

Studies in

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Part 1. Introductory Study

Part 2. Expositions

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Excellent work!

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"Do not despise the parable. With a penny candle one may often find a lost gold coin or a costly pearl. By means of a trifling simple parable one may sometimes penetrate into the most profound ideas."*

*Nathan Ausubel, A Treasury of Jewish Folk-lore (New York: Crown Publishers, 1948), p. 56.

Preface

Two years in a country pastorate and two years on the foreign mission field have convinced me that the presentation of the Gospel must be clear and plain, worded in simple concrete language, and in everyday symbolism, if it is to be understood and accepted. This is no new development. It was true when the greatest of all teachers and preachers, "went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness." (Mt. 9: 35). Jesus knew the common man. His words drew the fishermen and farmers, the women and children, the diseased and down-and-outs. Part of the secret of His success was the use of parables, a teaching medium capable of transmitting ^{the} joy and light of the Kingdom of God to the heart of miserable sinners. These parables are as meaningful today. They have the same charm, the same appeal, the same power as ever. This study, therefore, is undertaken with the following object: to reach an understanding of the parables of Jesus which will enable this student to use them to convey the same message our Lord sought to convey to the hearts of the same kind of men whom He sought to win.

It is not likely that any startling or new concept or interpretation will ^eherin be produced. A survey of the vast store of material from the pens of a host of great commentators is ample evidence that this field has been well covered. It is testimony to the power of the parables that so many interpretations and such abundant meaning has been found in them. I am grateful for helpful thoughts in

each of the authorities consulted. Even when theories of interpretation are unacceptable, the practical message often lays bare some gem of thought which might otherwise remain buried.

Part I

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

<u>Preface</u> - - - - -	<u>Page</u> 2
<u>Table of Contents</u> - - - - -	4
<u>Chap. I.</u> "The Parables as a Literary Medium" - - - - -	5
Definition; <u>παραβολή</u> ; <u>marshal</u> (in O.T., postbiblical literature, Rabbinical literature); Simile; Metaphor; Proverb; Myth; Fable; Allegory (theories of allegory, reasons against, exceptions, Julicher, Form criticism); summary and concluding definition.	
<u>Chap. II.</u> "The Purpose of the Parable" - - - - -	24
The problem; views of commentators; purpose of Jesus; views of Matt. 13:10-15 (early church, Julicher, Manson, comparison with parable of the Sower, purpose to reveal truth); Secondary purposes of parable (met a situation, attracted attention, calculated to win, easily remembered, made men think for themselves); conclusion.	
<u>Table I.</u> The Word "Parable" in the Gospels - - - - -	25
<u>Chap. III.</u> "The Distribution of the Parable" - - - - -	42
Parables as a part of the total Gospel material; parables distributed among periods of Christ's ministry; the three "parable clusters;" the parable with respect to time, place, hearers.	
<u>Table II.</u> Location of the Parables - - - - -	44
<u>Table III.</u> Location of the "Parabolic Sayings" - - - - -	45
<u>Table IV.</u> Distribution of Parables in Synoptic Gospels - - -	46
<u>Chap. IV.</u> "The Classification of the Parables" - - - - -	52
Samples of classification by commentators; difficulties and dangers of classification; relation of parables to the Kingdom of God teachings (statistics, what is the Kingdom of God?, eschatological question, Scofield theory, Lange theory); a classification of the parables.	
<u>Chap. V.</u> The Interpretation of the Parables - - - - -	64
Five steps in interpretation; Context; Text; Central truth; Relation of details to central truth; Practical application.	

Chap. I THE PARABLE AS A LITERARY MEDIUM

Biblical commentators have always waxed eloquent in their praises of the parable. Torrents of words have been poured out in tribute to the beauty, the merits, and the effectiveness of the parable as an instrument in the teaching ministry of Jesus. This enthusiasm is entirely justified. Men will continue to hear and heed the message of the parables as long as farmers sow seed and fathers welcome home errant sons with love and forgiveness. Yet with all this popularity, parables are often treated lightly and their true meaning and value and beauty lie buried under prejudice, trite explanation, and basic misconception of the nature and purpose of the parable. Our approach, then, must be to ask first of all: "What is a parable?"

A. Preliminary definition of a parable. "A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."⁽¹⁾ No one has improved on this definition, although many have elaborated, extended, or qualified it.⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ Quoted in nearly all commentaries, of which none give the exact origin.

⁽²⁾ The following are some excellent definitions of the term parable:

"In the more usual and technical sense of the word, parable ordinarily signifies an imaginary story, yet one that in its details could have actually transpired, the purpose of the story being to illustrate and inculcate some higher truth." G. H. Schodde, "Parable," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Vol. IV (Chicago: Howard Severance Company, 1930) p. 2243.

"A narrative moving within the sphere of physical or human life, not professing to communicate an event which really took place, but expressly imagined for the purpose of representing in pictorial figure a truth belonging to the sphere of religion, and therefore referring to the relation of man or mankind to God." Siegfried Goebel, The Parables of Jesus (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1883), p. 4.

"A parable is a literary creation in narrative form designed either to portray a type of character for warning or example or to embody

Dictionary definitions, which usually refer to the parable as an "allegory" or "metaphor," are unsatisfactory, and probably reflect popular opinion as to what a parable is, rather than defining the term as we find it in the Gospels. At the conclusion of this chapter will be a definition based on the study herein contained.⁽³⁾ Meanwhile as a "working definition" we take the one just quoted above: "A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."

B. Root meanings of the word "parable."

1. Our English word, "parable," is derived from the Greek παροιμία. The lexicon⁽⁴⁾ gives the following meanings under παροιμία.
 (1) juxtaposition, comparison (2) illustration, analogy (3) parable
 (4) by-word, proverb (5) objection to an argument. The idea is essentially that of placing two or more objects together, usually for the purpose of comparison. In the Gospels it is often used to describe old maxims and proverbs. Obviously, παροιμία covers a variety of forms.

a principle of God's governance of the world and men. It may partake of both natures. In logical terminology it might almost be called a concrete universal. The immediate object of the story is to be intelligible and interesting in itself; but its ultimate aim is either to stimulate the conscience, or to awaken religious insight in the hearers, or both together." T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus (Cambridge: University Press, 1945) p. 65.

"Invariably in the teaching of Jesus a parable was a picture of things seen intended to reveal and explain things unseen." G. Campbell Morgan, The Parables of the Kingdom (New York, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1907), p. 14.

(3) See p. 23

(4) Liddell & Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) Vol II, p. 1305.

This is because the LXX uses μαρὰ βολή to translate mashal, whose meaning we must grasp in order to understand μαρὰ βολή in the New Testament.

2. Mashal had a wide range of meaning in the Old Testament. Various commentators seize on one or the other of its meanings claiming it to be the essential one.(5) Oesterley(6) has supplied an excellent source of material for the study of the meaning of this word mashal.

a. Mashal in the Old Testament.(7)"Under parables in the Old Testament...are included short popular sayings, oracles, sapiential discourses, scornful or satirical sayings, short utterances of wisdom, allegories. Often their meaning is obvious, sometimes they require concentrated thought if they are to be understood, while there are many cases in which there is a prima facie meaning which is straightforward, but also a deeper significance which can be apprehended only by the more discerning (recipitur ad modum recipientis)."(8)

(5) Julicher says: "the most that can be done in the way of definition is to say that in the Old Testament, mashal is a discourse expressing or implying comparison." He felt that "a new element entered in during the period of the Jewish Hellenistic literature. Besides being a complete thought and expressing or implying comparison, the parable is now understood to veil a hidden meaning. The real teaching is not in what the words say but in their deeper import." W. J. Moulton, "Parable," Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1908) Vol. II, p. 312. See also Manson, Op. cit., pp. 59-65.

(6) W. O. E. Oesterley, The Gospel Parables in the Light of their Jewish Backgrounds (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1936) p. 3-18. The argument of this chapter is followed in our discussion here.

(7) Nathan's message to David (2 Sam. 12:1-4) is the best Old Testament parable, though it is not called a parable in the context.

(8) Oesterley, Op. cit., p. 5

b. Mashal in post-biblical literature. In Ecclesiasticus, mashal is used to describe literature based on the pattern of the Book of Proverbs, though frequently the "proverbs" are more extended. Perhaps here we may discern a ^{tendency toward} development which tended in the ~~direction of~~ the development of a proverb into the form which we should call a "parable." Ben-sira often takes a central theme and enlarges upon it. IV Ezra has several parables in the fuller sense.⁽⁹⁾ "Of a special character are the parables, or visions, in the Book of Enoch" where parable means "merely an elaborate discourse whether in the form of a vision, prophecy, or poem."⁽¹⁰⁾

c. Mashal in Rabbinical literature.⁽¹¹⁾ "The nature and characteristics of Jewish parables may be briefly indicated... Of the various types of parables we have, first, parables pure and simple: that is, narratives presenting scenes

(9) "Again, another (illustration). There is a builded city which lies on level ground, and it is full of all good things; but its entrance is narrow and lies on a steep; having fire on the right hand and deep water on the left; and there is one only path lying between them both, that is between the fire and the water, (and so small) is this path, that it can contain only one man's footstep at once. If now, this city be given to a man for an inheritance, unless the heir pass through the danger set before him, how shall he receive his inheritance? And I said: It is so, Lord! Then said he unto me: Even so, also, is Israel's portion; for it was for their sakes I made the world; but when Adam transgressed my statutes, then that which had been made was judged and then the ways of this world became narrow and sorrowful and painful, and, full of perils coupled with great toils." IV Ezra 7:6-12. R. H. Charles, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913) Vol II, p. 580.

(10) Oesterley, Op. cit., p. 6.

(11) Parables are found in Sifre (a Midrash--"searching out"--of the law) on Numbers and Deuteronomy, Mikilta (a Midrash on Exodus), Shirha-Shirim (a midrash on the Song of Songs) and Koheleth (a Midrash on Ecclesiastes). "The parables contained in these writings are of very various dates, and in their present form are all post-Christian, the earliest belonging to the end of the first century A.D., but it is highly probable that many of them have been handed down from earlier times; as Fiebig says, the material contained in the Rabbinical literature was originally handed down orally; first stored up in the memory, it was

from life, the meaning of which is clear and straightforward; they teach lessons easy to be understood, and in every case of this kind a comparison is presented. Then there are parables which contain a metaphor; it may or may not be a simple metaphor, but an explanation often follows. Many others, again, are allegories, at times somewhat obscure; and in a number of cases allegory and metaphor occur in one and the same parable, and even a parable of the simplest type may contain allegorical or metaphorical elements." (12)

Oesterley notes that many themes common to parables in Rabbinical literature were also used by Jesus, and that the introductory formulas are similar. Yet the Rabbinical parables are not prompted by surrounding circumstances and therefore are of a theoretical rather than practical interest. (13) In general the Rabbinical parables are on a lower plane than those in the Gospels. (14) Yet the parables were a common method of Jewish teaching. The resemblance of Jesus' teaching to that of the Jewish Rabbis "is such as could hardly have been avoided, when the same external life, and the same outward nature, were used as

uttered by word of mouth from leader to pupil and thus preserved, until ultimately put down in writing." Oesterley, Op. cit., p. 7.

(12) Ibid, p. 9.

(13) George A. Buttrick, The Parables of Jesus (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928) p. xv.

(14) Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai (second half of the first century A.D.) uttered this parable: "It is like a king who invited his servants to a feast, but he did not fix any time. The wise ones among them arrayed themselves and sat at the entrance of the king's palace. They said 'something is still wanting in the king's palace' (i.e. we shall not have long to wait). But the foolish ones among them went on with their ordinary work, saying, 'Is there ever a feast without long waiting?' Suddenly the king called for his servants. The wise ones among them entered in, fitly arrayed as they were. But the foolish ones entered into his presence all dirty as they were. Then did the king rejoice over the wise ones, but he was wrath with the foolish ones; and he said, 'These who arrayed themselves for the feast, let them recline, and eat and drink; but these who did not array themselves for the feast, let them remain standing and watch (the others.)'" Bab. Talmud, Shabbath, 153a, quoted by Fiebig. Quoted by Oesterley, Op. cit., p. 128

the common storehouse, from whence images, illustrations and examples were derived alike by all."(15)

3. The main value to be derived from this study of mashal with reference to the New Testament parable is the transfer from the former to the latter of the idea of a "hidden" or "deeper" meaning from that which appears on the surface.(16)

"In some respects these parables (of Jesus) convey a lesson which the first listeners may have grasped; but it is certain that the fullness of the meaning enshrined in them was beyond the comprehension of those first listeners. And, what is more, all through the ages the differences of interpretation prove that there is more in the parables than has been grasped even at the present day. Simple as most of the parables seem to be, and easy to understand, when first read, there are many which are seen to be very difficult as soon as they are pondered over."(17)

The student finds himself faced with parallel situations in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Fourth Gospel. In the latter much of Jesus' teaching revolves around the use of a few simple and commonly used words, such as "light," "life," "word," and "world"--yet who can fathom the fullest and deepest meaning of these terms? So it is when we stand before some of the parables which even a child can appreciate but which the wisest of commentators cannot fully comprehend.

C. The Parable Compared to Certain Other Literary Devices. The Parable is sometimes identified with other figures of speech, or literary

(15) Richard Chenevix Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (New York: N. Tibbals & Sons,) p. 49.

(16) Manson makes this point very clearly: "...every real parable is significant in two ways. It has its own meaning as a story and a further message--and this is the important thing--by application to persons or events or both together. It is possible for a hearer to follow and appreciate the former meaning without having the slightest inkling of the latter." Manson, Op. cit., p. 65.

