

PARABLE OF LABORERS

During the month of September, we will study four figures of speech used in the NT to teach the importance of the application of the word of God. **The meaning is in the literal while the application is in the figure.**

A figure of speech is a word or phrase that is used to communicate something more colorfully than its literal or original meaning and use.

A figure of speech expresses a doctrinal truth in an interesting way by anticipating uninformed listeners in attention in order to catch their attention and aid in their retention.

Today's figure of speech is a story parable used in our lesson text. **A parable differs from a simile in that it an extended analogy of a true to life story that either conceals or reveals one doctrinal truth.**

"Approximately one-third of Christ's teachings as recorded in the Gospels were in the form of parables."
(Parables of Jesus by J.D.Pentecost, pg.14)

Today's lesson will study five aspects of the Parable of Laborers as a biblical teaching technique.
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1. The disciples of Jesus wanted to know why he taught so much by parables (Matt.13:10).

"And he answered and said to them, 'To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.'" (Matt.13:11)

His answer revealed an interesting connection between human volition and doctrinal truth.

A biblical parable reveals the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven to those with PV, but at the same time conceals this knowledge to those with NV – "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because **while seeing they do not see and while hearing they do not hear**, nor do they understand." (Matt.13:13 and Matt.14-17).

Notice that both types of listeners were attracted to bible study and the teaching technique of the parable brought out either PV or NV from the listener. We call this secondary NV.

Secondary NV is refusal to understand and believe – "While seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." (Matt.13:13b) – "Lest they should see with eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I should heal them." (Matt.13:15b)

"For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was **not united by faith in those who heard.**" (Heb.4:2)

"But **blessed** are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear." (Matt.13:16)

2. A story parable can become complicated when it is filled with daily details of a lot of people and action, unexpected surprises, conflict, and conversations (Matt.20:1-16).

- Landowner went to the market place 5 times to hire laborers
- He wrote 5 different hiring contracts (6am, 9am, noon, 3pm, 5pm) for a 12 hour shift (6am-6pm)
- Day wage of denarius with payment at the end of the work day
- **Order of payment to those hired**
- Conflict over contract and wages (false assumptions led to grumbling against grace)

Sometimes a story parable can be so complicated and interesting that we can forget the doctrinal point – “**For the kingdom of heaven is like** a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.” (Matt.20:1)

3. Always look for rhetorical questions in story parables. They are designed to engage the listener in thinking about specific issues to lead him to the doctrinal truth.

There are four rhetorical questions in this parable (Matt.20:6, 13, 15, and 15).

Landowner to 11th hour laborers to be hired – “Why have you been standing here idle all day” (Matt.20:6-7)

Landowner to those hired first – “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?” (Matt.20:13-14) [They felt unpaid and cheated in lieu of grace.]

Landowner to those hired first – “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?” (Matt.20:15a) [Notice that a job, employment, contract, and livelihood were all loss because of envy and greed.]

Landowner to those hired first – “Or is your eye **envious** because I am **generous**?” (Matt.20:15b)

Rhetorical questions are designed to anticipate specific issues stated or implied in the listeners regarding the doctrinal truth.

4. There was a specific issue previously stated by Peter in Matt.19:27-30. It was the background to this parable.

Peter was wondering what was there for those disciples who left everything and was the first to join Jesus? (Matt.19:27))

“And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.” (Luke 5:11).

“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, shall inherit eternal life. **But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.**” (Matt.19:29-30) and RYR / (Gal.3:28) equality of grace.

This is what led to the Parable of the laborers (Matt.20:1-16).

5. The listener must search for that one mystery doctrine in story parable (Matt.13:11).

While the meaning is in the literal, the application is in the figure – “**Thus the last shall be first, and the first last.**” (Matt.20:16) [But all laborers will be rewarded by **God’s grace** (Matt.20:12-15).]

At the end of the day, we will have treasures in heaven for faithfully following Jesus (Matt.13:21, 28-29).