

Parables

Teacher Background on Parables

A parable is an extended simile. A simile compares the point of commonality (similarity, thus, simile) between two unlike things in order to demonstrate and teach that point. Therefore, one can describe a parable as a brief story that is true to life, comparing the point of commonality between two unlike things, given for the purpose of teaching a spiritual truth.

Another way to describe a parable is to call it a *word-picture* that uses an image or story to illustrate a truth or lesson. It creates a mini-drama in picture language that describes the reality being illustrated. It shows a likeness between the image of an illustration and the object being portrayed. It defines the unknown by using the known.

A parable helps the listener to discover the deeper meaning and underlying truth of the reality being portrayed. It can be a figure of speech or comparison, such as "*the kingdom of God ..is like a mustard seed ..or like yeast*" (Luke 13:19, 21). More commonly it is a short story told to bring out a lesson or moral. Jesus used simple stories or images to convey important truths about God and the kingdom, and how to live and act justly. They commonly feature examples or illustrations from daily life in ancient Palestine, such as mustard seeds and fig trees, wineskins and oil lamps, money and treasure, stewards, workers, judges and homemakers, wedding parties and children's games. Jesus' audience would be very familiar with these illustrations of everyday life. Today we have to do some "homework" to understand the social customs described.

Jesus' parables have a double meaning. First, there is the literal meaning, apparent to anyone who has experience with the subject matter. But beyond the literal meaning lies a deeper meaning; a beneath-the-surface lesson about God's truth and kingdom. Jesus' parables often involve an element of surprise or an unexpected twist. We are taken off-guard by the progression of the story. The parable moves from the very familiar and understandable aspects of experience to a sudden turn of events or a remarkable comparison that challenges the hearer and invites further reflection. We have a great word for this. It is called the "discombobulating shift"! It is that part of the story that turns the listener on their head!