(17) Oesterley, Op. cit., p. 13.

devices such as: 1. the Simile, 2. the Metaphor, 3. the Proverb, 4. the Myth, 5. the Fable, and 6. the Allegory. Is this identification or comparison justified? Let us examine these terms with relation to the parables of Jesus.

1. Simile: "A comparison of one thing with another." (18)

2. Metaphor: "The figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object different from, but analogous to, that to which it is properly applicable." (19)

"Simile and metaphor are the simplest forms of figurative speech. In both one thing is compared with another; but whereas in simile this comparison is formally expressed, in metaphor it is effected by transferring to the one the designation of the other." (20)

Jesus used them both. "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16) is a typical simile. "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick" (Mark 2:7) is a metaphor. Many sayings of Jesus are classed as similes or metaphors. Indeed the parables are often extended similes, so that it is frequently difficult to determine which are similes and which are parables.

3. Proverb: "A short pithy saying in common and recognized use; a concise sentence, often metaphorical or alliterative in form, which is held to express some truth ascertained by experience or observation and familiar to all." (21) The Gospels do not distinguish between parable and proverb, (22) probably because the Hebrew root, marshal,

(18) James A. H. Murray, A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888)

(19) Ibid.

(20) B. T. B. Smith, The Parables of the Synoptic Gospels (Cambridge:

(see discussion above) covered both ideas. The Old Testament proverb and, in general, those in the New Testament were "enigmatical, claiming a quickness in detecting latent affinities, and not seldom a knowledge which shall enable to catch more or less remote allusions, for their right comprehension." (23) An example of the proverb which shows how this form of expression was identified with the parable is in Luke 6:36:

"And he spake also a parable unto them: no man rendeth a piece from a new garment and putteth it upon an old garment; else he will rend the new, and also the piece from the new will not agree with the old."

Here, we may note again, the distinction is almost non-existent between simile, metaphor, proverb and parable, and the term we apply does not affect the interpretation.

We now note modes of expression with which the parable is sometimes identified in the minds of readers, and which may affect greatly their interpretation: i.e., myth, fable, and allegory.

4. Myth: "A purely fictitious narrative usually involving supernatural persons, actions, or events, and embodying some popular idea concerning natural or historical phenomena." (24) The myth is a "natural product of primitive imagination" which "mingles truth and fiction." (25) Often what moral or spiritual meaning a myth may have is a

(21) Murray, Op. cit.

(22) A. Plummer, "Parable (in N.T.)," James Hastings, A Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900) Vol. III, p. 663.

(23) Trench, Op. cit., p. 12.

(24) Murray, Op. cit.

(25) Hastings Bible Dictionary, Op. cit., p. 664.

meaning forced into an ancient legend.(26) The Greek who observed the movement of sun, moon and stars "explained" them with myths about Apollo, Diana, Venus, and Mars. Or he exalted and elaborated upon the basic facts of Ulysses' expedition to ^oTry, transforming these tales into myths. Obviously the parables of Jesus involved no such process. The parable describes a natural and feasible event or condition. When the parable is fiction, it does not (like the myth) represent fiction as fact.

5. Fable: "A brief story or tale feigned or invented to embody a moral, and introducing persons, animals, and sometimes even inanimate things as rational speakers and actors."(27) It is "fabulous," often grotesque, and teaches merely prudential virtue.(28) While fables do appear in the Bible(29) none of the attributes of the fable can be ascribed to the parables of Jesus. His teaching was on a far higher plane than the morals exhibited, for instance, in Aesop's Fables where such merely human virtues as thrift and diligence are taught. He could not debase the perfection of His Father's creation by allowing "un-natural" behaviour on the part of created objects.(30)

"The fable moves in the sphere of fantasy, because it introduces irrational creatures (beasts, trees, etc.) thinking, speaking and acting rationally; whereas the parable always borrows its matter from actual life, and never transgresses the limits of the possible."(31)

(26) Trench, Op. cit., p. 11.

(27) Funk & Wagnalls, New Standard Dictionary of the English Language (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1935).

(28) Buttrick, Op. cit., p. xvi.

(29) Judges 9:7-15.

(30) Trench, Op. cit., p. 10.

(31) Goebel, Op. cit., p. 7.

6. Allegory: "a figurative sentence, discourse, or narrative in which properties and circumstances attributed to the apparent subject really refer to the subject they are meant to suggest." (32) Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" immediately comes to mind as the best known of all allegories. The subject of the allegorizing of Scripture cannot be adequately covered here, but we may observe that there has never been a time when, rightly or wrongly, parts of the Scriptures have not been allegorized. Rabbis allegorized the law, Church Fathers and later writers allegorized Jewish History and the parables (33) and the modern scholar may allegorize the first part of Genesis.

"The creation of allegories is one thing, the allegorical interpretation of something already in existence is another. Allegorical interpretation affords a means whereby the venerated traditions of the past may be brought into line with the ideas and beliefs of the present. It enabled the Stoic to discover pantheism in the Greek mythology, the Hellenist Jew to discover Greek philosophy in the books of Moses, the Rabbi to discover edification even in the place-names of the Old Testament, and the Christian to discover the Gospel in the Law." (34)

Narrowing the discussion to the field of Jesus' teaching--did He use parables with allegorical content, or expecting His followers to find allegory in them?

a. Some, of course, do not hesitate to give allegorical rendering to the parables whenever it is convenient. Only recently the writer heard an excellent and effective sermon on the Parable of the Prodigal Son, where the robe, the ring, the shoes, and the feast were given allegorical interpretation. Of course, such homiletical

(32) Murray, Op. cit.,

(33) Tertullian, Augustine, Origin, Erasmus, Luther. See J. F. McFadyen, The Message of the Parables (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co.) pp. 38-42.

(34) Smith, Op. cit., p. 27.

use of a parable does not necessarily mean that the preacher believes that Jesus Himself intended such allegory. Even when we theoretically disapprove such procedure we cannot deny the fact that such allegorizing often does not do violence to the general teaching of Jesus, or even to the "point" of the parable in question, and frequently accomplishes a worthy purpose. (35) The extreme examples of allegorizing ^{are} ~~is~~ to be found in the teaching of the early Church Fathers. (36) Probably this grew out of an attempt to find the hidden meaning, thought to exist in the parable. A famous example is Augustine's interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan. (37) This example may represent an extreme,

(35) Even Hall, a follower of Julicher's viewpoint, admits, "Like a magnet each of the leading parables has drawn about itself all the mass of meanings within the sphere of its attraction till it might be compared to a special complex or constellation, so that a large part of the moral life is interpreted in its terms." G. Stanley Hall, Jesus the Christ in the Light of Psychology (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1917) Vol. II, P. 521.

(36) Hall notes three historical periods in the interpretation of parables: (1) The period up until the time of Origin, during which everything was allegorized. (2) From Origin to Luther when only the essentials were allegorized. (3) Luther to the present when nothing was allegorized. This outline is not true in the strictest sense, ^{but} shows the general tendencies of these periods of history. An outstanding exception to the modern tendency not to allegorize, is the viewpoint of the Scofield Reference Bible, where many aspects of the parables are given allegorical content. Hall, Op. cit., p. 518.

(37) "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho: Adam himself is meant; Jerusalem is the heavenly city of peace, from whose blessedness Adam fell; Jericho means the moon, and signifies our mortality, because it is born, waxes, wanes, and dies. Thieves are the devil and his angels. Who stripped him, namely, of his immortality; and beat him, by persuading him to sin; and left him half-dead, because in so far as man can understand and know God, he lives, but in so far as he is wasted and oppressed by sin, he is dead; he is therefore called half-dead. The priest and Levite who saw him and passed by, signify the priesthood and ministry of the Old Testament, which could profit nothing for salvation. Samaritan means Guardian, and therefore the Lord Himself is signified by this name. The binding of the wounds is the restraint of sin. Oil is the comfort of good hope; wine the exhortation to work with fervent spirit. The beast is the flesh in which He designed to come to us. The being set upon the

yet it clearly mutilates the expressed object of the parable as it lies in the Gospel account. Strong opposition to such methods are expressed by most modern commentators.(38)

Why not allegorize the parables as one pleases?(39) MacFayden points out three reasons why allegorical interpretation is a complete misunderstanding of the mind of Jesus:

(1) "Although it has held sway for nearly two thousand years, this method has given us no new insight into the meaning of one single parable."

(2) "The allegory is not intended to teach. It may give us new insight into truth which is already familiar, but it is not a vehicle for imparting new truth." Yet Jesus "taught" the people in parables."

(3) "There can never be any finality about allegorical interpretations." "Exegesis becomes purely arbitrary and one teacher has as much right to his opinion as another, while all will find in the parables the meaning which they wish to find. The number of possible applications becomes literally infinite."(40)

beast is belief in the incarnation of Christ. The inn is the Church, where travellers are refreshed on their return from pilgrimage to their heavenly country. The morrow is after the resurrection of the Lord. The two pence are either the two precepts of love, or the promise of this life and of that which is to come. The innkeeper is the Apostle (Paul). The supererogatory payment is either his counsel of celibacy, or the fact that he worked with his own hands lest he should be a burden to any of the weaker brethren when the Gospel was new, though it was lawful for him to live by the Gospel." Quaestiones Evangeliorum II. 19 --slightly abridged. C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (London: Nisbet & Co. 1946) pp. 11-12.

(38) Julicher. See MacFayden, Op. cit., p. 38; E. Basil Redlich, Form Criticism (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939) p. 155; Trench, Op. cit., p. 18; Dodd, Op. cit., p. 13.

(39) This discussion may rightly belong later in this study, under the head of "interpretation." Yet it is intimately tied up with the subject of whether or not Jesus intended to produce allegory that we must consider it here.

(40) MacFayden, Op. cit., pp. 43-45.

True allegory supplies a key to itself, and unless the key is self-evident, the reader who attempts to discover the allegory is free to assign meanings where and how he pleases, often with extreme results. "The nobler the parable, the more devastating its allegorical interpretation."⁽⁴¹⁾ One has only to scan the notes to the parables in the Scofield Reference Bible for modern example of this sort of thing.

"The allegory needs not, as the parable, an interpretation to be brought to it from without, since it contains its interpretation within itself; and as the allegory proceeds, the interpretation proceeds hand in hand with it, or at least never falls far behind."⁽⁴²⁾

The parables of Jesus do not supply such a key. Hence interpreters who allegorize the parable are forced to manufacture their own keys--wide diversity of opinions and interpretation is the result. The parables do have, as a rule, one focal point where Jesus intended the meaning to be seen; allegorizing finds meaning at many points, often to the disadvantage or covering up of the real meaning.

b. Those who stoutly insist that parables have no allegorical interpretation themselves often give an allegorical interpretation when they offer an exposition. Indeed this is understandable when one is dealing with literature which is so rich and suggestive, even in its details, as are many of the parables. The danger, of course, comes when such procedure "forces" or "strains" the meaning of a point in a parable, or when we go to the extreme of giving every word a separate, interpretation. Probably the strong statements denying all allegorical content to the parables are a reaction of disgust at such travesties on common sense as were committed by early allegorists. An example is

(41) Ibid, p. 40

(42) Trench, Op. cit., p. 18.

found in Calvin "regarded by Julicer as the greatest parable exegete in the first sixteen centuries."

"It is true that he sometimes fell back into old allegorical errors. For example he regards the vineyard of Matt. 21:33 as typifying the Church of God; the hedge, winepress and tower as representing the adjuncts to God's Law, such as sacrifices and other ceremonies, meant to develop the faith of the people. He clearly saw however, that the material of a parable must be grasped as a whole and the details studied in relation to the whole." (43)

Again, "Trench grumbles against Calvin because he will not allow the oil in the vessels of the Wise Virgins to mean anything, nor the vessels themselves, nor the lamps." (44) The line between finding a legitimate meaning and allegorizing is often too thin for us to condemn one interpretation and favor another.

c. Of those who reject in general the allegorizing of the Parables of Jesus most (45) note that (a) He himself gave an allegorical interpretation to some, and that (b) His teachings do contain allegorical passages. For instance, in John's Gospel, the following discourses are among those sometimes called allegories: The "parable" of the sheep-fold (Jn. 10:1-6), the good shepherd discourse (Jn. 10:7-18), the true vine passage (Jn. 15:1-8). I will not quarrel with those who call these passages allegories, yet they seem to partake more of the quality of metaphor than that which we usually mean by allegory. Further-more, even if they are allegories, they do not directly affect our discussion of the allegoric interpretation of parables, because they are not really parables in the usual sense.

Commentators note that Jesus Himself gave allegorical interpretation to several parables, i.e., the parable of the Sower (Matt.

(43) MacFayden, Op. cit., p. 42

(44) Ibid., p. 43

13:3-9, 18-23), the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (Matt. 21:33-36), the parable of the Tares (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). Here again, whether or not these are true allegories is debatable. Not every feature of these parables is given an allegorical meaning by the Master--only some are. In the first mentioned the seed, the birds, the "rocky-places," the thorns, and the good ground may be said to have allegorical meaning, but other facts (particularly the numerical figures) represent nothing. In any case, we are not left free to allegorize as we please (beyond what Jesus did).

d. One other school of thought insists that there is no allegory in the parables of Jesus. Where allegory is indicated by the remarks of the evangelists, or by Jesus Himself, this theory discounts them as unauthentic. Accordingly they become interpretations injected into the account by later Christian writers, or even by the evangelists, to suit their own ideas about what Christ meant, or to strengthen the argument of the book, or to meet a situation in the time and place of writing. Chief among these interpreters is Julicher.⁽⁴⁶⁾ He "has argued powerfully that, so long as a parable is intelligible and self-consistent, it must in the first place be understood as meaning what it says."⁽⁴⁷⁾ He leans over backward in his dogmatic assertions that no allegorical interpretation is permissible, even if this means red-pencilling the comments in the context.

