse you for any extra expense you have had."

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### 3. Shrewd manager

Luke 16:1-9

There was this rich man whose manager had been accused of squandering his master's property. He called him in and said, "What's this I hear about you? Let's have an audit of your management, because your job is being terminated." Then the manager said to himself, "What am I to do? My master is firing me. I'm not strong enough to dig ditches and I'm ashamed to beg. I've got it! I know what I'll do so doors will open for me when I am removed from management."

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So he called in each of his master's debtors. He said to the first, "How much do you owe my master?" He said, "Five hundred gallons of olive oil" And he said to him, "Here is your invoice; sit down right now and make it two hundred and fifty."

Then he said to another, "And how much do you owe?" He said, "A thousand bushels of wheat." He says to him, "Here is your invoice; make it eight hundred."

The master praised the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.

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## 4. Vineyard Laborers

Matt 20:1-15

For Heaven's imperial rule is like a proprietor who went out first thing in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the workers for a silver coin a day he sent them into his vineyard.

And coming out around 9 A.M. ... Around noon he went out again ... About 5 P.M. ....

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When evening came the owner of the vineyard tells his foreman: "Call the workers and pay them their wages starting with those hired last and ending with those hired first.

Those hired at 5 P.M. came up and received a silver coin each. Those hired first approached thinking they would receive more. But they also got a silver coin apiece. They took it and began to grumble ...

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In response he said to one of them: "Look, pal, did I wrong you? You did agree with me to work for a silver coin, didn't you? Take your wage and get out! I intend to treat the one hired last the same way I treat you. Is there some law forbidding me to do with my money as I please? Or is your eye filled with envy because I am generous?"

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## 5. Mustard Seed

Matt 13:31b-32; Mark 4:31-32; Luke 13:19; Thom 20:2

It's like a mustard seed. (It's) the smallest of all seeds, but when it falls on prepared soil, it produces a large plant and becomes a shelter for birds of the sky.

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