

The Parables of Jesus: Simple Stories, Important Spiritual Truths

Parables: An Overview

Jesus understands human life in its many dimensions. Jesus used everyday illustrations to minister to people of all social strata and backgrounds. He spoke the language of the people and taught them at their own level. Jesus used the tool of parables to convey important spiritual truths in ways that people could easily understand.

Jesus' parables depict real-life incidents that communicate irrefutable truth. Details in these parables call up analogies that challenge the reader and the hearer to fill in appropriate comparisons. Here are some general guidelines that can help us learn and apply the parables as Jesus intended:

- 1) Generally speaking there is one key point for us to emphasize in our learning and application. Some teach there is only one point, while others feel there is always one and sometimes more.
- 2) Understanding the historical setting and circumstances behind the parable helps us get a richer understanding of its intended meaning.
- 3) We should pay attention literary and grammatical structure of the parable. Look closely at introductions, conclusions and literary devices such as triads (i.e. use of three characters or elements). Almost always, it's the end of the story that is most important.
- 4) The main point of a given parable should be checked theologically against the teaching of Jesus and the rest of Scripture.
- 5) We need to translate the meaning of the parable in terms relevant to needs of today. We need to find the **relevance** – and we need to find the **application** to our personal lives!

The Parable of the Two Builders (Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-49)

Key characters and elements:

- Builder on the rock
- Builder on the sand/no foundation
- Words of Jesus
- Storm (torrential rain, flood, winds)

Historical Setting:

- Rural houses were generally built upon hardened mud/clay
- Was hard work to dig down through the clay to rock, and it was hard work to then build the house on the clay
- Matthew wrote for Jewish readers living in Israel, while Luke wrote to Greeks/Gentiles living in Asia minor (explains minor differences in details; these details do not alter the meaning of the parable)

Key Point:

“The wise person 1) listens to God’s words AND 2) put them into practice”.

A person who hears words of Jesus and puts them into practice is like the wise builder. Building our house (lives) on the applied words of Jesus will help us withstand the storms of life that everyone faces. In contrast, the foolish person hears the words of Jesus but doesn’t obey them - and is like the foolish builder who built his house (life) on sand/no foundation. When the storm hit, his house (life) collapsed.

Other Relevant Scriptures:

I Cor 3:10-11

Luke 8:19-21

Luke 11:27-28

James 1:22-25

John 14:21

Few Examples of helpful scriptures to hear and apply:

Struggling with worry? Read and apply Phil 4:6-7

Need strength to meet challenges? Try Phil 4:13

Dealing with temptation? Follow I Cor 10:13

Need purpose and meaning to life? Check out I Cor 10:31; Matt 22:34-40; Matt 28:19-20

Sad over death of a Christian loved one? Think through John 14:1-6; Rev 21:1-4

Dealing with anger? Read and apply Eph 4:26-5:2; James 1:19-20