This too is the approach of form criticism which is defined as

"a method in which the critic abstracts temporarily from the thought or content of the passage before him, to concentrate attention

(45) Smith, Op. cit., p. 22; Oesterley, Op. cit., p. 63; A. Plummer, Op. cit., W. J. Moulton, Loc. cit., etc.

(46) We are handicapped by not having an English version of Julicher's work for reference. Allusions to his theories are gleaned from other works, particularly: Hall, Op. cit., pp. 518-591; MacFayden, Op. cit., pp. 38-53.

upon the form, or pattern, into which it falls--as for example, in the Gospels, the forms of biographical anecdote, miracle story, dialogue, parables, and so forth." (48)

Dibelius (49) insists that the Church was to blame for the abuse of the parables. To him the whole setting of the parables in Mark and the other Gospels was purely a literary device to suit his own purposes.

"The effort to provide the Churches with as many exhortations as possible sometimes occasioned complete misunderstanding of the parables." (50) In this line of interpretation Redlick discusses the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4) and rules out Vs. 11, 12 as actually being the words of Jesus because they are contrary to the character of Jesus. They are, instead, the contribution of the evangelist who expressed the view of the Church "to explain why the large majority of the Jews was unresponsive." (51)

"Turning to the Parable of the Sower itself, the discrepancy in the treatment is obvious. In the allegorical explanation whilst the seed is the Word, that which comes from the seed is differing groups of people. Again the interest in the parable is in the Sower, in the explanation it is in the different kinds of soil. For this and other reasons it has been held that the explanation of the Parable is in reality an early sermon on it. The explanation of the Sower, which is allegorical in character, was the work of the early church." (52)

(47) MacFayden, Op cit., p. 46.

(48) Martin Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel (New York, Charles Scribners Sons, 1935) p. 227, 248 ff.

(49) C. H. Dodd, "Thirty Years of New Testament Study" Union Seminary Quarterly Review, Vol. V, No. 4 (May 1950) p. 6. Yet Dodd takes a more moderate position than that indicated in this definition: "There are cases where, without necessarily solving the possibly unanswering question whether we have the ipsissima verba of Jesus, we may have confidence that the application of the parable came down with the parable itself in the earliest tradition, and therefore shows us at the least how the parable was understood by those who stood near to the very situation which had called it forth." C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (London: Nisbet & Co. 1946) p. 29.

Inasmuch as this paper is not a discussion of form-criticism it cannot give a detailed argument for and against its methods. Yet it seems to open the study of Scriptures to far greater abuses and "wilder" interpretations than ever before. The advocate of this method is claiming to know more about what the Master taught than did the Gospel writer.⁽⁵³⁾ The parable of Jesus is to such an interpreter as seed falling on the wayside,—as illustrated in Redlick's interpretation of the parable of the Sower (quoted above). Admittedly the writers of the Gospels selected and arranged their books from a mass of available material, and not always in chronological and topical sequence, but that does not imply that they "read into" the life and teachings of Jesus matters which were not there, or put into His mouth what they themselves would like to say. Their deep reverence for Jesus would tend to make them afraid to resort to such practices. If Jesus chose to give a "semi-allegorical" interpretation to only a few parables it was within His rights to do so if it served His purposes.

e. So far in our discussion of the allegorical interpretation of parables we have noted two major schools of thought: (1) Those who freely allegorized and (2) those who say parables should not be allegorized. In this second group are (1) the extremists who cancel out as not authentic the allegoric content of some of the

(50) Ibid, p. 248.

(51) Redlick, Op. cit., p. 157.

(52) Ibid, p. 158.

(53) Paradoxically enough, the interpreters who represent the opposite extremes of thought (allegorical use of the parables and the form critics) find themselves fundamentally in the same error: both are more or less free to find in the parable whatever meaning most appeals to them! Both can make Jesus say whatever they would like for Him to say.

parables, and (2) those who argue against general application of allegory to the parables except where Jesus or the evangelists do. This group of interpreters also allow the allegoric interpretation of the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (Matt. 21:33-46). The introduction and the conclusion of this passage leaves no doubt that the chief priests and Pharisees needed no interpreter to catch the keen blades of the allegory thinly sheathed as a parable. Yet even here we do not have true allegory in the very strictest sense, since meaning is not attached to every word, such as the hedge, winepress, and tower of the vineyard. Hence the general thesis that allegorizing of the parables is not permissible holds true, while allowing for the assignment of ^{"allegorical"} meaning to some details of a few parables. "A parable is not an allegory. It is a flash of light, not an ingeniously devised mosaic. It may have divergent rays, but these derive their virtue from the light itself." (54)

7. Summary. To summarize, we note that the (1) Simile, (2) Metaphor, and (3) Proverb are used by Jesus, that they frequently overlap and are indistinguishable from each other, and that they are sometimes called parables. The Parable is never a (4) Myth or a (5) Fable. Nor is it a true (6) Allegory, although (as shown above) certain features of a few parables are generally recognized as allegoric. (55)

(54) Buttrick, Op. cit., p. xxiv.

(55) "The parable differs from the fable, moving as it does in a spiritual world, and never transgressing the order of things natural --from the mythus, there being in the latter an unconscious blending of the deeper meaning with the outward symbol, while the two remain separate and inseparable in the parable--from the proverb, inasmuch as it is more fully carried out, and not accidentally and occasionally, but necessarily figurative--from the allegory, comparing as it does one thing with another, but, at the same time, preserving them apart as an inner and an outer, and not transferring, as does the allegory, the properties and qualities and relations of one to the other." Trench, Op cit., p. 14.

D. Conclusion: In conclusion, let us give our answer to the question of this chapter, What is a parable as we find it in the Gospels?

The parable is a picture of a situation or event taken from the realm of nature or human relations, a picture intended to focus the observer on one thought. This central idea may be enhanced by the attribution of meaning to certain (but not all) details. This central idea may have deeper implications than those first observed on the surface. The parable of Jesus was no new thing, nor was the use He made of it. Yet in His teaching the parable is at its best.

A proper definition of a parable is incomplete without reference to its purpose, which we will consider now in the next chapter. The use Jesus made of parables sheds further light on the question of this chapter.

Chap. II. THE PURPOSE OF THE PARABLE

Why did Jesus use parables? Were they told for their own sake in order to entertain His hearers? Were they intended as illustrations of the truth, or to teach truth itself? Were they intended to conceal truth or to reveal it? Were they used to meet an immediate and temporary situation, or do they have lasting permanent value? These are some of the questions involved in discovering the purpose of the parable. More than any other phase of our study, it is important to determine why Jesus used parables if we are to place the right interpretation upon them today. After all, the wide latitude found in the meaning of the word "parable" in the preceding chapter indicates that Jesus could have used parables in one or more of any number of ways. Clearly His purpose puts its stamp on the meaning of "parable" itself, and upon our interpretation of the parables.

Commentators mention many purposes of the parables. Most of these views shed at least some light on our problem. They may be roughly grouped as follows, though the line of distinction between groups is very thin, and they overlap frequently. One group of writers emphasizes that the parables revealed truth to some and concealed it from others. Others are particularly insistent that Jesus did not mean to conceal but really to reveal the truth. A third group puts an emphasis on Jesus' attempt to meet a situation with a parable. Still another group asserts that the primary purpose was to win assent on the part of the hearers. Others note the main purpose of the parable as being to instruct and teach.

TABLE I The WORD "PARABLE" IN THE GOSPELS

	Reference	Quotation	Parable introduced
Period IV	Luke 4:23 Luke 5:36 (Mt. 9:17, Mk. 2:21)	Doubtless you will say unto me this p. And he spake also a p. unto them	(Physician heal thyself) New cloth-old garment
	Luke 6:39 (Mt. 17:3) Mk. 3:23	And he spake also a p. unto them. And he called them unto him and said unto them in parables	Blind lead blind Kingdom divided against itself.
	[Mt. 13:3 Mk. 4:2 Lk. 4:4 Mt. 13:10 Mk. 4:10 Lk. 8:9	[And he spake to them many things in p. And he taught them " " " p. And he spake by a p. Why speakest thou unto them in p. they---asked him the p. his disciples asked him what this p. might be	The Sower " " Explan. of Sower " "
	[Mt. 13:13 Mk. 4:11 Lk. 8:10 - - -	[Therefore speak I to them in p. but unto them that are without, all things are done in p. but to the rest in p.	" " " " " "
Period V	[Mt. 13:18 Mk. 4:13 Lk. 8:11 Mk. 4:13 Mt. 13:24 [Mt. 13:31 [Mk. 4:30	[Hear then ye the parable of the sower Know ye not this parable? Now the parable is this: and how shall ye know all the parables? Another p. set he before them, saying [Another p. set he before them, saying [How shall we liken the k. of God? or in what p. shall we set it forth?	" " " " " " " " The Tares The Mustard Seed " "
	Mt. 13:33 [Mt. 13:34 [Mk. 4:33 [Mt. 13:34 [Mk. 4:34 Mt. 13:35 Mt. 13:36 Mt. 13:53 Mt. 15:15 Mk. 7:17	Another parable spake he unto them [All these things spake Jesus in p. And with many such parables spake he [And without a p. spake he nothing [And without a p. spake he not I will open my mouth in parables Explain unto us the p. of the tares When Jesus had finished these parables, [Declare unto us the parable his disciples asked of him the parable	The Leaven (parabolic teaching) " " " " " " " " Explan of Tares - - - Blind guides " "
Period VII	Jn. 10:6 (ἀπορία) Lk. 12:6 Lk. 12:41 Lk. 13:6 Lk. 14:7 Lk. 15:3	This parable spake Jesus unto them And he spake a parable unto them Lord, speakest thou this p. unto us, and he spake this parable And he spake a p. unto those..bidden And he spake unto them this p., saying	Door of the Sheep. Foolish Rich man Watchful servants Figtree Chief Seats at Feast Lost Sheep

Table I. cont.

	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Quotation</u>	<u>Parable introduced</u>
Period VII cont.	Lk. 18:1 Lk. 18:9 Lk. 19:11	And he spake a parable unto them And he spake also this parable he added and spoke a parable	Unjust Judge Pharisee & Publican Pounds
Period VIII	Mt. 21:33 Mk. 12:1 Lk. 20:9 Mt. 22:1 Mt. 24:32 Mk. 13:28 Lk. 21:29 Jn. 16:25 (suppl. p. 4) Jn. 16:25 " Jn. 16:29 "	Hear another parable And he began to speak unto them in p. And he began to speak unto the people in p. And Jesus answered and spake again in p. Now from the fig tree learn her parable Now from the fig tree learn her parable And he spake to them a parable These things have I spoken unto you in p. the hour cometh, when I shall no speak Lo, unto you in p. now speak thou plainly, and speak- est no p.	Wicked Husbandmen " " " " Marriage Feast Figtree " " (general teaching) " " " " " "
	Mt. 21:45 Mk. 12:12 Lk. 20:9	And when the chief priests and Pharisees heard his parables for they perceived that he spake the parable against them for they perceived that he spake this parable against them.	" " " " " "

The Periods referred to in this table are those of the ministry of Jesus. See Table IV., p. 46

The key is not found in reviewing the commentaries, as helpful as that is, but in examining the Gospels to see what Jesus said about the purpose of parables, and what use He made of them (this usage often revealing^s the purpose He had in mind even if that purpose is unexpressed.)

What did Jesus claim that the purpose of parabolic teaching was? A study of the word παραβολή in the Gospels (See Table I) reveals that the word is used 48 times in the Gospels (twice elsewhere, in the N.T. Heb. 9:9 and 11:19). (Another term, παραύλα, is used four times in the Gospel of John: 10:16; 16:25 (twice); 16:29 and once in II Peter 2:22). Of these 48 usages of παραβολή, 24 (exactly half) appear in Matt. 13, or the parallel passages (Mk. 4, Luke 8). Seven parables are related in Matt. 13. Two others (if Mk. 4:21 is included) appear in parallel passages. Therefore, it is significant that in this, the largest "cluster" of parables, and the passage where the word παραβολή occurs most frequently, Jesus Himself should give His only explanation of why He spoke in parables. We quote this passage in full:

- Matt. 13:10. "And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou in parables? And he answered and saith unto them,
11. Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,
but to them it is not given (Mark: But unto them that are without, all things are done in parables;
Luke: to the rest in parables.)
 12. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance:
but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath.
 13. Therefore speak I to them in parables;
because seeing they see not
and hearing they hear not,
neither do they understand.
 14. And unto them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith,
By hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand;
and seeing ye shall see, and shall in no wise perceive:

15. For this people's heart is waxed gross,
 And their ears are dull of hearing,
 And their eyes have they closed;
 Lest haply they should perceive with their eyes,
 And hear with their ears,
 And understand with their heart,
 And should turn again,
 And I should heal them.
16. But blessed are your eyes, for they see;
 And your ears, for they hear.
17. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous
 men desired to see the things which ye see, and saw
 them not; and to hear the things which ye hear, and
 heard them not.

The parallel to vs. 15 is quoted thus in Mark 4:11:

"That seeing they may see, and not perceive,
 And hearing they may hear, and should turn again
 And it should be forgiven them.

