



Matthew 13:10-17

The Purpose of the Parables

¹⁰ Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” ¹¹ And he answered them, ^(L)“To you it has been given to know ^(K)the **secrets** [mystery] of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² ^(L)For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, ^(M)even what he has will be taken away. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables, because ^(N)seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, ^(O)nor do they understand. ¹⁴ Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled [in the process of being fulfilled.

Progress] that says:

^(P)““You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.”

¹⁵ For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears ^(Q)they can barely hear, and ^(R)their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and ^(S)understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷ ^(V)For truly, I say to you, ^(W)many prophets and righteous people **longed** [intense, covet, hunger] to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

I. What is Jesus talking about?

- Jesus distinguished between the unbelieving crowd and the believing disciples – WHY?
- Believers would be given the understanding, given help, to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Unbelievers, would not be given any divine revelation, any help. Why?
- LONGED: Is this the key?
LONGED: 13:17 desired, epithumeo (ep-ee-thoo-meh-oh); Strong’s #1937: To set one’s heart upon, eagerly long for, covet, greatly desire, lust after. The word emphasizes the intensity of the desire rather than the object desired. It describes both good and evil desires
- Matthew Henry compares the **parables** to the pillar of cloud and fire which enlightened Israel while confusing the Egyptians. The parables would be revealed to those who were sincerely interested but would prove “only an irritation to those who were hostile to Jesus”.
- So it was not a matter of whim on the Lord’s part, but simply the outworking of a principle which is built into all of life—willful blindness is followed by judicial blindness. That is why He spoke to the Jews in parables.
- H. C. Woodring put it so: “Because they did not have the love of the truth, they would not get the light of the truth.”
Note: Pharisees professed, were committed to understand and teach and live truth, “but Truth incarnate stood before them and they resolutely refused to see Him. They professed to hear God’s Word, but the living Word of God was in their midst and they would not obey Him.
They were unwilling to understand the wonderful fact of the Incarnation; therefore, the capacity to understand was taken from them.
- They were awaiting the arrival of the Messiah...but did they not want to stop waiting? Did the waiting give their purpose, power, priority in society?



NOTE: The **mysteries of the kingdom** are hitherto unknown truths concerning the kingdom in its interim form. The very fact that the kingdom would *have* an interim form had been a secret up to now. The parables describe some of the features of the kingdom during the time when the King would be absent.

The Saviour's reply was that only the disciples were to know the **mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**. The mystery implies a secret into which one must be initiated in order to understand it. The mystery revealed would be the new form of the kingdom during the interval between the first and second advents.

14–17. The quotation from the **prophecy of Isaiah** [Esaías], (i.e., Isa 6:9–10) follows the LXX, emphasizing the obstinate unbelief of the people. As in Isaiah's day, the Jews had hardened themselves against God's truth and He had further hardened them in their unbelief. Their hearts had **waxed gross** (fat) and they would not, nor should not **be converted**, i.e., changed or saved. The faith of the disciples was evidence of their conversion and caused them to see and hear the truth which the **prophets** (vs. 17) had desired to know (cf. **1 Pet 1:10–12**) [Was the desire the key?]

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ¹¹ inquiring what person or time^[a] the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

II. The Parables – Form and Function

Thirty-five percent of all gospel teaching is written in parables.

a. VERY EARLY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH outsiders saw Christians drawing their faith from parables.

- Galen, the most famous medical doctor of the second century. He was also the first pagan to say positive things about Christians. Around A.D. 140 he wrote:

Most people are unable to follow a demonstrative argument consecutively; hence they need parables, and benefit from them ... just as now we see the people called Christians drawing their faith from parables [and miracles] and yet sometimes acting in the same way [as those who philosophize] ... and in their keen pursuit of justice, have attained a pitch not inferior to that of genuine philosophers.

b. A Shift: In later centuries parables became a source for Christian *life* (ethics [DO]) but not Christian *faith* [THINK] (theology) [reason behind the DO].

