

Parables of Jesus

(Week 1: Introduction)

Nature of Parables

The term *parable* is a broad term that encompasses many of Jesus' teaching. (Matthew 13:34)

According to Matthew, Jesus often taught in parables.

In literary terms, some qualify as *stories*, some as *illustrations*, and some as wise *sayings*.

Parables are stories comprised of actors, scenes, plots, beginning, and end.

They engage us in thought and emotion.

They are memorable, compelling us to go away and ponder.

They call us to certain response. Why does Jesus teach using parables?

Jesus used parables to teach hidden things, not yet revealed. ([Matthew 13:35](#))

He wanted to relate these truths in terms people could understand (real life stories). Using stories is a more engaging way to teach truth (like a movie).

We get drawn in. We relate with the characters. We get emotionally involved.

Why did people have difficulty understanding parables?

At first glance, they could understand the surface (earthly) meaning of the stories.

However, the deeper (heavenly) meaning was hard to grasp, especially as it related to the Gospel.

One reason they had difficulty understanding was that the deeper meaning, the Gospel, was foreign to their understanding of God. It was a radical teaching, something unexpected.

In the case of the disciples (Luke 24:44-45), they had difficulty because they did not yet understand Jesus' redemptive mission – The Gospel.

In the case of the Pharisees (Matthew 13:14-15), it was because they did not want to understand and accept, i.e., they did not want to listen, see, and agree.

Throughout Jesus' ministry they saw what Jesus did, they heard what he said, yet they intentionally closed their hearts and minds to God's revealed truth. Isaiah said they hardened their hearts.

Historical-Cultural Context

The original audience understood the cultural norms and laws.

We are in the 21st century and have our own cultural norms.

There is 2000+ years of cultural gap/difference between us.

The *Principlizing Bridge*.

Step 1 Grasping the Text in the Original Audience

How did the original hearers understand the parable?

Step 2 Measuring the Width of the River

What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?

(Time, Culture/Customs, Language, Situation, Location, Social Class, Governmental Systems, Covenant)

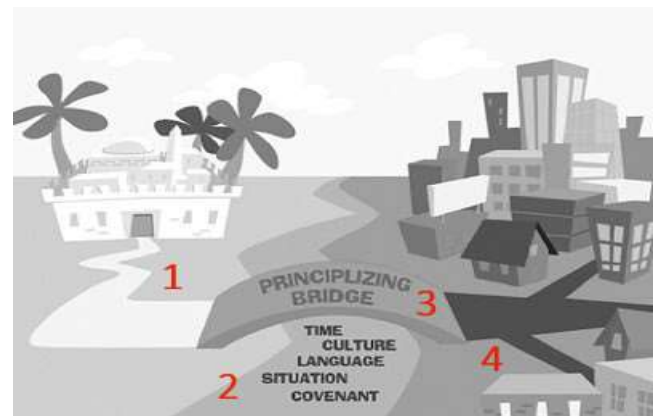
Step 3 Crossing the Principlizing Bridge

What is the common theological principle that spans the gaps?

Step 4 Grasping the Text in Our Town

How should Christians today apply the theological principle in their lives?

Examples of Cultural Biases Matt 5:38-41



Without understanding the context as 1st century Jews understood, we are led to believe by our culture that we should not defend ourselves and embrace pacifism. We should allow people to take advantage of you in the name of love.

Based on Roman law, each of these actions Jesus is recommending is a **criminal offense**.

Rather, Jesus wants us to **defuse the anger** of the offender by **calling attention to their sin** and **lovingly encouraging them to reconsider their actions** and **back-down**. We are to respond in **love** not **anger**.

Structure of Parables

Literary Forms:

- Standard Parallelism (AA'BB'CC') Luke 21:23-24
- Step Parallelism (ABC A'B'C'') Luke 11:9-10
- **Inverted Parallelism** (ABCD D'C'B'A') Romans 10:8-10

Benefits:

- Helps us compare and contrast.
- Helps us focus on main point (climax, decision point, inflection point).
- Encourages us to feel the tension of the story and evoke a personal response.

Resources

- "Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes," Kenneth E. Bailey, Eerdmans, ISBN 0-80281947-8
- "Jesus, The Middle Eastern Storyteller," Gary M. Burge, Zondervan, ISBN 978-0-310-28045-3
- "Finding the Lost Cultural Keys to Luke 15," Kenneth E. Bailey, Concordia, ISBN 0-570-04563-0
- "The Cross and the Prodigal," Kenneth E. Bailey, Acorn Press, ISBN 0-908284-43-8
- "Manners and Customs of the Bible," James M. Freeman, Logos International, ISBN 0-88270-022-7
- "NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible," Zondervan, ISBN 9780310431589
- "The Bible and the Land," Gary M. Burge
- "Jesus, the Middle Eastern Storyteller," Gary M. Burge
- "Jesus and the Jewish Festivals," Gary M. Burge
- "Encounters with Jesus," Gary M. Burge