One other passage from Matt. 13 bears on our study:

Matt. 13:34. "All these things spake Jesus in parables unto
 the multitudes; and without a parable spake he nothing to
 them:

35. that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the
 prophet, saying,
 I will open my mouth in parables;
 I will utter things hidden from the foundation of
 the world.

These verses have been the center of the discussion of our
 problem. That they have been variously interpreted and often misunder-
 stood is not at all surprizing. Probably the average reader is puzzled
 by them, and hastens on to more easily understood passages. If he
 registers an opinion it is likely to be: "Jesus told parables in
 order to deliberately confuse and blind his enemies—fortunately He
 did not include me in the latter group!" The casual English reader
 can hardly avoid getting this impression from the phrase "lest haply
 they should perceive with their eyes...and should turn again, and I
 should heal them," or, "that seeing they may see, and not perceive."

What does this passage mean?

(1) The early Church took the view expressed above, i.e., that Jesus deliberately used figurative language with a double meaning to confuse the unbelieving.⁽¹⁾ Yet this is contrary to the whole tone of the ministry of Jesus. He came to win, not to repel. He came to reveal and not to conceal. He "taught the people in parables," --mystifying them would hardly be teaching. This point of view does not satisfactorily answer the problem.

(2) Some refer these words of Jesus only to the parables of the mystery of the nature of the Kingdom, or parables of judgment,⁽²⁾ and not those relating to truths necessary for salvation. This would limit the understanding of the more mysterious of the teachings of Jesus to His disciples.

"The harshness of the view is softened by assuming that the unreceptive and unworthy multitude already stood self-condemned because of their rejection of the message of salvation. Teaching in parables is part of their just punishment, and serves also to keep the door open for those who may become receptive. Another way of removing the harshness is to say that the parable, while executing God's judgment, was at the same time a merciful provision, preventing an increase of guilt."⁽³⁾

If this were the case, why did not Jesus reserve the parables for periods when He was alone with the disciples. Matt. 13:34 says that "Jesus spake in parables unto the multitude and without a parable spake he nothing to them." If their meaning was intended for only a few, or if they shielded his hearers from judgment by enabling them to avoid knowing the truth, would it not have been better never to

(1) J. E. MacFadyen, The Message of the Parables (New York; Funk & Wagnalls,) p.

(2) W. J. Moulton, "Parable," Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908) Vol. II, p. 315.

(3) Ibid., p. 315.

have taught the multitudes in parables?

3. Another view is that of Julicher, who accepts the obvious meaning of these verses but refers them, not to Jesus, but to the evangelists who sought thereby to explain the large parabolic content of the teaching of Jesus. "The multitude had not accepted Him as Messiah. What had happened must have been in accord with the Divine plan. This plan had been fulfilled through the use of the parables." (4) Yet in some of the Gospels, the parabolic content is not strikingly large. And most of the parables were clearly understood by all classes of hearers (even that of the Wicked Husbandmen with its scathing implications.) We discussed in the last chapter other reasons for rejecting this method of Julicher.

4. The most satisfactory interpretation of these remarks of Jesus is found in Manson's The Teachings of Jesus. (5) He points to the key point of discussion as expressed in Mark 4:11: ὅτι βλεποῦντες . . . ἡμεῖς ὑμῶν ψυχαῖς. The first key is in the Parable of the Sower, just related.

"The one thing that is clear in the parable is that the result of sowing depends, not on the seed, but on the kind of ground in which it lodges. In other words the efficacy of parables depends, not on the parables, but on the character of the hearers. The object of sowing is not to prevent growth or fruition but rather to see whether anything will grow and give fruit." (6)

Manson finds the other clue in a comparison of the Marcan form of the quotation from Is. 6:9 with the Targum, drawing the conclusion that the ὅτι could represent an Aramaic particle which can

(4) Ibid., p. 316.

(5) T. W. Manson, The Teachings of Jesus (Cambridge: University Press, 1945) pp. 76 ff.

(6) Ibid., p. 77.

introduce either a relative or a final clause (therefore could have been translated into Greek as either ὅς "who," or ὅτι "that").

This makes the passage read:

"To you is given the secret of the Kingdom of God;
but all things come in parables to those outside who
See indeed but do not know
And hear indeed but do not understand.
Lest (for if they did) they should repent and receive
forgiveness." (7)

The objection that this violates the Old Testament text is **countered** by the fact that loosely quoting was a common Jewish custom at the time.

Another view is that ὅτι (Mk. 4:12 and Lk. 8:10) need not express purpose, but may merely be result, as is clear from the parallel in Mt. 13:13 where ὅτι is found. (8)

"The final particle ὅτι denotes intention or aim. But in regard to God's dealing all results are intended results, and the usual distinction between consecutive and final clauses is lost. The result of teaching by parables was that the careless and indifferent did not understand, it was the intention of God; in other words it is a spiritual law that those only who have πίστεως shall learn. The form and thought of the original Hebrew corresponds with this view." (9)

(7) Ibid., p. 78.

(8) G. H. Schodde, "Parable," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Vol. IV (Chicago: Howard Severance Company, 1930) p. 2244. See also MacFayden, Op. cit., p. 29: "Matthew gives a turn to the words which makes them mean that Jesus uses figurative language because the multitudes are unable to understand spiritual truth conveyed in plain prose (xiii. 13); while he alone of the three evangelists makes it clear that the saying is taken from Isaiah."

(9) A Carr, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, Vol. I of the Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges. (Cambridge: University Press, 1890) p. 187. cf. G. F. MacLean on Mark in same series for similar viewpoint.

Thayer, noting that the sacred writers traced all events back to God as their author allows this rendering by remarking: "if we are ever in doubt whether ὅτι is used of design or result, we can easily settle the question when we interpret the message 'that, by God's decree,' or 'that, according to divine purpose.'" Joseph Henry Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (New York, American Book Co. 1889) p. 304.

This results in the same general interpretation as that of Manson but does not require such complicated exegetical gymnastics (though his remarks may account for the use of οτι rather than ινα in some of the parallel passages.)

Once we get the proper view of this little word ινα, the passage gives insight into the purpose of the parables. Clearly Jesus faced what Isaiah (ch. 6) and Paul (Rom. 11:8) and every other true messenger of God to this day have discovered, i.e., that the seed of the word falls on what are basically two types of soil, the good and the bad. Clearly this is the point of the parable in our context. One soil received the seed and brought forth fruit; the remaining soil, though subdivided into three types, was unreceptive, or incapable of harboring the seed and hence produced no crop. The two types of soil are the two classes of people referred to and contrasted in Matt. 13:10-15 and parallel passages. "Unto you, the good soil, the responsive and receptive, it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." For to whoever has this capacity to receive shall abundant measure be given. But to them, the poor soil, the dull of hearing and blind of sight, all the teaching by parables or by any other method means absolutely nothing. And to such unresponsive hearts the word of God has a hardening effect so that even what means of perception they once possessed are taken away from them. The parables revealed the truth to the disciples because they had received Jesus as King, and, by reason of that action and their attitude towards Him, had been able to receive the mysteries of His Kingdom—"to whosoever hath, to him shall be given." But the multitudes lacked this capacity hence--"whosoever ^{hath} ~~that~~ not, from him

shall be taken away even that which he hath." (10) One class of hearers are able to receive the truth in the parables; the other class hears the parable, but the words remain but a parable to them--the hardness of their hearts prevents them from seeing any more: "Unto you is given the mystery of the Kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all things are done in parables."

"What is it that places a man in the one class rather than the other? ...there can be only one answer to the question. It is the man himself who places himself in one category or another, and that simply by the response which he makes to the parable. (11)

Jesus yearned for men to see, and when they gave evidence of real perception his joy knew no bounds. "And turning to his disciples, he said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I say unto you, that many prophets and kings desired to see the things which ye see, and saw them not; and to hear the things which ye hear, and heard them not." (Luke 10:23-24). Jesus desired this response more than self-glorification. He replied to the woman who wanted to glorify Him personally, "Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it." (Luke 11:28) The Master was made conscious of the two kinds of "soil" among his hearers down to the very end, when the two thieves crucified with Him proved to represent good and poor soil by their reaction to Him.

The purpose of the parable then was not to conceal the truth, but to reveal it. Actually the result was to conceal truth from the un-receptive, but that was not the fault of the parable but of the hearer.

(10) G. Campbell Morgan, The Parables of the Kingdom (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1907) p. 21.

(11) Manson, Op. cit., p. 76.

"He came to illumine lives and not to darken them; and because lives were self-darkened He spoke in parables, well knowing that the rays of a parable will penetrate 'where truth in closest words shall fail.'"(12)

The naked truth Jesus was trying to reveal would have been too difficult even for those who knew Him best. The parable was an essential medium upon which He relied to put the truth in terms which men could comprehend. It was not the fault of the "seed" but the fault of the "soil" whenever the parable failed to be understood and appreciated, or whenever the parable was understood and appreciated but no proper reaction resulted.

A revealing illustration of the principle stated in these verses, and of the truth of the Parable of the Sower, is to be noticed in the paragraph preceeding and the one immediately following the "parable cluster" in Matt. 13 (paralleled in Mark's account.) In Matt. 12:46-50, we find Jesus in a home, surrounded by a great multitude, ^{which} ~~whom~~ He was teaching. Someone drew his attention with the words, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside waiting to speak to you." Pointing to his disciples He replied: "Behold my mother and brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father. . . he is my brother, and sister, and mother." Immediately following the parables of Chap. 13, Jesus is found in the synagogue at Nazareth. His hearers exclaimed, "Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James and Joseph and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters are they not all with us? Whence

(12) George A. Buttrick, The Parables of Jesus (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928) p. xx.

then hath this man these things?" "And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Jesus had clearly indicated that His true brethren and sisters were those who "did the will of His Father," who followed and believed in Him. Yet the multitude failed to see and to hear, and even though the parable of the soils was still ringing in their ears, they still saw Jesus as another ordinary man with quite ordinary family connections. They failed to grasp that through their own fault they were excluded from the "family" of Jesus whose mighty deeds they could not fail to admire.

The purpose of the parable as used by Jesus is also linked with the matter of their distribution—relative to his total ministry. Although the study of this is to follow in the next chapter, we may note here that the parable was evidently used by Jesus throughout His entire ministry, but that after distinct opposition developed, and after the two classes of hearers (receptive and non-receptive) became evident, then Jesus turned to a more frequent notice^{use} of the parable than ever before—a development which his disciples noticed and enquired about.

The parable served many purposes, of which Jesus was aware, in addition to the essential purpose noted above, i.e., to put truth within the grasp of mankind. These purposes are really but parts of this grand central purpose.

(1) The parable attracted attention. The homely natural stories drew common people.

"The parables are a calling of attention to the spiritual facts which underlie all processes of nature, all institutions of human society, and which though unseen, are the true ground and support of all. Christ moved in the midst of what seemed

to the eye of sense an old and wornout world, and it evidently became new at his touch; for it told to men now the inmost secrets of His being."(13)

". . . language is ever needing to be recalled, minted and issued anew, cast into novel forms, as was done by Him of whom it is said, that without a parable spake He nothing; He gave no doctrine in an abstract form, no skeletons of truth, but all clothed, as it were, with flesh and blood. . . . He brought forth out of His treasure things new and old; by the help of the old He made intelligible the new; by the aid of the familiar He introduced that which was strange; from the known He passed more easily to the unknown."(14)

(2) The parable put truth into a form easily remembered.

Just as the illustrations of a modern sermon are remembered long after the more carefully thought out argument is forgotten, so the parables clung to the memory of the hearers, and of the Gospel writers themselves.

"His words, laid up in the memory were to many that heard Him like the money of another country, unavailable for present use--the value of which they only dimly know, but which yet was ready in their hand, when they reached that land, and were naturalized in it."(15)

Meanings at the time not clear to His disciples were obvious to them years later when they remembered the parables Jesus had spoken in their hearing.

(3) The parable was calculated to win the will of the hearer. When direct presentation of the truth would have offended and antagonized, the parable wooed and won. "The stories were part of the strategy of Jesus in attacking men's proud and sinful hearts. They

(13) Richard Chenevix Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (New York: N. Tibbals & Sons) p. 20.

(14) Ibid, p. 25.

(15) Ibid, p. 26.

got under men's defenses,"(16) Men are often peculiarly blind to their own defects (see II Sam. 12:1-4). Jesus' parables had an argumentative way of their own, and He often concluded them with a comprehensive question calculated to "catch" the hearer who had already passed a moral judgment on the parable without noticing the application to himself.(17) The best example is that of the parable of the good Samaritan, which even today can "reach men's consciences and challenge their lives."(18)

While not a proof text for doctrine, the parable does contribute ^{testimony} ~~proof~~ calculated to win assent to the truth of doctrine.

"No point of doctrine can be established on figurative passages of Scripture, as then all elements of doubt would not be eliminated, this doubt being based on the nature of the language itself... The argumentative or doctrinal value of parables is found in this, that they may, in accordance with the analogy of Scripture, illustrate truth already clearly expressed elsewhere."(19)

The power of the parables lie

"in the harmony unconsciously felt by all men, and by which all deeper minds have delighted to trace, between the natural and spiritual world, so that analogies from the first are felt to be something more than illustrations, happily but yet arbitrarily chosen."(20)

In the case of an inadequate degree of the power to apprehend on the part of the hearer, the parable facilitates such apprehension; in the case of an evil tendency of the will, refusing to believe, the parable con-

(16) Leslie D. Weatherhead, In Quest of a Kingdom (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1944) p. 59.

(17) Willard H. Robinson, The Parables of Jesus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928) p. 139.