It is instructive to note that in the second century Galen saw Christians building their *faith* on parables. **How did parables lose their status as a source of the Christian faith?**

Do we want to see Jesus as a gifted story-teller but not a theologian? Do we want that place to be filled by humans (like the Pharisees)?

c. New Phrase: Jesus was a *metaphorical theologian*. That is, his primary method of creating meaning was through metaphor, simile, parable and dramatic action rather than through logic and reasoning. He created meaning like a dramatist and a poet rather than like a philosopher.

WHY did Jesus do this?

1. Crowd control – to reduce the distraction of Phariseetical distraction.
2. Easier to remember the points
3. Bite size pieces of theology
4. Simplified difficult concepts



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5. Created a contact with their daily lives
6. Covenant – God’s covenants directed (open & closed behavior) through instruction that developed into action that would grow into more intimacy with Him. Has Kingdom Principles replaced this process?

d. Serious theology [fits Greek culture]

In the Western tradition serious theology has almost always been constructed from ideas held together by logic. In such a world the more intelligent the theologian, the more abstract he or she usually becomes, and the more difficult it is for the average person to understand what is being said. **Paul works with ideas and metaphors. In the West we have tended to emphasis his concepts and sideline his metaphors.** By so doing we have made him fit into our world of conceptual theologians.

e. Metaphor: A point to connect concepts

Metaphor = Verbal picture, not a verbal description

Parable = Theological Metaphor

What precisely is a metaphorical theologian? Consider the following. We know that God is Spirit and is neither male nor female. Yet in the Scriptures we are told that the believer is “born of God” (1 Jn 3:9). Here John uses female language to describe the relationship between God and believers. Similarly, when Jesus addressed God as “Father,” he used a male metaphor/title to help us understand the nature of God. Scripture uses male and female images to enrich our understanding of God, who is Spirit and thereby beyond male and female.

- f.** The listener/reader of the parable is encouraged to examine the human predicament through the worldview created by the parable.

Parables create a house for theology to be understood and put into practice.

- g.** Of vital importance to understand the CULTURE the parables were wrapped in.

i.e. Parable of the Prodigal Son

Loving Father

Rebellious sons

Self-righteous siblings

All cultures can understand this

Middle Eastern Cultures:

But in the Middle East when a young man asks for his inheritance while his father is still alive his request means, “Dad, why don’t you drop dead.” The father is expected to get angry, slap the boy across the face and drive him out of the house. None of these things happens in the parable. By the time we process the significance of these three bits of cultural insight, the parable exhibits new meanings that otherwise would be missed.

We now can experience the full extent of God’s Grace Jesus was explaining in this parable.

- h.** Of vital importance to understand the HISTORICAL CONTEXT the parables were wrapped in.

- Martin Luther King Jr’s “I Have a Dream” speech connected to the Civil Rights Movement
- Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address” connected to the Civil War

- i.** The Meaning

Is there one central meaning (truth) in each parable?

Is there a cluster of meanings?



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i.e. Prodigal Son

If the great parable of the prodigal son has “only one point,” which shall we choose? Should the interpreter choose “the nature of the fatherhood of God,” “an understanding of sin,” “self-righteousness that rejects others,” “the nature of true repentance,” “joy in community” or “finding the lost”?

Must be evaluated in the witness of Jesus’ life.

We are stepping into the ‘house of parables’ that Jesus built.

Parables are not allegories. (fatted calf in the prodigal son is not a representation of Christ’s sacrifice).

III (Do the 3 bolded if time)

WOMEN AND THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Parable	Audience	Application
The lamp under a basket (Matt. 5:14–16; Mark 4:21, 22 ; Luke 8:16, 17).	To the disciples.	Life and words should give personal testimony to God’s redemptive and transforming grace.
²¹ And he said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand? ²² For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light.		
The marriage (Matt. 9:15; Mark 2:19, 20; Luke 5:34, 35).	To the Pharisees and the disciples of John.	Joy will be found in Christ’s companionship.
The patched garment (Matt. 9:16; Mark 2:21; Luke 5:36). He also told them a parable: “No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old.	To the Pharisees and the disciples of John.	Jesus did not come to adapt to the old order of legalism but to make all things new.
The children in the marketplace (Matt. 11:16, 17; Luke 7:31, 32).	To the multitudes concerning John the Baptist.	Those who rejected Jesus and John could not be pleased. Beware of focusing on personal whims.
The leaven (Matt. 13:33 ; Luke 13:20, 21). He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”	To the multitude on the seashore.	Beware of sin that makes its way into life to corrupt and draw away from the good and true.



