Teaching in Parables

A series on the parables spoken by Christ

The Importance of Parables
This series of booklets is based on a 19th century book entitled “Christ’s Object Lessons”. The Scriptures have been modified into modern English, some long paragraphs have been broken up for easier reading and emphasis, and some explanations have been added in square brackets. Headings have also been inserted where necessary, as has all the emphasis.
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The Importance of Parables
Our aim: To enable everyone everywhere to read and understand the Bible for themselves.
Introduction
(This is not part of the original book)

The use of parables

Parable teaching has been used a lot through the millennia and has been widely accepted. But it has its limitations – not every aspect of the chosen illustration gives the information the teller wants to impart. We must learn to see the subject of the parable and stick with the explanation of it, and not be led astray by further assumptions through peripheral details.

The disciples did not always understand the lessons which Christ wished to convey by parables, and when the multitude had gone away, they would ask Him to explain His words. See Matthew 13:36. He was ever ready to lead them to a perfect understanding of His word and His will; for from them, in clear, distinct lines, truth was to go forth to the world. So today, if we have a problem with any parable, the Spirit of God is willing to explain it to us from another part of the Bible.

Why did He use parables?

Matthew 13:
10 And the disciples came, and said to Him, “Why speak You to them in parables?”

11 He answered and said to them, “Because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. 12 For whosoever has [an enquiring mind], to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that he has [use it or lose it]. 13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

14 “And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, ‘By [physical] hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand; and [by physical] seeing you shall see, and shall not perceive:’ 15 for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them [they have rejected Him].
“But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. 
For verily I say to you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which you see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which you hear, and have not heard them.”

Sometimes parables were acted out for greater impression. Such a case occurred when Jeremiah asked the descendants of Rechab to drink wine. Jeremiah 35:1-19. Their steadfast refusal to do so was used by the Son of God to illustrate the long-term obedience He expected from the rest of Israel.

To demonstrate the nature of the swift-coming judgments, the prophet Jeremiah was once bidden to “take of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests; and go forth to the valley of the son of Hinnom,” and there, after reviewing the apostasy of Judah, he was to dash to pieces “a potter's earthen bottle,” and declare in behalf of God, whose servant he was, “Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again.” See Jeremiah 19:1-11.

The prophet did as he was commanded. Then, returning to the city, he stood in the court of the temple and declared in the hearing of all the people. “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear My words.” Verse 15.

In the beautiful parabolic prophecy of Zechariah, the high priest Joshua, standing clothed in filthy garments before the Angel of the LORD, represents the sinner in the judgment. And the word is spoken by the LORD, “Take away the filthy garments from him. And to him He said, Behold, I have caused your iniquity to pass from you, and I will clothe you with change of raiment. . . . So they set a fair miter upon his head, and clothed him with garments.” Zech. 3:4-5. Even so God will clothe you with “the garments of salvation,” and cover you with “the robe of righteousness” in the judgment. Isaiah 61:10.

But mostly they were familiar stories of everyday things which could be used to illustrate spiritual thoughts.

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