(18) Weatherhead, Op. cit. p. 60.

(19) G. H. Schodde, "Parable" International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (Chicago: Howard-Severance Company, 1930) p. 2244. "Theologia parabolica non est argumentativa."

38

vinces even the reluctant will of its truth.(21)

(4) The parable often met a particular situation.

Biographies of Abraham Lincoln relate that knotty problems were solved, factional tensions eased, and judgements brought back on an even keel by his use of apt stories. Jesus, who faced even more trying circumstances and who dealt with far more profound matters often answered questions or reacted to a situation with a parable.

"The evangelists almost invariably assign some situation or other and some definite occasion or application to each parable. If they had not felt and known that Jesus spoke his parables to meet or modify definite situations, the very uncertainty in regard to the actual occasion would have made them omit the mention of any situation whatever." (22)

This of course makes it important to observe well the context of the parables of Jesus. One of many instances where the parable met a definite situation is that recorded in Matt. 18:21-35 where Peter raised the question, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times?" Jesus replied with the parable of the Unmerciful Servant, concluding with the words, "So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts." This not only silenced Peter, but taught a spiritual lesson of eternal value. When the Pharisees murmured because Jesus allowed a sinful woman to anoint his feet He did not argue in self-defense, something which might only have further endangered His reputation. He replied with the parable of the two debtors, concluding with,

(20) Trench, Op. cit., p. 16.

(21) Siegfried Goebel, The Parables of Jesus, (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1883) p. 15.

(22) Robinson, Op. cit., p. 37.

"Which of the two debtors will love the lender the most? . . . to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."(Luke 7:40-47)

If then, the parable was intended to meet such a specific situation, does it retain no value and meaning for today? Certainly not, they are no more transient than any other event in the life of Christ. The parables have eternal significance just as much as every miracle, or the cross, or the resurrection.(23)

(5) The parable made men think for themselves. Attention has already been called to the question Jesus often asked at the end of the parable. Rather than tell the "point" of the parable (which He occasionally did, as in the parable of the Sower) His final question often required the listener to reason out his own answer. The question at the end of the parable of the Good Samaritan could have only one answer: "Which of these three, thinkest thou, proved neighbor unto him that fell among the robbers?" (Luke 10:36). In so doing, Jesus used the parable with sound pedagogical purpose.

"As true education is not pouring knowledge into the mind, but rather drawing out the mind itself, so salvation is not something bestowed from without, but rather the quickening and development of spiritual life already existing but dormant in the soul. It follows that the most valuable truth, the truth that does the most good either intellectually or spiritually, is that which we think out for ourselves."(24)

(6) Another purpose of the parable is suggested by Dr. Buttrick. The parable served to protect the truth from being heedlessly exposed to mockery. This does not contradict our position above (that the parable reveals the truth rather than conceals it.)

(23) Ibid, p. 147.

(24) George Henry Hubbard, The Teachings of Jesus in Parables (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1907) p. xiv.

"Thus, in respect to the obdurate, the parabolic method was twice blessed: by veiling truth, it guarded it from raillery; and the hostile received, despite themselves, a story that might germinate in secret, but which did not confirm hostility and deepen guilt, as plainer statement might have done, by provoking enmity to ~~wrath~~."(25)

"The parable is an aid, not a hindrance. It veils truth, not that men may not grasp it, but that it shall not escape them. There is a sense in which the sun is hidden by the piece of smoked glass which the boy holds before his eyes, and yet without such an instrument he could not look upon the sun at all. Essential light unveiled, blinds. Its veiling is the opportunity of vision."(26)

Summary

The central purpose of the parable is to reveal by means of an easily understood picture of an event or situation a truth not otherwise easy to grasp, while at the same time the deepest implications of a parable are known only to those who make the necessary response required by Jesus. Included in this purpose are its secondary purposes: to meet a definite situation, to attract the attention of the common hearer, to win his approval and acceptance of the truth, to strengthen his memory, and to make him think out for himself the significance of the truth imparted by Jesus.

At the risk of quoting too lengthily let me conclude with the excellent summary of the purpose of the parable as given by Manson:

(25) Buttrick, Op. cit., p. xxi.

(26) Morgan, Op. cit., p. 18.

"A parable is a picture in words of some piece of human experience, actual or imagined. As such it is a work of art. Further, this picture portrays either an ethical type for our admiration or reprobation, or some principle of the rule of God in the world, or it does both things at once. That is to say it embodies the moral insight and the religious experience of its creator. Its object is to awaken these things in those to whom it is addressed, to pierce through the husk of self-righteousness and worldly cares and interests to the essential man, to arouse the slumbering conscience, to turn the affection from things that change, and pass to things that have the quality of eternity, to induce repentance and faith. In actual working, then, every true parable is a call to a better life and a deeper trust in God, which things are but the Godward and manward sides of a true religion, the obverse and reverse of the one medal. For its effectiveness the parable requires a certain responsiveness on the part of those who hear it: and this response, in practice, separates those who may go farther from the others who make no advance. The parable becomes a kind of test which determines who shall be disciples.

"Such is the nature of the parable as we find it in the teaching of Jesus, and such are the principles on which he made use of parabolic teaching. He made many parables, long and short, in many moods, addressed to all kinds of people; scribes and lawyers, his own disciples, the great multitudes. Yet all are governed by a single purpose--to show directly or indirectly what God is and what man may become, and to show these things in a way that will reach men's hearts if it is possible to reach them at all. And when we come to think of it, the greatest and most effective parable of them all is his own life."(26)

(26) Manson, Op. cit., pp. 80-81.

-442-

Chap. III. THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE PARABLES

A study of the distribution of the parables involves a survey of all the material in the Gospels. Parables comprise a large part of the Gospel discourse. For instance, in Mark $\frac{1}{4}$ or more of the words of Jesus are in the narration of parables, in Luke about $\frac{1}{2}$.⁽¹⁾ When the material of the Gospels is "charted" by paragraphs, the material falls roughly under four main topics: (1) Discourse, (2) Miracles, (3) Selection and training of the twelve, (4) Opposition. Of course these four lanes of Gospel material often overlap. They are held together in patterns by very brief but illuminating phrases and sentences pointing to the time, place, and circumstance. While the Gospel writers indicated various purposes in the writing of their Gospels, the "plot" of all four may be reduced to the following common denominator: an account of the (1) words (discourse) and (2) works (miracles) of Christ and the resulting (3) belief (response) and (4) unbelief (opposition). If the paragraphs of the Gospels are blocked out in four different colors separating these four lines of development, two things become evident: (1) Except for the accounts of the birth of Christ and His trial, death and resurrection, there is very little material which cannot be grouped under the four heads. (2) Although several parables (or several ^{miracles} ~~parables~~, or several paragraphs of discourse, or several paragraphs describing the opposition) are often grouped together, in general the four strands appear alternately like the strands of a rope.

⁽¹⁾ G. Stanley Hall, Jesus the Christ, in the Light of Psychology (New York: Doubleday Page & Co., 1917) p. 523.

If we take the list of the Parables of Jesus which I have selected as being true parables (as differentiated from the "parabolic sayings" listed in Table III^{p.45}) which are listed in Table II^{p.44}, and compare this list with the record of the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels as outlined in Stevens & Burton's Harmony of the Gospel⁽³⁾ we can find where the parables are distributed in the periods of Christ's ministry (column A in the table).^{See Table IV, p.46} Column B. shows the approximate length of time in each period (according to Burton & Steven's analysis); Column C shows the number of parables in each period; Column D. shows the number of parabolic sayings (listed in Table III) in each period; Column E shows the number of times the word παροβολή (listed in Table I) occurs in each period, with the figure in brackets indicating the occurrence of this word minus parallels; Column F shows the approximate percentage of the Gospel Material of these periods which is devoted to each separate period.

It may be noted that in Period V, most of the parables are in Matthew's Gospel (5 of the 10 have parallels in other Gospels). In Period VII, the so-called Perean Ministry of Jesus, the parables are almost entirely restricted to Luke's account alone.

Placing these periods in the ministry of Jesus along a "time scale" results in the picture represented in Column B (Table IV).⁽⁴⁾

(3) Wm. Arnold Stevens & Ernest DeWitt Burton, A Harmony of the Gospels (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908). See the analytical outline, pp. 3-14. Recognizing differences of opinion about the chronological order of the Gospels, we accept this standard harmony for the purposes of our study here.

(4) Ibid, Adapted from Appendix V, p. 280.

TABLE II LOCATION of the PARABLES

	<u>Name of Parable:</u>	<u>MATthew</u>	<u>Mark</u>	<u>Luke</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Hear- ers</u>
Period V	1. Wise & Foolish Builder	7:24-27	-----	6:46-49	Galilee Mt.	M
	2. Two debtors	-----	-----	7:41-43	" Pharisee home	P
	3. Sower	13:3-8#	4:4-8#	8:5-8#	" Seaside	M
	4. Tares	13:24-30*	666---	-----	" "	D M
	5. Seed Growing Secretly	-----	4:26-29*	-----	" "	D
	6. Mustard Seed	13:31-32*	4:30-32*	13:19*	" "	D M
	7. Leaven	13:33*	***---	13:20*	" "	"
	8. Hid Treasure	13:44*	-----	-----	" "	D
	9. Pearl of Great Price	13:45-46*	***---	-----	" "	"
	10. Draw Net	13:47-50*	-----	-----	" "	"
Period VI	11. Unmerciful Servant	18:21-35*	-----	-----	Capernaum	D
Period VII	12. Good Samaritan	-----	-----	10:30-37	Perea (?)	J
	13. Friend at Midnight	-----	-----	11:5-8	Place of	D
	14. Rich Fool	-----	-----	12:16-21	prayer Perea (?)	M
	15. Barren Fgg Tree	-----	-----	13:6-9	"	"
	16. Chief Seats	-----	-----	14:7-11	"	P
	17. Great Supper	*-----	-----	14:15-24	enroute to Jerusalem	"
	18. Lost Sheep	18:12-14	-----	15:3-7	"	"
	19. Lost Coin	-----	-----	15:8-10	"	"
	20. Lost Son	-----	-----	15:11-32	"	"
	21. Unjust Steward	-----	-----	16:1-9	"	D
	22. Rich Man & Lazarus	-----	-----	16:19-31	"	P
	23. Unprofitable Servants	*-----	-----	17:7-9	"	D
	24. Unjust judge	-----	-----	18:1-8	"	"
	25. Pharisee & Publican	-----	-----	18:9-14	"	P
	26. Laborers in the Vineyard	20:1-16*	-----	-----	"	D
	27. Pounds	-----	-----	19:11-27	Nigh to Jerusalem	M
Period VIII	28. Two Sons	21:28-32#	-----	-----	Temple	Pr.
	29. Wicked Husbandmen	21:33-45#	12:1-12	20:9-19	"	"
	30. Marriage of King's Son	22:1-14*	-----	-----	"	"
	31. Faithful & Foolish Servant	24:45-51	-----	12:42-46	Mt. Olives	D
	32. Ten Virgins	25:1-13*	-----	-----	"	"
	33. Talents	25:14-30	-----	-----	"	"

Key: M for multitude; D for disciples; P for Pharisees; J. for the Jewish lawyer; Pr. for the temple priests.

*Introduced by "the kingdom of heaven is like unto---"
#Reference clearly to the Kingdom of heaven.

TABLE III PARABOLIC SAYINGS

	<u>Parabolic Saying.</u>	<u>Matthew</u>	<u>Mark</u>	<u>Luke</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Hear-ers</u>
Period IV	Sick need a physician	9:12	2:17	5:31	Galilee (in publican h)	P
	Sons of the bridechamber	9:14-15	2:18-20	5:33-35	"	D
	New patch on old garment	9:16	2:21	5:36	"	D
	New wine in old wineskins	9:17	2:22	5:37-39	"	D
	Blind lead the blind	---	---	6:39	" (outside)	D
	Mote in brother's eye	7:3-4	---	6:41-42	" "	D
	Son asking for a loaf	7:9	---	11:11	" (place of prayer)	D
	Children at play	11:16-19	---	7:31-35	"	P
	Empty house	12:43-35	---	11:24-26	"	P
	Kingdom divided against itself	12:25	3:24-25	11:17	"	P
	Entering house of strong man	12:29	---	11:21	"	P
	Good fruit off good tree	12:33	---	16:43	"	P
	Good man, good treasure	12:35	---	6:45	"	P
	Lamp under bushel	---	4:21	8:16	" (outside)	D
	Treasures new and old	13:51-52*	---	---	" (house)	D
	Harvest is plentiful	9:37	---	---	" "	D
	Plant not planted by Father	15:13	---	---	"	P
	Blind guide the blind	15:14	---	---	"	P
	Whatever goes in the mouth	15:17-20	7:18-20	---	"	P
Period V	Children's bread to dogs	15:26	7:27	---	Tyre-Sidon	S. W.
	Salt havee lost saltness	---	9:50	14:34	" (?)	M
Period VI	Ox watered on sabbath	---	---	13:15	Enroute to Jerus. (homse)	P
	Ox in well on sabbath	---	---	14:5	"	P
	Uncompleted tower	---	---	14:25-30	"	P
	Preparation for war	---	---	14:31-33	"	P
Period VII	Rejected cornerstone	21:42-45#	12:10-11	20:17-18	Temple	Pr.
	Fig tree's leaves	24:32	13:28	21:29#	Mt. Olives	D
	Master of house & thief	24:43	13:34	---	"	D
Period VIII						
Period IX						
Period X						
Period XI						
Period XII						
Period XIII						
Period XIV						
Period XV						
Period XVI						
Period XVII						
Period XVIII						
Period XIX						
Period XX						
Period XXI						
Period XXII						
Period XXIII						
Period XXIV						
Period XXV						
Period XXVI						
Period XXVII						
Period XXVIII						
Period XXIX						
Period XXX						
Period XXXI						
Period XXXII						
Period XXXIII						
Period XXXIV						
Period XXXV						
Period XXXVI						
Period XXXVII						
Period XXXVIII						
Period XXXIX						
Period XL						
Period XLI						
Period XLII						
Period XLIII						
Period XLIV						
Period XLV						
Period XLVI						
Period XLVII						
Period XLVIII						
Period XLIX						
Period L						

Key: M for multitude; D for disciples; P for pharisees; S.W. for Syrophonecian woman; Pr. for temple priests.