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The pearl of great price (Matt. 13:45-46).	To the disciples.	The relative value of the gospel exceeded all else.
The wedding garment (Matt. 22:10-14).	To the chief priests and the Pharisees.	Keep your life pure and holy.
The wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13).	To the disciples on the Mount of Olives.	Always be prepared and watchful.
The wedding feast (Matt. 22:2-9; Luke 14:16-23).	To the chief priests and the Pharisees.	Do not reject God's invitation to salvation.
The lost coin** (Luke 15:8-10).	To the Pharisees and scribes.	Remember Christ's love for sinners and His determination to draw them to Himself.
The persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8).	To the disciples.	Persevere in prayer.

**Biblical women often wore a *frontlet* (Heb. *semedi*) on their foreheads. This adornment was made of coins (perhaps part of the woman's dowry) and signified betrothal or marriage. The monetary value of the coins was not as important as the sentimental value and symbolism of commitment.

A parable is a lesson from daily life that teaches a spiritual truth. Jesus often told parables to provide an understanding of life, especially life in God's kingdom. **Thirty-five percent of all gospel teaching is written in parables.** ¹

NOTES:

WORD WEALTH

LONGED: 13:17 **desired**, *epithumeo* (ep-ee-thoo-meh-oh); Strong's #1937: To set one's heart upon, eagerly long for, covet, greatly desire, lust after. The word emphasizes the intensity of the desire rather than the object desired. It describes both good and evil desires.²

SECRETS: **cr:Mark 4:11** Mystery: In biblical thought the term "mystery" means something formerly hidden, but now revealed, which people cannot understand **except by divine revelation.** ³

They would not be permitted to know **the mysteries (secrets) of the kingdom of heaven**, whereas His true followers would be helped to understand.

¹⁴ **Is fulfilled** (ἀναρπύεται). Rather of something in progress: *is being fulfilled or in process of fulfillment.*⁴

B. The Purpose of the Parables (13:10-17)

13:10 The disciples were puzzled that the Lord should **speak to** the people in the veiled language of **parables**. So they asked Him to explain His method.

13:11 In His reply, Jesus distinguished between the unbelieving crowd and the believing disciples. The crowd, a cross-section of the nation, was obviously rejecting Him, though their rejection would not be complete until the cross. They would not be permitted to know **the mysteries (secrets) of the kingdom of heaven**, whereas His true followers would be helped to understand.

A mystery in the NT is a fact never previously known by man, which man could never learn apart from divine revelation, but which has now been revealed. **The mysteries of the kingdom** are hitherto unknown truths concerning the kingdom in its interim form. The very fact that the kingdom would *have* an interim form had been a secret up to now. The parables describe some of the features of the kingdom during the time when the King would be absent. Some people therefore call this "the mystery

¹ Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman's Study Bible* (Mt 13:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Mt 13:10-16). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

³ Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Mk 4:11). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ Vincent, M. R. (1887). *Word studies in the New Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 78). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.



form of the kingdom”—not that there is anything mysterious about it but simply that it was never known before that time.

13:12 It may seem arbitrary that these secrets should be withheld from the multitude and revealed to the disciples. But the Lord gives the reason: “**For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away.**” The disciples had faith in the Lord Jesus; therefore, they would be given the capacity for more. They had accepted the light; therefore, they would receive more light. The Jewish nation, on the other hand, had rejected the Light of the world; therefore they were not only prevented from receiving more light, they would lose what little light they had. Light rejected is light denied.

13:13 Matthew Henry compares the **parables** to the pillar of cloud and fire which enlightened Israel while confusing the Egyptians. The parables would be revealed to those who were sincerely interested but would prove “only an irritation to those who were hostile to Jesus.”

