

As simple as they appear, the parables of Christ are not just stories told for entertainment purposes. A parable is “a short allegorical story designed to illustrate or teach some truth, religious principle, or moral lesson.” (College Dictionary, 1998) But what truth did the Lord intend to teach us through His parables? The Lord Jesus said, “*To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables.*” (Luke 8:10) Two important facts can be drawn out of this verse: the mysteries of the kingdom of God are found in the parables, and not everyone is granted an understanding of them.

Since the mysteries of the kingdom of God are hidden in the parables, it is of great value to study each of them. Most of the parables are found in the gospels of

Sts. Matthew and Luke. However, the total number of parables in the gospels is not clearly defined, but there are at least 40 parables mentioned. One of the best ways to study the parables is to group them by theme and see how they explain a complete truth about God. There are various ways in which the parables can be grouped by theme. One method is to group them under four main categories: repentance as a requirement for the kingdom, the men of the kingdom, the characteristics of the kingdom, and the coming of the kingdom.

Take into consideration the parables about repentance. God searches for the lost in the Parable of the Lost Sheep. (Matthew 18:10-14, Luke 15:1-7) Then, in the Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10), the Church’s role

in searching for those who need repentance is demonstrated. Again, in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), we obtain a better view of God’s compassion towards sinners. The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) teaches us that repentance is always accepted regardless of the time it is made, and the Parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32) shows us that repentance requires action.

Some examples that fall under the category of men of the kingdom include the good merchant in the Parable of the Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44), wise builders and warriors in the Parable of Building a Tower and Making a War (Luke 14:25-33), and merciful travelers in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). The good merchant sold all that he had and bought

the field containing the hidden treasure. This field represents the Holy Bible where we can find the Lord Jesus Christ, the real treasure. (Fr. Malaty, 1983) Moreover, as the wise warriors count the cost before making a war, we also ought to count and be willing to pay the cost of discipleship and follow Christ. (Fr. Malaty, 1985) The final example of a man of the kingdom is the Good Samaritan who brought the wounded stranger to an inn. Thus, to become merciful travelers, we should bring our friends, who are wounded by sin, to the church to find healing. (Fr. Malaty, 1985)

When talking about the characteristics of the kingdom, we are referring to the kingdom of God being within us as in the Parable of the Leaven (Matthew 13:33). It is given to us as a gift as

noted in the Parable of Unprofitable Servants (Luke 17:7-10), and it is growing consistently as described in the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32). Furthermore, in representing the coming of the kingdom, the Lord spoke the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), the Parable of the Watchful Porter (Mark 13:32-37), the Parable of the Faithful and Wise Servants (Luke 12:35-48), and the Parable of the Fig Tree (Matthew 24:32-35).

It is evident that the Lord did not explain His parables openly to everyone, “*All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them.*” (Matthew 13:34), but He did reveal their mysterious meanings privately to His disciples: “*But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked*

Him about the parable.” (Mark 4:10) The disciples wondered why the Lord did not reveal His mysteries to everyone, “*Why do You speak to them in parables?*” (Matthew 13:10)

Of course, the Lord did not want to deprive anyone from His mysteries, as He “*desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*” (1 Timothy 2:4) In his book, Contemplations on the Parables of Christ, Pope Shenouda III explained that Christ spoke in parables to attract those who are yearning for the knowledge of truth. Additionally, the Lord did not want to present His teaching openly to everyone, so that those who do not have the desire to follow the truth would not disrespect the word of God, “*Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not*

see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.” (Matthew 13:13) St. John Chrysostom also explained that the parables were used to indirectly rebuke some of the listeners. However, the Lord did not rebuke them openly so that they would not fall into despair. This is clear in Matthew 21:45, “*Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.*”

Being disciples of the Lord, we also have a share in understanding those mysteries. What a privilege! Therefore, we should not take the parables for granted but we should try to study them. This can be a good spiritual exercise, as we begin a new Coptic year. We should investigate the parables to uncover the lessons found in each of them and to thank the Lord for revealing His mysteries to us.

Additional References:

Pope Shenouda III, Contemplations on the Parables of Christ. (2001) Cairo, Egypt.

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty, Commentaries on the Gospel to St. Matthew. (1983) Cairo, Egypt: Anba Rweis Press.

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty, Commentaries on the Gospel to St. Luke. (1985) Cairo, Egypt: Anba Rweis Press.



More Than Just Stories