*Introduced by "the kingdom of heaven is like unto---"

#Reference clearly to the Kingdom of heaven.

It seems to me, on the basis of a study of this chronological scale of the distribution of parables (admitting that evidence is insufficient) that we should be cautious in making a blanket assertion, as some commentators do, that Jesus used parables only following any one turning point in His ministry. Actually we do not have enough evidence to make such an assertion. With the exception of the narration of events pertaining to John the Baptist, the temptation of Christ in the wilderness, and the selection of some of the disciples, Period II and III depend entirely upon John's account rather than the Synoptics. John at no place in his Gospel records what are generally included in lists of parables. Hence so far as our sources are concerned, ^{only} the Synoptics ~~only~~ record parables or "parabolic sayings" in each of the remaining periods of our Lord's ministry.

Yet there are three "parable clusters," in Matt 13, Luke 10-19, and Matt. 18-25. These passages warrant close observation, because these "clusters" account for virtually all of the parables. Yet the fact that ten parables are recorded during the 10 months of Period IV ^{at} ~~the~~ the very center of the period of His ministry does not necessarily indicate that He suddenly turned to the use of parables as the result of a rising tide of opposition. Most of the parables of this section were apparently uttered at one point in His ministry (Matt. 13) when He was riding the crest of a wave of popularity.

Matthew (Chap. 13) seems to have opened one "window" into the Galilean ministry of Jesus. We get a typical view of His preaching by the seaside and in a home, to the multitude and to a small group of intimate friends. Evidently, at this point, if anything caused Him to use

more parables than before, it was the rising tide of unbelief which Jesus could detect beneath the more obvious waves of personal popularity. We have no assurance that Jesus actually spoke all seven of these parables on one day, or during one discourse. Matt. 13:1 opens with "on that day" which refers us back to the preceeding chapter. Apparently Jesus had already cured "one possessed with a demon, blind and dumb." He had already argued with the Pharisees and taught the multitudes. Vs. 10 "And the disciples came" would seem to indicate a change of time and scene. Vs. 24 and 33 are introduced by "another parable" which could indicate connected discourse. But in vs. 34 and again in vs. 36 there are obvious breaks in continuity again. Jesus could have spoken all these parables at once, but the record does not say so, and the evidence we have makes it doubtful that He did. Matthew may have gathered in this chapter as material of related subject matter parables spoken not once, but often repeated in the teaching of Jesus.

The second "parable cluster" are those spoken by Jesus between the time when "he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" and His arrival there for the last time. 16 of our list of 33 parables are found here. As has often been observed, these are among the richest and most beautiful of the utterances of Jesus. Did Jesus use more parables in this period, or do we simply have a fuller record? I am inclined to believe the latter. They appear as the natural method of Jesus in answering questions by his disciples, and particularly those of the Pharisees and other antagonistic Jewish leaders, or His method of giving a teaching value to a situation (Lk. 14:7-11).

The third parable cluster is in Matt. 18-25 when the end was drawing near. Jesus was conscious of this and there is a note of finality and warning and parting admonition in His parables as well as His general teaching of this period. The idea that He used parables during this time of rising unbelief and opposition in order to convey a lesson to His disciples--a lesson which He did not want His enemies to hear or which would arouse their anger--simply does not prove valid. His enemies understood the implications of His parables all too well (Mt. 20:1-6), The parables did sometimes state the message of Jesus in such fashion that the Jewish opposition could not get angry about it and openly accuse Him, without admitting that they themselves were the object of the parable. The only "hidden" meaning they failed to grasp was the response in a total change of heart and conduct that Jesus was seeking in His hearers.

Something is to be gained from noting the total amount of Gospel material devoted to each of these periods. Column F. ^(p. 46) gives the approximate percentage of the total material (of periods II-VII) in the four Gospels which belongs in each period. With the possible exception of Period VI the parables and "parabolic sayings" are distributed over periods IV-VIII. The fact that six parables are recorded during less than a week prior to the death of Jesus is not surprising in the light of the detailed accounts we have of that period. Actually when Matthew and Luke (our chief sources of parabolic material) are "blocked" out by paragraphs on a chart, with the parables indicated by some symbol or color, we see that parables are fairly evenly distributed over all the material. Studying the distribution of parables by chron-

ology or by periods in the ministry of Christ as we have done above, tends to show several "spots" where the parables occur—but looking at the material as a whole as given by these two evangelists leads us to believe that the writers, who were not attempting a biography of Jesus, but an interpretation and presentation of Him, looked upon the parables as a regular feature of His life, so that we find them mixed in with other discourse and accounts of His miracles. We conclude then that a study of the distribution of the parables (relative to chronology and the amounts of material) does not indicate a certain point at which Jesus began extensive use of parables, but does indicate their use as a regular feature of His teaching.

Mention is not always made in the Gospels as to where Jesus was when He spoke the parables, or as to who the exact group of hearers were. We can assume from observation of the Gospel material that the figures are about as follows; (numbers indicate number of parables):

Geographic region	No.	Kind of place	no.	Hearers	No.
Galilee	11	Home of Pharisee or Publican	10	Disciples	13
Enroute from Jerusalem from Galilee	16	Out of doors	20	Multitudes	8
Jerusalem and environs	6	In the temple	3	Pharisees	12

Clearly there ~~was~~^{is} overlapping in this table, and it is open to all sorts of error and differences in opinion--the attempt is to get an approximate picture rather than any statistical accuracy. Just who heard which parables is impossible to ascertain. If the record states that Jesus is speaking to any one group, that does not mean other groups were not present--

in fact He seems to have enjoyed virtually no privacy (a common condition among Eastern peoples) and was probably surrounded by all sorts of people even when He wanted to speak directly to His disciples or to the Jewish leaders. The fact that so many parables seemed to have been spoken when Jesus was out of doors points to His ability to find their material from His surroundings and apply them to His teaching .

Jesus had no home of His own, no school-building, movable tabernacle or auditorium. He depended on two general places for His teaching: (1) Homes where he was invited to meals, and (2) the outdoors. The ability of the multitude to find Him, to apparently gether spontaneously from howhere, and to feel no hesitation about intruding on the privacy of meal-time in a home, or a period of prayer on a hillside is not at all surprising against the Oriental background, coupled with the drawing power of Jesus' ability to work miracles. The crowd assembled, Jesus began to pour out His heart in teachings fitted to the needs and circumstances about Him. The parable was the medium upon which He depended to transfer the truth from His heart to the hearts about Him and to strike a responsive chord there.

Chap. IV. THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE PARABLES

Commentators often seek to classify the parables and this classification may "color" their total interpretation. For instance Goebel, noting the three "parable clusters" referred to in chap. III of this paper, classifies them as follows:

- (1) The first series of parables in Capernaum, which have reference to the Kingdom of God as a whole (Mt. 13).
- (2) The later parables according to Luke, which have reference to the individual members of the Kingdom of God.
- (3) The parables of the last period, which have reference to the judgment of the members of the Kingdom of God.

Yet he renounces an attempt to classify the parables by their content and, pointing out the evils of such an attempt, takes his plan only as a working scheme.⁽¹⁾

Here are a few illustrative examples of how various commentators approach the problem of classifying the parables. Dr. Buttrick feels that the "chronological order, if it could be determined, would perhaps be the best. It would show the unfolding of the spirit of Jesus."⁽²⁾ Godet classified them thus:

- (1) Preparatory existence of the Kingdom under the Jewish dispensation.
- (2) Realization of the Kingdom in the form of a church.
- (3) Realization of the Kingdom in the life of individual members.⁽³⁾

Lange offered still another classification based on the Kingdom idea:

- (1) The Kingdom in its development.
- (2) The Kingdom in its completion by acts of mercy.
- (3) The Kingdom in its completion by acts of judgment.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Siegfried Goebel, The Parables of Jesus (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1883) pp. 17-24.

(2), George A. Buttrick, The Parables of Jesus (New York: Harper & Brothers) 1928) p. xxvii.

(3), (4) A. Plummer "Parables in N.T." in James Hastings, A Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906) Vol. III, pp. 664-665.

Westcott based his classification on the material of the parables:

- (1) Parables drawn from the natural world.
- (2) Parables drawn from the relations of man
 - (a) To the lower world.
 - (b) To his fellow men.
 - (c) to providence.(5)

Bruce, taking a somewhat different approach, observed the teaching ministry of Christ as falling under three divisions (as a Rabbi, Evangelist, and Prophet); he therefore classified parables as:

- (1) Theoretic, containing general truth pertaining to the Kingdom of God.
- (2) Evangelistic, setting forth the Divine goodness and grace as the source of salvation and the law of Christian life.
- (3) Prophetic, proclaiming the righteousness of God as the Supreme Ruler, rewarding men according to their works.(6)

Others, such as Weatherhead(7) place all the parables under the central idea of the Kingdom of God, or make no attempt whatever at a system of classification (Trench(8)).

Nearly all of these commentators recognize the difficulties and dangers in such systems of classification. Often different classifications can be equally valid, depending upon the point of view. Yet the attempt to classify runs these dangers: (1) Of "forcing" parables into a pre-conceived scheme into which they do not naturally fall, and (2) Of breaking the continuity of parables within their context, or with other parables which may teach a different lesson yet for some reason ~~are~~ ^{are} given the same context.

Clearly the parables have some relation to the general subject of the Kingdom of God in the teachings of Jesus, and this relation deserves

(5) Ibid, p. 665.

(6) A. B. Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ (New York, Hodder & Stroughton, 1886) pp. 3-9.

careful study. The expression Kingdom of God (Kingdom of heaven) occurs 130 times in the New Testament, 106 times in the Gospels, and 14 times (not counting parallels) in connection with the parables, and 2 times (not counting parallels) in connection with "parabolic sayings." Of Matthew's 17 parables, 13 refer them to the Kingdom of God; of Mark's 4 parables, 3 are so referred; of Luke's 22 parables, 3 are so referred. Obviously the emphasis of Matthew's Gospel accounts for nearly all the parables he records being related to the Kingdom of God. (With the exception of Mark. 4:26-29 the Kingdom parables in Mark and Luke are all parallels of those in Matt. 13). It has often been noted that Matthew sought to bring out the fulfillment of the Old Testament Messianic prophecy in his account, a fact which helps explain the large number of Kingdom Parables.

What is the kingdom of God? This is, of course, a whole field of study in itself and there is room for considerable difference of opinion. The expression had its sources in Jewish thinking since Old Testament times (especially in Daniel). The Jews entertained hopes of the Kingdom of God along with the expectation of the Messiah. At the time of the birth of Jesus and John the Baptist there were groups who "waited for the Kingdom of God." Some looked for an earthly Jewish Kingdom under the promised Messiah who would be able to overthrow the power of Imperial Rome. Others saw an era of righteousness and peace and joy. Oesterley sums up the current (at the time of Jesus) Jewish thinking concerning the Kingdom of Heaven

(7) Leslie D. Weatherhead, In Quest of a Kingdom (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1944)

(8) Richard Chenevix Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (New York: N. Tibbals & Sons.).

and the Messiah as follows:

"Speaking quite generally, one may say that in regard to the former, materialistic ideas, on the one hand, spiritual ones, on the other, held sway; and with regard to the Messiah, an earthly king, on the one hand, and a supernatural personality on the other, was conceived of."(9)

Jesus took a term in common use and developed it in His teaching. The Jewish multitudes hearing this were sure that He would set up an earthly kingdom and were greatly disappointed when He did not.

"In the nature of the case the kingdom must have been growing from stage to stage during His earthly ministry. He Himself was there, embodying the kingdom in His person; and the circle gathered around Him partook of the blessings of the kingdom. This circle might have grown large enough to be co-extensive with the country; and therefore, Jesus retained the consciousness of being the Messiah, and offered Himself in this character to His fellow-countrymen by the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. But the citizens of the kingdom had to enter it one by one, not in a body as the Jews were expecting. Straight was the gate; it was the narrow gate of repentance."(10)

He came to bring in a new kingdom by preaching woe to sin, pardon to sinners, blessedness to the obedient, "rest" and "peace" and "life" to the believing. "Such were the blessings He had come into the world to bestow; and the most comprehensive designation for them all was 'The Kingdom of God.'"(11)

The following definition of the Kingdom of God seems to me to cover the teaching of Jesus most completely:

"...an analysis of 119 passages in the New Testament where the expression 'Kingdom occurs, shows that it means the rule of God; which was manifested in and through Christ; is apparent in

(10) G. H. Schodde, "Parable" in International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Vol. IV (Chicago: Howard Severance Company, 1930) p. 1807

(11) Ibid.