So it was not a matter of whim on the Lord’s part, but simply the outworking of a principle which is built into all of life—willful blindness is followed by judicial blindness. That is why He spoke to the Jews in parables. H. C. Woodring put it so: “Because they did not have the love of the truth, they would not get the light of the truth.” They professed to see, that is, to be familiar with divine truth, but Truth incarnate stood before them and they resolutely refused to see Him. They professed to hear God’s Word, but the living Word of God was in their midst and they would not obey Him. They were unwilling to understand the wonderful fact of the Incarnation; therefore, the capacity to understand was taken from them.

13:14, 15 They were a living fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9, 10. Israel’s heart had **grown dull** and their **ears** were insensitive to the voice of God. They deliberately refused to **see with their eyes**. They knew that if they saw, heard, understood, and repented, God would heal them. But in their sickness and need, they refused His help. Therefore, their punishment was that they would **hear but not understand, and see but not perceive**.

13:16, 17 The disciples were tremendously privileged, because they were seeing what no one had seen before. The prophets and righteous men of the OT had longed to be living when the Messiah arrived, but their desire had not been fulfilled. The disciples were favored to live at that crisis moment in history, to see the Messiah, to witness His miracles, and to hear the incomparable teaching which came from His lips.⁵

13:10–15 Jesus’ parables were a teaching method designed to reveal spiritual truths in such a way that those who wanted to respond would understand and receive more (vv. 9, 12, 43). Those who chose not to respond would not completely understand, and what little understanding they did have would disappear.

11–13. The Saviour’s reply was that only the disciples were to know the **mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**. The mystery implies a secret into which one must be initiated in order to understand it. The mystery revealed would be the new form of the kingdom during the interval between the first and second advents. Kent (p. 45) notes, “These parables describe the strange form of the kingdom while the King is absent, during which time the gospel is preached and a spiritual nucleus is developed for the establishment of the messianic reign.” This special revelation is given only to the apostles who will become the foundation of that church. Those to whom this revealed secret is **not given** are those who have already rejected Christ. Thus, to the unbeliever, the parable form leaves him without understanding. Their rejection of Him leads to His rejection of them.

14–17. The quotation from the **prophecy of Isaiah** [Esaiahs], (i.e., Isa 6:9–10) follows the LXX, emphasizing the obstinate unbelief of the people. As in Isaiah’s day, the Jews had hardened themselves against God’s truth and He had further hardened them in their unbelief. Their hearts had **waxed gross** (fat) and they would not, nor should not **be converted**, i.e., changed or saved. The faith of the disciples was evidence of their conversion and caused them to see and hear the truth which the **prophets** (vs. 17) had desired to know (cf. 1 Pet 1:10–12).⁶

Parables of Jesus

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Introduction to the Parables

VERY EARLY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH outsiders saw Christians drawing their faith from parables. One of these witnesses was Galen, the most famous medical doctor of the second century. He was also the first pagan to say positive things about Christians. Around A.D. 140 he wrote:

⁵ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (pp. 1254–1255). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ Hindson, E. E., & Kroll, W. M. (Eds.). (1994). *KJV Bible Commentary* (p. 1917). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



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Most people are unable to follow a demonstrative argument consecutively; hence they need parables, and benefit from them ... just as now we see the people called Christians drawing their faith from parables [and miracles] and yet sometimes acting in the same way [as those who philosophize] ... and in their keen pursuit of justice, have attained a pitch not inferior to that of genuine philosophers.

In later centuries parables became a source for Christian life (ethics) but not Christian faith (theology).

It is instructive to note that in the second century Galen saw Christians building their *faith* on parables. How did parables lose their status as a source of the Christian faith?

Today, Jesus is naturally seen by Christians as the Son of God and Savior of the world. The New Testament also presents him as the perfect example of love and an effective storyteller for simple folk. But have we thought of him as a serious *theologian*?

Jesus was a metaphorical theologian. That is, his primary method of creating meaning was through metaphor, simile, parable and dramatic action rather than through logic and reasoning. He created meaning like a dramatist and a poet rather than like a philosopher.

THEOLOGY: CONCEPTUAL AND METAPHORICAL

In the Western tradition serious theology has almost always been constructed from ideas held together by logic. In such a world the more intelligent the theologian, the more abstract he or she usually becomes, and the more difficult it is for the average person to understand what is being said. **Paul works with ideas and metaphors. In the West we have tended to emphasize his concepts and sideline his metaphors.** By so doing we have made him fit into our world of conceptual theologians.

