

Jesus' Parables

This document summarises the five parables of Jesus that we have studied.

Parable of the Compassionate Master

Matthew 20:1-16

Theology

Ethics

- Work has value (but not necessarily proportionate)
- Compassion on those less fortunate is righteous

Theology

- Complainers could be pharisees or disciples
- Whichever, the lesson is: obey God, but don't dictate how he should treat others
- Jesus is like the owner, who hired the workers himself
- God came to us in Jesus, and showed us costly, generous compassion
- God's generosity short-circuits our ideas of fairness
- God doesn't respect our ideas of priority

Our Parable's Requirements

Context must:

- Communicate value of work vs. God's value of people
- Communicate value of compassion
- Communicate God's "upside-down" view of the world

Context should:

- Allow room for surprise of grace (everyone gets equal pay)
- Allow room for surprise of God's compassion (going to the job market)
- Allow debate over world's view of "justice" vs. God's grace

Story should have:

- Surprise
- Symmetry & simplicity
- Shared metaphors
- Setup for judgement

Story must communicate:

- God's extreme compassion
- Surprising grace vs. worldly "justice"
- God's different priorities
- Value of work
- Value of human beings

Parable of the Unjust (Shrewd) Steward

Luke 16:1-8

Theology

Theology

- God is just (the master dismisses the corrupt steward)
- God is merciful (he merely dismisses the steward, he doesn't imprison him or his family, and he accepts the cost of the stewards self-preserving actions)
- Sin is ultimately found out, it cannot be kept secret
- Sin leads to more sin (the steward chose to solve his problems with more sin)
- The steward's insight is commended, not his actions: he understands that his master (God) is gracious, and he banks on that
- The steward's courage to act on his convictions of God (his master) is approved of

Our Parable's Requirements

Context must:

- Communicate the master's reputation and its importance
- Communicate steward's understanding of master's good character
- Communicate a wicked exploitation of the master's good character

Story should have:

- Surprise
- Symmetry & simplicity
- Shared metaphors
- Setup for judgement

Story must communicate:

- God's extreme generosity
- Steward's shrewd understanding of God
- Steward's exploitation of God's goodness

The Parable of the Two Builders

Luke 6:46-49

Theology

Theology

- Jesus is Lord (v. 46)
- Jesus' word is true, and should be obeyed
- Obedience has costs
- Obedience has rewards
- Disobedience has immediate benefits
- Disobedience has ultimately disastrous consequences ("great ruin")
- Placed at end of Sermon on the Mount/Plain, this emphasises the nature of Jesus' words: they are not advice or suggestions, they must be obeyed

Our Parable's Requirements

Context must:

- Communicate the foundational nature of Jesus' words
- Communicate the good results of obeying Jesus' words
- Communicate the great disaster of not obeying Jesus' words

Story should have:

- Surprise
- Symmetry & simplicity
- Shared metaphors
- Setup for judgement

Story must communicate:

- The foundational nature of Jesus' words in all human life
- The life-or-death importance of obeying Jesus words

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Luke 15:1-2, 11-32

Theology

Theology

- God forgives
- God shows grace
- The fallen can return
- The fallen need to return
- God expects others to forgive
- God expects others to show grace

Our Parable's Requirements

Story should have:

- 3 key characters or players to demonstrate God, someone lost who repents and an obedient one
- Surprise
- Shared metaphors
- An unfinished element where there is a chance for a decision

Story must communicate:

- The foundational nature of God's forgiveness and grace
- The critical requirement to forgive like God

The Parable of Lazarus & the Rich Man

Luke 16:19-31

Theology

Theology

- God gives different physical gifts, good and bad, but they do not define us
- What we do with God's gifts matters
- God's ultimate gift (and desire) is good character (thus Lazarus's name)
- Only chance to repent is in this life (death introduces uncrossable chasm)
- Wealth ≠ righteousness; suffering ≠ wickedness

- Wealth can corrupt
- Love of neighbour begins at doorstep
- All are judged
- More evidence ≠ more belief

Our Parable's Requirements

Context must:

- Communicate the importance of character (and what is good and bad character)
- Communicate the corrupting influence of material wealth
- Communicate the eternal consequence of bad character

Context should:

- Point out need for repentance
- Illustrate reality that more evidence doesn't equal more belief

Story should have:

- Surprise
- Symmetry & simplicity
- Shared metaphors
- Setup for judgement

Story must communicate:

- God's focus on character
- Character's eternal impact
- True position of material wealth