'the church;' gradually develops amidst hindrances, is triumphant at the second coming of Christ ('the end'); and, finally, perfected in the world to come."(12)

This is certainly not what the Jews meant by the Kingdom of God, but a transformation and exaltation thereof.(13). Jesus taught that the Kingdom was at hand, that we must be worthy of it, that we must seek for it, pray for its coming, be prepared for it when it does come, that the Kingdom has deep inner aspects ("The kingdom of God is within you") as well as outward manifestations, and that in some respects it is already here. The very clear statements all through the Gospels indicate that the Kingdom cannot be merely an eschatological concept. Already this Kingdom is "the impact upon this world of the 'powers of the world to come' in a series of events unprecedented and unrepeatable, now in actual process."(14)

"For Jesus the Kingdom of God was a spiritual thing. It was a communion of souls founded on sacrifice and love. Its soldiers were the humble, the meek, the gentle, the forgiving. Its standard was the cross."(15)

Unless one confuses the whole issue by assuming that Jesus' "foresight" was really "insight" into history (and nothing more) and that what real predictions He is said to have made are really the inventions of the evangelists or of the early church,(16) it is quite

(12) Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (New York; E. R. Herrick & Co., 1886), Vol. I, p. 270. Each clause of the definition quoted is here documented with all the relevant Scriptural references.

(13) W. O. E. Oesterley, The Gospel Parables in the Light of their Jewish Backgrounds (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1936) p. 33.

(14) C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (London; Nisbet & Co. 1946) p. 51.

(15) W. H. Robinson, The Parables of Jesus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928) p. 45

(16) Dodd, Op. cit., Ch. II, III. Another outrageous and ridiculous view is that expressed by G. Stanley Hall in Jesus, the Christ in the Light of

evident that Jesus' teaching regarding the Kingdom also did have eschatological content.

"Prophetical, no doubt, many of the parables are; for they declare how the new element of life, which the Lord was bringing into men's hearts and into the world, would work--the future influences and results of his doctrine. . . But they declare not so much the facts as the laws of the kingdom, or the facts only so far as by giving insight into the laws, they impart a knowledge of the facts." (17)

Jesus saw clearly that the Kingdom would grow secretly and steadily, that it would have opposition from without and from within, but that the Lord of the Harvest would eventually come to receive the harvest, to bind up the sheaves of golden grain and burn up the tares and thistles, and (changing the figure of speech) send some to the joy of the Lord and others into outer darkness. (18)

"The one idea, then, the one burden, the one message of Jesus' ministry was the Kingdom of God. His whole career was a perpetual exposition of that thought." (19)

Obviously, if the parable was Jesus' frequently used tool to convey truth, and if teachings regarding the Kingdom occupy a large and important place in His teaching, the parables must have taught messages about the Kingdom. If we adopt the definition of Edersheim (quoted above) the Kingdom of God idea is broad enough to embrace all the teachings of Christ, and the parables naturally are descriptive of the growth, membership, character and final full development of the Kingdom.

Psychology, pp. 588-591. Jesus is here represented (in his parables) as reflecting "his youthful dream to command servants, stewards, tenants; to be a master thrifty yet kind, wise in building, just yet sympathetic--in short a noble country gentleman. . . Thus Jesus' youthful reveries of an ideal manor and its feudal lordship and its manifold orders of service, vast as it came to be in his mind as the months and years of his life went by, and far yet vaster as the conception of it has since become, have all attained reality enough to give the world its most precious hope as it continues to grow from age to age, although perhaps aeons yet must pass before it fills the earth."

(17) Trench, Op. cit., p. 43

"The parables show us the Kingdom of God as a purely spiritual, free, and lofty communion of souls in God. This communion rests upon no foundations of flesh and blood, and is not limited by them. Its members are brothers and sisters under the protection of a father. It was already present in Jesus and his disciples. Hence it makes no noisy approach. But it unfolds itself as unfailingly and unfalteringly as the spread of leaven or the growth of a tree.

"All men do not find pleasure in it, not even all who think they would like to set down at its feast. Those who really know it, however, prize it above any pearl or hidden treasure, **Even** the most pitiable and abject dwellers in the lanes and byways, even the despised and rejected of society, are not excluded, but urgently invited to join it. Its gifts and goods are free to all. The fulness of one causes no starvation for another, for its treasures consist of love, mercy, peace, and joy.

"It is a communion which makes its requirements as well as confers its privileges. But the privileges do not belong to birth or standing or intellectuality. Its requirements are readiness for reconciliation, humility, love, patience, watchfulness, self-denial, faithfulness and trust in God."⁽²⁰⁾

Before concluding our study of the meaning of the Kingdom of God and its relation to the Kingdom of God, we must digress at considerable length to consider one other widely held view. This is the teaching regarding the "Kingdom" found in the Scofield "Reference Bible." Dr. Scofield regards the mission of Jesus as being primarily to the Jews. Hence His ministry up to the cross is largely an extension of the "legal dispensation" of the Old Testament. The doctrines of grace are to be found in the Epistles, not the Gospels. This means that the doctrine of the Church did not concern Jesus' ministry but the period following His resurrection. Thus Scofield argues that the "kingdom of heaven" and

(18) See T. W. Manson, The Teachings of Jesus (Cambridge: University Press, 1945) pp. 234-236.

(19) Robinson, Op. cit., p. 51

(20) Ibid., p. 45.

"kingdom of God" are two different things, the former is "Messianic, mediatorial, and Davidic and has for its object the establishment of the kingdom of God in the earth."

"Since the kingdom of heaven is the earthly sphere of the universal kingdom of God, the two have almost all things in common. For this reason many parables and other teachings are spoken of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew, and of the kingdom of God in Mark and Luke." (21)

Scofield classifies the parables under one or the other kingdom, the kingdom of God being inner, spiritual and true; the kingdom of heaven being outward, organic, and full of leaven (to Scofield the symbol of error). The parables of Matthew 13 teach the mystery form of the kingdom of heaven which

"is the sphere of Christian profession during this age. It is a mingled body of true and false, wheat and tares, good and bad. It is defiled by formalism, doubt, and worldliness. But within it Christ sees the true children of the true kingdom who, at the end, are to 'shine forth as the sun.' In the great field, the world, He sees the redeemed of all ages, but especially His hidden Israel, yet to be restored and blessed. Also, in this form of the Kingdom, so unlike that which is to be, He sees the Church, His body and bride, and for joy He sells all that He has and buys a field, the treasure, and the pearl." (22)

The "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven"

describe the result of the presence of the Gospel in the world during the present age . . . Briefly that result is the mingled tares and wheat, good fruit, and bad, in the sphere of Christian profession." (23)

Scofield describes a "mystery" in Scripture as "a previously hidden truth now divinely revealed." (24)

(21) C. I. Scofield (editor), Reference Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917) p. 1003.

(22) Ibid, p. 1018.

(23) Ibid, p. 1014.

(24) Ibid, p. 1014.

There is enough truth in all this to make it difficult to point out the error. It is certainly true that the present Church contains the impure and false which must someday be purged out leaving the true Church. But the differentiation between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God and the resulting attempt to force the ministry of Christ into an exposition of one and the message of the Epistles into an exposition of the other, or to classify the parables as teaching one or the other, is unacceptable. In the first place in Jewish usage "heaven" and "God" were often synonymous.⁽²⁵⁾ Furthermore this theory makes it necessary to force the meaning of the particular parable in accordance with what ever term Jesus is reported to have used when He uttered the parable. The fact that in parallel passages both terms appear, and that neither Jesus nor any other speaker or writer in the Bible ever mention such a differentiation between terms does not daunt Dr. Scofield.

He also allegorizes the parables at will, which of course is helpful in fitting them into the pattern of his theories regarding the Kingdom. For instance, he interprets the parable of the hid treasure as follows:

"Our Lord is the buyer at the awful cost of His blood, and Israel, especially Ephraim, the lost tribes hidden in 'the field,' the world, is the treasure. The divine Merchantman buys the field (world) for the sake of the treasure beloved for the father's sake, and yet to be restored and saved. The note of joy is also that of the prophets in view of Israel's restoration."⁽²⁶⁾

Again, Scofield is rather capricious and inconsistent in the meanings

(25) Oesterley, Op. cit., p. 19.

(26) Scofield Reference Bible, p. 1017 (Scripture references omitted).

he attaches to objects in the parables. Many instances could be cited, but here is one in his own words: "As Israel is the hid treasure, so the Church is the pearl of great cost." (27) The mass of material involved in giving the views of Scofield, cannot be covered here, but to base a classification of the parables upon such views of the nature of the Kingdom in the teachings of Jesus opens up all sorts of fields of error.

Still another interesting view of the relation of the parables of Jesus to the Kingdom idea is that of Lange. (28)

"The first parable treats of the institution of the kingdom of God, and the last of its completion on earth by the final judgment; while the five intermediate parables successively mark its progress..."

Lange views each of these parables (in Matt. 13) as a "complete and independent section..."

Under every new phrase as it emerges in each of these parables, the kingdom and its history are presented from another aspect, and in a new form, marking its onward progress from the commencement to the completion. If parables present the ideal phases in the development of the kingdom of heaven, we shall naturally expect that they also bear reference to the historical succession of the different forms through which the visible Church has passed. Accordingly, we cannot fail to trace in the parable of the sower a picture of the apostolic age; in the parable of the tares, the ancient Catholic Church springing up in the midst of heresies; in the parable of the mustard bush, resorted to by the birds of the air as if it were a tree, and loaded with their nests, a representation of the secular state-Church under Constantine the Great; in the leaven that is mixed among the three measures of meal, the pervading and transforming influence of Christianity in the medieval Church, among the barbarous races of Europe; in the parable of the treasure in the field, the period of the Reformation; in the parable of the pearl, the contrast between Christianity and the acquisitions of modern secular culture; and in the last parable, a picture of the closing judgment." (29)

Lange also works out a curious "analogy" or "parallel" of these seven

(27) Ibid., p. 1017.

(28) John Peter Lange, The Gospel According to Matthew (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, & Co. 1873) pp. 236-238. See also Trench, Op. cit., p. 42 for an account of a similar working out of these parables.

(29) Ibid., p. 237.

parables with the seven beatitudes and the seven churches in the book of Revelation. One wonders if he could extend his parallel to the seven days of creation and the seven branches of the temple candelabra! This was the approach of Cocceius and the "historico-prophetical" school.

"By the parables, they say, and so far they have right, are declared the mysteries of the kingdom of God. But then, ascribing to those words, 'Kingdom of God,' a far too narrow sense, they are resolved to find in every one of the parables a part of the history of that kingdom's progressive development in the world to the latest times. They will not allow any to be merely ethical, but affirm all to be historico-prophetical." (30)

Many faults might be found in this view, among them the following:

- (1) It seeks to determine doctrine and history where such is not intended.
- (2) The comparison to the periods of Church History, the beatitudes and the seven churches are arbitrarily determined, of doubtful "connection," and open to all sorts of unintended teachings.
- (3) Allegorical meanings are attached to the parables. This partly-allegorical, partly eschatological, and arbitrary establishment of parallels, as a serious interpretation of the parables in relation to the Kingdom of God spoils Lange's view of the kingdom of God as the gradual development amidst hindrances of the rule of God in the hearts of men.

Conclusion

If, then, the parables are to be classified at all, I think they may be considered to teach the general truths of the Kingdom of God, when we interpret this latter term to be the development of God's rule in the hearts of men. Within this ^{broad} framework, it seems to me that the parables may be classified as follows. This scheme is open to question

(30) Trench, Op. cit., p. 41.

and perhaps some of the parables might just as well be placed under a different heading in the outline. This classification is something along the line which Goebel and Godet (see above) followed. The numbers indicate the parables as numbered in Table II, (page 44), and the numbers in brackets are the parables which are listed at more than one place in the outline. The attempt here is to give a general view of the parables arranged topically and without respect to chronological or contextual sequence.

An Outline of the Parables of Jesus in the Gospels.

- I. The growth of the Kingdom of God.
 - A. Responsive action, as well as hearing of the Word, necessary--1, (3).
 - B. Growth of the kingdom is slow and secret--3, (4), 5, 6, 7.
 - C. "Foreign" elements accompany this growth--4, 10.
- II. Value (supreme worth) of the Kingdom of God and what it has to offer--8, 9.
- III. Qualities and Characteristics of the members of the Kingdom.
 - A. Forgiveness--2, 10.¹⁰
 - B. Brotherly love--11, 22.
 - C. Humility 16, 25.
 - D. Diligence and fruitbearing 15, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33.
 - E. Foresight and shrewdness--21.
 - F. Insistence in prayer--13, 24.
 - G. Love of wealth to be spurned--14.
- IV. How God invites and seeks out members of the Kingdom--17, 18, 19, 20, 30.
- V. Rewards and punishments in the Kingdom--23, 26, 28, 29.

Chap. V. THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLES

This discussion of parables up to the present point has often involved the interpretation of the parables of Jesus, but has presented no orderly arrangement of principles or rules to govern such interpretation. Clearly, a commentator who permits allegorizing of the parables will allow his rule of interpretation to cover such a method. Or a commentator like Scofield who has some peculiar "one-sidedness" or pet theme to develop will allow this to color his interpretation. Those who seek to press eschatological as over against ethical values, or some particular mode of classification of the parables, will have rules of interpretation which "fit."

But not only do such views affect canons of interpretation, but also a canon of interpretation may be applied in differing ways, according to the particular point of view of whichever commentator happens to be applying the rule.

Recognizing these difficulties and dangers, one hesitates to set up a system of interpretation. Nevertheless, if one is to be consistent and accurate and honest in his parabolic interpretation it is necessary to offer a "yardstick." I do so here, recognizing two authors, Trench⁽¹⁾ and Goebel⁽²⁾ as our best source of helpful material. This attempt is also made to organize the rules in such a way that they form the logical and effective way of interpreting the parables in expository

(1) Richard Chenevix Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (New York: N. Tibbals & Sons).