In contrast, the popular perception of Jesus is that of a village rustic creating folktales for fishermen and farmers. But when examined with care, his parables are serious theology, and Jesus emerges as an astute theologian. He is, as noted, primarily a *metaphorical* rather than a *conceptual* theologian.

What precisely is a metaphorical theologian? Consider the following. We know that God is Spirit and is neither male nor female. Yet in the Scriptures we are told that the believer is “born of God” (1 Jn 3:9). Here John uses female language to describe the relationship between God and believers. Similarly, when Jesus addressed God as “Father,” he used a male metaphor/title to help us understand the nature of God. Scripture uses male and female images to enrich our understanding of God, who is Spirit and thereby beyond male and female.

A metaphor communicates in ways that rational arguments cannot. Pictures easily trump but do not replace abstract reasoning. A powerful television image communicates meaning that a thousand words cannot express. When used in the theology to create meaning, the parable challenges the listener in ways that abstract statements of truth cannot approach. Yet the two are often linked, and both are critical to the task of theology.

Theologians often use “illustrations” to infuse energy and clarification into their abstract reflections. Illustrations are frequently “the sugar-coating on the theological pill,” as T. W. Manson so aptly stated. **A metaphor, however, is not an illustration of an idea; it is a mode of theological discourse. The metaphor does more than explain meaning, it creates meaning. A parable is an extended metaphor and as such it is not a delivery system for an idea but a house in which the reader/ listener is invited to take up residence.**

The listener/reader of the parable is encouraged to examine the human predicament through the worldview created by the parable. The casing is all that remains after a shell is fired. Its only purpose is to drive the shell in the direction of the target. It is easy to think of a parable in the same way and understand it as a good way to “launch” an idea. Once the idea is “on its way” the parable can be discarded. But this is not so. If the parable is a house in which the listener/reader is invited to take up residence, then that person is urged by the parable to look on the world through the windows of that residence. Such is the reality of the parables created by Jesus of Nazareth, a reality that causes a special problem.

If theology is built on logic and reasoning, then all one needs to understand that theology is a clear mind and a will to work hard. But if, for Jesus, stories and dramatic actions are the language of theology, then the culture of the storyteller is crucial. Our task includes the responsibility of trying to understand the metaphors and stories from and about Jesus in the light of the culture of which he was a part.

UNLOCKING METAPHORS

To unlock the secrets of these metaphors, there are a few simple yet far-reaching challenges.

The first is to realize the importance of the task. It is easy to ignore historical questions. Granted, anyone can read the Bible and be blessed by that reading, just as anyone can listen to a Bach cantata and be moved. But at the same time, the trained ear will hear more and be moved on a deeper level by the same music.

One ploy often used to escape the hard work of attempting to discover what Jesus was saying to his audience is to affirm the “universal appeal” of his parables. Every culture has loving fathers, rebellious sons and self-righteous older brothers, and many, directly or indirectly, assume that the parable of the prodigal son needs no special cultural glasses. It is universal in its appeal. Up to a point this is true. But in the Middle East when a young man asks for his inheritance while his father is still alive his request means, “Dad, why don’t you drop dead.” The father is expected to get angry, slap the boy across the face and drive him out of the house. None of these things happens in the parable. By the time we process the significance of these three bits of cultural insight, the parable exhibits new meanings that otherwise would be missed.



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The second challenge is to realize the historical nature of the Word of God. The Bible for Christians is not *just* the Word of God. Rather, it is the Word of God spoken through people in history. Those people and that history cannot be ignored without missing the speaker or writer's intentions and creating our own substitutes for them. Historical interpretation is the key to unlocking the vault that contains the gold of theological meaning. Without that key the gold turns to brass. It is helpful to note that this is true of all significant literature.

How is President Lincoln's Gettysburg address to be understood today? That speech was a turning point in American history because of the meaning it created in the middle of an identity-forming Civil War ("War Between the States"? or "The Great Rebellion"? or perhaps "The War of Northern Aggression"?). Each American brings his or her own history and experience to a study of that war. In spite of that, anyone who ignores the context of the war and the battle of Gettysburg cannot understand Lincoln's speech. In like manner, it is critical to interpret the parables of Jesus within his own world. Only then can we grasp the meaning created by them. The question becomes, How much meaning?

