

Session 10

Jesus teaches with parables: Mt 13

Context

Before we turn to Mt 13, it would be helpful to summarise where we have come from in our study of the Gospel.

In the first two chapters, Matthew presents Jesus as child of Abraham, David, Israel and God (Mt 1-2). His ministry commences with his baptism and proclamation of the nearness of God's Reign (Mt 2-4). The first teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) explicates the qualities necessary for authentic discipleship, the value of Torah practices and teaching, and how to treat the "enemy." Jesus' Word in Mt 5-7 dovetails with his deeds of healing in Mt 8-9. This leads to his second discourse in Mt 10 about missionary endeavours and the challenges that will be (are already being?) experienced by Matthew's Gospel addressees. In the chapters immediately preceding Mt 13, the evangelist reflects on Jesus' rejection and opposition and its implications for the future proclamation of the Gospel (Mt 11-12). We now arrive at Mt 13.

Some scholars consider Mt 13—Jesus parabolic teaching, the third of five teaching moments in the Gospel—as the centre of the Gospel.

Video Teaching Session 10

As a result of this video, you will:

- Sense the centrality of Mt 13 to the overall plan of the Gospel;
- Appreciate the meaning and purpose of Mt's parables;
- See parables are agents of God's reign;
- Identify the clear structure of the chapter.
- Reflect on the importance of the "meta-parable", the parable of the sowed seed (Mt 13.3-9).

Mt 13: Jesus' Parable Teaching

The Gospel's Literary Structure centered on Mt 13

The following is a helpful outline of the Gospel centered on Mt 13, as proposed by one scholar:

A. 1:1 - 4:17 *Narrative*: The birth and preparation of Jesus.

B. 4:18- 7:29 First Teaching: Jesus' authoritative teaching: discipleship & consequences

C. 8:1 - 9:35 *Narrative*: Jesus acts with authority: ten miracles reveal.

D. 9:36 - 11:1 Second Teaching: The Twelve commissioned with authority.

E. 11:2 - 12:50 *Narrative*: Jesus rejected by 'this generation'.

13:1 - 53 Third Teaching: The parables of the kingdom.

E¹. 13:54 - 16:20 *Narrative*: Jesus opposed and confessed, acts in compassion to Jews & gentiles.

D¹. 16:21 - 20:34 Fourth Teaching in *Narrative*: The impending passion of Jesus, lack of understanding of the disciples.

C¹. 21:1 - 22:46 *Narrative*: Jesus' teaches with authority: antagonists reject.

B¹. 23:1 - 25:46 Fifth Teaching: Jesus' authoritative teaching: On Israel and false prophets, the consequences of the coming of the kingdom.

A¹. 26:1 - 28:20 *Narrative*: The death & resurrection of Jesus; formal preparation for mission.

H. Combrink, 'The structure of the Gospel of Matthew as Narrative,'
Tyndale Bulletin., 34[1], 71.

Nature of a Parable

The classic definition of a parable comes from C. H. Dodd:

A parable...

- is a riddle drawn from everyday life
- usually has one main point and contains a surprise element
- attracts and teases people
- can trap people, or if they are open to them, it can move them to conversion.
- presents the surprising action of God in the ordinary things of life.
- tells a short story with a double meaning: one surface meaning is clear but another deeper meaning lies hidden within. This deeper meaning contains the “seeds” for encountering God’s Reign.

Proposed Literary Design of Mt 13

In this structure, the “meta-parable” of the sowed seed, accompanied by Jesus’ explanation of the purpose of parables and the allegorical interpretation of the sowed-seed parable (13:3-23) leads two main sections that contain three parables:

Introduction (13:1-2)

Meta-parable: The Sower (13:3-9)
Purpose of Parables (13:10-17)
Explanation of Sower (13:18-23)

Three Parables

- Wheat and Weeds (13:24-30)
- Mustard Seed (13:31-32)
- Leaven (13:32-33)

Role of parables in Jesus’ Ministry (13:34-35)
Explanation of Wheat and Weeds (13:36-43)

Three Parables

- Treasure (13:44)
- Pearl (13:45-46)
- Fishnet (13:47-50)

Conclusion: ‘Have you understood all this?...’ (13:51-53)

Summary

- Parables are word-agents that bring about the Reign of God. Their encounter, with an openness of heart, can lead people to conversion. They are religiously and theologically dynamic.
- This can still happen today in the telling of the parable.
- Gerhard Lohfink reflects similarly in his comments on the parable of the hidden treasure and the search for the pearl “of great price”:

“Evidently what Jesus speaks of in the parable of the treasure and the pearl is something he himself had experienced: he was seized and overcome by the joy of the reign of God— and not a reign of God that will come sometime but the one already beginning, the one that can be attained now, the one that anybody can barter and exchange today.

“The reign of God is already happening here, in this world— today. It is reality wherever people believe the Gospel, accept the reign of God, let their lives be changed by its fascination— when they turn from their own life projects to the new one that God wants to create. The double parable of the treasure and the pearl speaks about this earth, about now, about today. And in doing so it speaks as clearly as can be about the presence of the reign of God.”

Lohfink, Gerhard. *The Forty Parables of Jesus* (Liturgical Press, 2021), 47-48.

- About the Parable of the Sowed Seed, Gerhard Lohfink writes,

‘And what did Jesus mean by the parable of the sower? What did he want to tell his listeners? As in many of his parables, here again he speaks of the reign of God, which is coming. It has already been sown. In fact, the wheat is already growing. The reign of God is many enemies, however, and they seem overwhelming. And yet, despite all these enemies in opponents, the reign of God will come to pass. The work of God will succeed. It will bear fruit. In the end a rich harvest will be produced.’

Jesus of Nazareth: What he wanted, Who he was
(Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), p. 108.

For Reflection

- Is there anything that “surprises” you about this study of parables in Matthew’s Gospel?
- How might Jesus be considered a “parable” preacher? What implications does this have for teaching and preaching today?



Matthew and the Angel, by Rembrandt, 1661

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