Following Jesus by the Book

Parables

"The Kingdom of God is Like…"

What is a parable?

Parables are poetic pictures pointing to the propositional truths of Christianity. "A parable," wrote F.F. Bruce, "is a saying or story that seeks to drive home a point the speaker wishes to emphasize by illustrating it from a familiar situation of common life." Or as we can remember hearing in Sunday School, a parable is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."

The purpose of parables is to reveal through story who God is, who are in relation to Him, and what He expects us to be and do as our response to Him. Eta Linnemann wrote, "It overcomes the difficulties of comprehension by explaining what is unknown or hard to grasp through what is familiar and easy to grasp." "In its broadest sense," wrote Colin Brown in a Greek word study of parable, "a parable is a form of speech used to illustrate and persuade by the help of a picture." Or as my NT professor in seminary and chairman of the RSV Bible Committee Bruce Metzger explained, "Parables reveal a principle of God's government…teaching a certain kind of conduct which His hearers are to emulate or avoid…or they disclose something of the character of God and His dealings with men."

Simply, parables are Jesus' way of saying, "The Kingdom of God is like this. When people live like this, the prayer is being fulfilled: 'Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'"

What are some keys to understanding parables?

It helps to remember parables, enlisting Archibald Hunter's exposition, "appeal to the intelligence through the imagination." Helmet Thielicke refers to parables as "God's picturebook." So while reading a parable, try to recreate the scene in your mind before struggling with the content.

Piggybacking on the previous paragraph, the details of the parable are subordinate to the picture being painted by the parable. To quote two of my favorite seminary professors, Elmer Homrighausen and Rob Stuart, "Deliver the turkey! Don't pluck it in front of everybody! You can't construct theology on broken pickle jars!"

"The parable," according to Eta Linnemann, "is not for the sake of conversation, but to bring the listeners to understand something."

Lloyd Ogilvie suggested five questions to ask while reading parables: "What is the main point? What does it tell us about God? What does it compel me to do? What was the context that motivated the parable? How can I live the parable as a part of my citizenship in the Kingdom of God?"

The stories have sting to show/alert us how to honor God.

Again, Jesus tells parables to illustrate what the Kingdom of God is like. Parables provide graphic images of what it is like when God rules and His will is being done on earth as it is in heaven.

Selah.

RRK (10/22/26)