The third challenge is to distinguish what meaning or meanings can be attributed legitimately to the parables. For many centuries allegory reigned supreme as a method of interpretation, and the fatted calf in the parable of the prodigal son became a symbol for Christ because the calf was killed. Through allegory, interpreters were able to locate their favorite ideas almost anywhere, and confusion and finally meaninglessness conquered. This is probably why parables ceased to be sources for Christian faith and were limited to ethics. The Latin proverb reads, "Theologia parabolica non est theologia argumentativa."

In reaction to the fanciful exaggerations that the allegorical method produced in past centuries, across the twentieth century there was a stream of scholarship that argued for "one point per parable." Others allowed for several themes in a parable. The purpose was to protect interpretation from adding meanings to the text that could not have occurred to Jesus or his audience. But if a parable is part of a larger worldview, and if it is "a house in which we are invited to take up residence," then the dweller in that house can look out on the world from different windows. The house has a variety of rooms. If the great parable of the prodigal son has "only one point," which shall we choose? Should the interpreter choose "the nature of the fatherhood of God," "an understanding of sin," "self-righteousness that rejects others," "the nature of true repentance," "joy in community" or "finding the lost"? All of these theological themes are undeniably present in the story and together form a whole that I have called "the theological cluster." Each part of that cluster is in creative relationship to the other parts. The meaning of each can only be understood fully within the cluster formed by the entire parable. The content of the cluster must be controlled and limited by what Jesus' original audience could have understood.

When the Pharisees sat together and reflected on what Jesus was talking about in a particular parable, what ideas were available to them? There may be one or more. The themes that comprise the theological cluster of a parable must grow out of the world in which the parable was told and first heard. But should such a principle be strictly applied?

A great work of art has a life of its own. The viewer of that art brings his or her own life and experience to the moment of encounter with the work. Michelangelo's statue of Moses leaps beyond the world of sixteenth-century Italy and becomes "the angry man of God." Yet there need to be limits to what can legitimately be found in a story. One of the island cultures of the Pacific glorifies the cleverness of the deceiver. People of that culture read the story of the passion of Jesus and the hero of the story becomes Judas. Jesus turns into the duped fool. In the West some have found Marxism or Freudianism or Existentialism in the parables of Jesus. Postmodernism is selected by others as the appropriate lens through which to study the parables. Such interpretations could not have been imagined by Jesus or his audience. Additionally, whatever the interpreter finds in a parable needs to be evaluated in the light of the life and witness of Jesus. All fair-minded reviewers appropriately extend such a courtesy to any modern author. Can't the same courtesy be offered to Jesus? Such a discipline keeps one within the "critical realism" that N. T. Wright eloquently presents as a starting point for New Testament interpretation.

SUMMARY: INTRODUCTION TO THE PARABLES

Finally, the question is not, Where are you on the ladder? but Did you get there by climbing or falling? All of us have limited intellectual and spiritual resources as we approach "the mind of Christ" in the parables. Each of us is aware of great interpreters who are so far ahead of us that they are nearly out of sight. Others



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known to us may not have had the opportunity to learn what we have learned. This perspective is shared by the greatest scholar and the simplest believer. All readers of Jesus' parables are challenged to do the best they can with what they have and not despair at the ignorance or achievements of others.

Simply stated, our task is to stand at the back of the audience around Jesus and listen to what he is saying to them. Only through that discipline can we discover what he is saying to any age, including our own. Authentic simplicity can be found the other side of complexity. The theological and ethical House of the Parables of Jesus awaits. May all enter with great expectations!⁷

13:10 The purpose of parables was to make spiritual truths clearer to hearers; to put truth in a form easily remembered; to avoid offense with hostile people who would not receive the truth; and to declare judgment upon those who were willfully blind. See note on Mark 4:12.

13:11 See note on Mark 4:11.

13:16 The disciples were privileged to see and hear things not given to God's servants in the OT.

⁷ Bailey, K. E. (2008). *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (pp. 277–283). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.