



In His Dust – 10. Parables – Their Uniqueness and Beauty

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One third of Yeshua's teaching was in parables. The English word *parable* comes from the Greek *parabolé* meaning *that which is cast alongside, a comparison, analogy, or metaphor*. The underlying Hebrew word is *mâshâl* from the root that means *shadow*. *Mâshâl* means *a story that teaches a lesson*. As you can see in the picture above of the shadows on the snow in my front yard, the shadows are not the real mounds of snow; they are evidence of the mounds. You only see them when the sun shines on the mounds.

So it is with parables. They are illustrative stories that reveal real life situations and solutions when the light of Messiah shines in the heart of the person who listens to them. They cast an impression, reaching the listener through the imagination. They magnify the unseen. Like a good counselor, they cause the listener to come to their own conclusions.

Michael Card writes in his book *Mark, The Gospel of Passion*, "I believe that when we imagine, something is taking place in our hearts. Our minds are working with our hearts to create images (hence *image-nation*). But the heart and mind must work in concert; they must be connected by a bridge. This bridge is the imagination. It connects the heart and mind."

Unlike our linear, Western thinking that puts Yeshua's words into systematic, theological, categorical boxes, the Hebrew language is simple and compact with organic, artful layers of meaning. Parables, unique to the Jews, are simple stories that reveal the character of our heavenly Father in strong word pictures from everyday life, and they evoke emotion and response from the listener.

Contrary to what is often taught about parables, their messages were not concealed. They were designed to be clear and illuminating, revealing truth and evoking a righteous response. They were not fables or allegories with hidden, abstract, unrealistic messages that needed to be decoded.

Only unrepentant, prideful hearts could conceal the parable's message. Michael Card writes, *Pgs. 65,69* regarding Yeshua's parable of the sower of seed, "The parables demand interaction. By their very nature they reveal the character of the person who listens (or doesn't listen) to them. They were told in order to be understood by those who would engage with their imaginations."

Our imagination must be surrendered to God when we listen to Scripture. We must keep our minds pure from the onslaught of evil images in our society. In 2 Corinthians 10:5, the Apostle Paul speaks about vain imaginations or images that we must cast down because they exalt themselves against the true knowledge of God. As we bring every thought captive to Messiah, we can hear and embrace the lessons of the parables.

Drawing the Lost Sheep

Yeshua ministered on earth during Roman rule among a diverse group – priests, Levites, Sadducees, Herodians, Zealots, Essenes, Pharisees, and the common people. He said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). How was Yeshua to find His lost sheep? His parabolic teaching in stories would be the sieve that would separate the sincere seekers from the insincere, the sheep from the goats. The lost sheep would emerge from the crowds, and as we find in the accounts of these Gospels,

Gentiles were included in these sheep. Yeshua also said, “My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:27-28). Those who longed for truth would hear His voice and follow.

Other Examples

Artists use their imaginations to portray spiritual truth with stories, canvasses, films, or other media. We know this is not the real thing, but like an impressionist painting, art makes the real thing beautiful, and the story assimilates the truth into the heart.

Recently, I was so affected by an artful re-enactment of a Biblical story in the Chosen TV series that an attitude of my mind changed and, along with it, a great peace about a matter with which I’d been struggling. Seeing the strength of the story drove home the Biblical truth and brought emotion and resolve.

I will share another metaphor that came to me yesterday. Here is the current-day situation: The sins of a Christian leader were exposed – the sins of adultery, abuse, and the covering up abuse. The guilt has become evident, proven. Out of love, many in the church have reached out to share their concern and pleas for repentance. Others have called this discernment *accusation*. So... pretend that I am standing on the hills outside of the Sea of Galilee and I am teaching a parable, and I am aware of this situation. I would say to those listening something like this:

“A certain man was being repeatedly beaten by his wife. His body bore the evidence, and the neighbors had many pictures, videos, and audios of his wife beating him. So, the man went to the police seeking a restraining order. He brought all the evidence with him. The policeman said to the man, ‘It is wrong for you to accuse your wife. Do you have any sin of your own?’”

I look to the crowd and say, “Who do you think is *just* in this case? The man or the policeman?”

So, in the typical fashion of parables, I have left the story open-ended. The people would be buzzing among themselves, “Of course, the policeman is wrong! He should seek justice for the man!” The parable would cause the listeners to come to their own conclusion, thus clarifying other situations in their lives. They would understand the difference between judging wrongly and judging righteously. They would see that confronting your brother or sister in love regarding sin is not the same as accusation.

A Structure that Invites us to Participate

Just like the prophets,¹ Yeshua’s parables are crafted from the current situation for the current audience with a needed lesson, and using the surrounding nature. The following are the typical elements of parables along with questions we may ask ourselves as we seek to bring His truth from our heads to our hearts with our own imaginations:

- **Introduction** (example: “The kingdom of heaven is like...”) – Identify the introduction.
- **Cast** – Can I identify with a cast member? What do I learn about God from this parable?
- **Plot** – What is the plot?
- **Conflict** – What conflict do I see? Are they familiar to me?
- **Resolution** – How would I resolve this conflict?
- **Call** to decision and application – Are there situations in my life where I can apply this truth?

Yeshua’s parabolic stories take truth about God and bring it to our hearts by allowing us to experience the scene in our imaginations. They give wisdom that brings direction that brings transformation!

¹ Isaiah 5 and Ezekiel 15 speak of Israel as a vineyard and a vine. And Nathan effectively spoke to King David with the parable of the lamb (2 Samuel 12:1-15)