

PARABLES

Parables were often used by the Lord Jesus to teach significant truths in bite-size pieces. The word parable is actually the combination of two Greek words, *para* meaning “alongside” and *ballo* meaning “to throw.” The literal meaning of the word parable is “to throw alongside,” meaning that a parable is an extended metaphor designed to come alongside the truth and illustrate its meaning.

Some have read the Bible and been confused by the parables of our Lord because of the natural confusion between a parable and an allegory. Although a few of Jesus’ parables do border on the allegorical, most of them are not. The biggest difference to understand is that where an allegory, like then Pilgrim’s Progress, each detail in the story has some kind of counterpart in the meaning. But in the parables of Jesus, story and meaning tend to meet at one general focus. In other words, the allegory has to be deciphered point by point like a code; the student of the parables must decipher the one chief point and the individual parts of the story that serve the main thrust.

As you examine the parables of Jesus in Mar 4, keep in mind the following:

- Parables tend to follow the general rules of story-telling. They enjoy the presence of several rules: 1) The rule of contrast where opposites stand in stark contrast to each other. The Gospels offer the contrast of the Wise and the Foolish Bridesmaids and the Two Builders. 2) The rule of three where many of the parables will have three distinct characters...like the use of the three travelers and the Good Samaritan. 3) The rule of end stress where the spotlight tends to fall on the last character or action in the story.
- Parables rise from real life situations. Our Lord walked in the sandals of His listeners to impart truth in a format and style that would like hearts to actions. Thus, the agricultural culture depicted in Mark Four’s three “seed” parables represents the lifestyle of where many people lived and survived in these times.
- Every parable was designed to move people to action. Jesus wants his followers to both listen and respond. He wanted Christ-followers through the ages to respond for themselves to the truth being offered.

Jesus was convinced that all of the human condition, with its multiple faults and frailties, could furnish signposts toward the rule of God. Read them searching for both insight and glimpse of God’s care and concern.