(2) Siegfried Goebel, The Parables of Jesus (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1883)

form to the average group of Christian and non-Christian hearers.

The following points seem to be the proper steps to the best approach to a proper and fair interpretation of any given parable:

1. The context.
2. The text.
3. Discovery of the central truth.
4. Relation (if any) of details to the central truth.
5. The practical application.

1. The context. Nearly all the parables have a context which helps in interpreting the parable. In the last chapter we pointed out certain facts as to place, time, and persons addressed which are pertinent to discovering the meaning. But more than this we need to study carefully other facts in the context. The Gospel writers rarely go into details of description, yet often a word or phrase or two gives the setting. The "pro-parabola" and "epi-parabola" are rarely omitted.

"The neglect of these often involves in the most untenable explanations; for instance, how many interpretations which have been elaborately worked out of the Laborers in the Vineyard could never have been so much as once proposed if heed had been paid to the context, or the necessity been acknowledged of bringing the interpretation into harmony with the saying which introduces and winds up the parable." (3)

Trench notes the two sources in the context which may give us such information. (1) Jesus Himself. (Matt. 22:14--at the end of the parable of the Marriage Feast, Jesus says: "For many are called but few chosen. Matt. 25:13--at the end of the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, He says: "Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour.") (2) The Gospel writers. (At the beginning of the parable of the Unrighteous Judge is this comment: "And he spake a parable unto them to the end that

(3) Trench, Op. cit., p. 37.

-66-

they ought always to pray and not to faint." Matt. 18:1). Sometimes this "key" is a prologue, sometimes an epilogue--occasionally "keys" are at both the beginning and the end.⁽⁴⁾

In addition to the epilogue and prologue, and such comments as Jesus or the Gospel writers may give, we may also learn much from a true understanding of the general setting. The situation in which Jesus found himself, the events leading up to the speaking of the parable, the character of his hearers and their attitude toward Him, all are relevant. Oesterley blames much of our lack of understanding of the parables on lack of background knowledge of the Jewish atmosphere⁽⁵⁾ and he is probably right. We are also justified in doing everything possible to obey the following precept:

"In interpreting a parable, we must first of all ask what Jesus meant to say to those to whom He delivered it, what doctrine, exhortation, or warning He meant to give; and with strict reservation of the point of view, we must judge how far the particulars in the parable require, according to the fundamental plan, a definite counterpart in the interpretation, and, in effect, how they are to be interpreted."⁽⁶⁾

Close examination of the context has, besides the positive value of helping discover the "key" to the parable, a negative value as well. That is, knowledge of the context tends to enable us to approach the parable itself without preconceived notions about its meaning. We thereby tend to "put ourselves in the shoes" of Jesus' listen-

⁽⁴⁾ Ibid., p. 36.

⁽⁵⁾ W. O. E. Oesterley, The Gospel Parables in the Light of Their Jewish Background (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1936) p. 17.

⁽⁶⁾ Siegfried Goebel, The Parables of Jesus (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1883) p. 25.

ers and hear the parables as they heard them. In no better way are we prepared to react as the Master wants us to when we read His message.

2. The Text. Careful study of the text of the parable itself is the second step in the procedure. Lack of real and complete observation of all the facts is at the root of many of the misunderstandings and disagreements in our world other than the study of the parables of Jesus. The physician must observe the patient with utmost care before making his diagnosis. Especially in the field of art--painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry, music, literature--observation (not just passive "watching" but a keen effort to see all that is to be seen) is necessary. We must extend this approach to aesthetics to the study of the parables, which after all are artistic creations from a Master Artist. Those familiar with the teaching methods of Dr. Howard Kuist can never forget his untiring efforts to teach his students to observe: first the whole structure, then the parts in relation to the structure as a whole.

"In the penetrating analysis entitled Vision and Authority, John Oman declares, 'We truly inherit nothing except what we also discern. Nothing is ours, however it may be presented to us, except we discover its truth and except it prove itself again in our experience. . . . Mere acceptance of the conclusions of others. . . . is not the way by which we . . . lay broad and deep foundations. With eyes bandaged in formulas men see only the aspect of life the formula allows They grow accustomed to the half-light. . . . and with all the colors of ~~it~~ it toned down to suit the sombre hues of a twilight soul.' But once let an individual determine to flood his twilight with genuine illumination --to really see--off must come the bandages! He must learn to look with his own eyes." (7)

Such observation of the text of the parable should not be with the view to determine the meaning of every word and phrase as the alle-

(7) Howard Tillman Kuist, These Words Upon Thy Heart (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1947), p. 56.

gotizers have done, nor yet to find some idea or doctrine for which we want proof texts. During such preliminary observation we should not at first seek even the interpretation of the parable. This should be observation to answer this question: What does the parable say? What is the story? What are the facts? Someone has suggested reading the parable many times and then attempting to rewrite it using only the facts and features of the parable given by Jesus Himself. Whatever the mechanical means employed, observation of the parable itself is preliminary to the understanding of its message. This will enable us to look upon the parable as a beautiful gem, and let the sparkle from each facet strike our eyes with its natural beauty and brilliance. It will give us the free and natural meaning of the parable as we find it..

"... we must follow the figurative history itself in its natural course, word by word and step by step seeking in the first instance everywhere to understand the simple verbal sense lying in the sphere of physical or human life, without entering at present, as is commonly done, on the field of interpretation, without asking in every verse and at every step what is meant to be symbolized,--to speak generally, without letting ourselves be disturbed and misled in the understanding of its course and connection by thoughts of the interpretation and its supposed difficulties. For only by thus putting aside prejudice, and letting the narrative in its natural course up to the conclusion, on which everything depends, influence us, is a secure basis laid for consistent interpretation of the parable. Now, in such a consecutive study of the text as to its verbal sense, these ingredients in the figurative history, which decisively influence its inner course, and therefore form its essential contents, and also those which merely serve the purpose of pictorial delineation of the formation of its outward structure will spontaneously stand forth before the expositor in their true character, and thus the necessary postulates will be gained for solving, in the next place, easily and surely, all merely apparent difficulties in the work of interpretation on the basis of such previous labor."(8)

(8) Goebel, Op. cit., p. 26

3. Discovery of the central truth. The heart of the whole study of parables is involved in the discovery of the central truth intended by it. This is preliminary to determining what is significant in the parable and what is not; what is essential and what is not (a study taken up in the following step, #4).

"It will much help us in the matter of determining what is essential and what not, if, before we attempt to explain the particular parts, we obtain a firm grasp of the central truth which the parable would set forth, and distinguish it in the mind as sharply and accurately as we can from all cognate truths which border upon it; for only seen from that middle point will the different parts appear in their true light. 'One may compare,' says a late writer on the parables, 'the entire parable with a circle of which the middle point is the spiritual truth or doctrine, and of which the radii are the several circumstances of the narration; so long as one has not placed oneself in the centre, neither the circle itself appears in its perfect shape, nor will the beautiful unity with which the radii converge to a single point be perceived, but this is all observed as soon as the eye looks forth from the centre. Even so, in the parable; if we have recognized its middle point, its main doctrine, its full light, then will the proportion and right signification of all particular circumstances be clear unto us, and we shall lay stress upon them only so far as the main truth is thereby more vividly set forth.'"(9)

It is sometimes true that Jesus, or the Gospel writer, definitely state the point of the parable. It takes no brilliant analysis to discover the heart of such a parable; for instance such a one as the parable of the unrighteous judge (Luke 18:1-8) when it is so clearly stated in vs. 1, "And he spoke a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint." The context is not always so helpful, or it may sometimes give only partial clues.

When the purpose of a particular parable is not clearly stated certain keys may help solve the problem. As we found in Chap. IV, it is

(9) Trench, Op. cit., pp. 35-36.

impossible to "classify" the parables by any exact plan, yet structurally there are certain distinct types which may be helpful in getting to the heart of the parable.

One of these is by noting two types of parables which Goebel calls symbolic and typical. The symbolic parables are in the majority.

"The general background here is the presupposition of an all-pervading harmony between the entire sphere of the physical world and man's physical life on the one hand, and the higher sphere embracing the relations of man to God on the other, so that in virtue of this divinely-established harmony, states and relations, incidents and operations, belonging to the former sphere of life, mirror something of a like kind in the latter sphere. Viewed from this standpoint, the nature of the symbolic parable is to represent in figure those truths belonging to the religious sphere which it wishes to illustrate, in a narrative freely composed out of symbolically significant relations, incidents and operations in physical or human life." (10)

For instance, in some parables, a situation in nature is a symbol of a situation in spiritual matters. In each of these parables a process of nature is found to be a process in the Kingdom of God. The law of one is as consistent and authoritative as the law of the other. Just as the receptivity of the soil determines its ability to nurture full growth of seed sown in it, so the receptivity of the human heart determines its ability to allow the seed of the Word to reach full growth. As the owner of a grain field must, in the interest of preserving the good wheat, allow destructive tares to grow among the grain until the final harvest, so God must allow certain impurities in the Kingdom to go unmolested until the day of reckoning. As seed sown in the ground grows by natural process in regular stages until it is ripe for harvest, so the kingdom of God operates "naturally" according to laws of

(10) Goebel, Op. cit., pp. 4-5.

spiritual growth. As a grain of mustard seed, insignificant though it be at first, by nature springs up into a large tree, so the kingdom with its small beginning will grow into a large domain. As leaven works by laws of biology to permeate and influence meal, so the kingdom operates in the world. As the fig tree which persistently is found unproductive is fit only for destruction so in the Kingdom of God unproductiveness deserves destruction. In these parables to discover the central truth is to discover the law of nature as a natural analogy of a spiritual process.

Or, in other parables, a human situation is the exact symbol or illustration of a spiritual truth. The reaction of a human being may be the reaction which we find in a much higher sense of God Himself. As the man cannot reject the continued and urgent appeals of a neighbor at midnight, and as a judge, even if he be unjust, will in the end respond to appeals from a poor widow, so God responds to our continued prayer-- Being loving and just means that he is just that much more likely to respond than the imperfect human example. As a shepherd rejoices over the finding of a lost sheep, or a woman over the recovery of a lost coin, or a father over the return of a prodigal son, so God rejoices over the "finding" and "recovery" and "return" of repentant sinners. Here again the central point is discovered when we discover the analogy between a natural human reaction and that of God.

The other type of parable noted by Goebel, is the typical, or exemplary. Here we are not faced with a symbol where spiritual facts and laws are mirrored in the realm of nature or human affairs. Rather we have a direct example to be followed.

"In all these cases παράβαλλον, or a comparative setting side by side, takes place in so far only as the author introduces a particular case in the shape of an artificial history by way of composition with the general truth meant to be taught. The particular case so confirms the truth that the religious truth in question is intuitively recognized in the history as in a striking example. Thus the narratives themselves as such bear a religious character. . . Here, what is necessary in order to give expression to the moral of the narrative is not the interpretation of a symbol, but merely the generalizing application of what is said and narrated of a particular case to all cases of a like kind, so that special events of the history related are traced back to the universally valid law executed and the universally valid truth confirmed in them."⁽¹¹⁾

Several parables are built around a character whose example illustrates qualities of citizens of the kingdom. Often two or more characters or groups of characters illustrate contrasting elements and characteristics. As the Good Samaritan illustrated real brotherly love, so the citizens of the Kingdom of God should demonstrate true neighborliness. As the rich man who glories in the accumulation of riches must part with his treasure at death, so are all whose "life consisteth in the abundance of things." As an unrighteous servant takes advantage of his position to win friends before he is punished, so the citizen of the Kingdom must be shrewd, resourceful, and astute. Passing into the joys of heaven depend not upon degree of wealth, as is shown by the comparative fate of Lazarus and the rich man. The worth of self-righteousness versus true humility before God is illustrated by the Pharisee and the Publican. As true diligence and thrift among servants left with responsibilities is rewarded, so with the kingdom of God.

Besides help from noticing these two general types, the symbolic and typical parables, we gain insight from the way in which the

(11) Ibid., p. 6

parable is stated. Such expressions as "is likened unto" or "as... so" or "how much more" indicate the kind of comparison or way in which it is intended. These give the key as to what thing is compared with some other thing.

Often the question which Jesus puts at the end of the parable shows the "point" He intended to make. For instance, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the "point" is obvious: "Which of these three proved neighbor unto him that fell among thieves?"

4. Relation (if any) of details to the central truth of the Parable. At this point there is great variety among commentators, both in theory and in practice.⁽¹²⁾ One writer says we must make a sharp distinction between the body (copus) and the soul (anima) of the story-- between ornament and substance. In some places Christ himself makes the distinction. "Those features which illustrate the scope of the parable belong to its substance, and those which do not, belong to the ornamentation."⁽¹³⁾ I do not believe it is possible to set up any rules to govern this selection in all cases. "Strictly understood, there is no mere byplay and empty ornamentation in the parables of Jesus. Details may have no special meaning in themselves, but they do serve the end of the whole."⁽¹⁴⁾

It seems to me that the very lack of detail in the parables is a negative proof that Jesus did not intend that any details should detract or distract from the central theme. It is amazing what pictures Jesus painted with such a few words. His parables could have been

⁽¹²⁾ See Trench, Op. cit., p. 30 ff.

⁽¹³⁾ G. H. Schodde "Parables" in I. S. B. E. p.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Goebel, Op. cit., p. 25.

elaborated and meanings attached to parts subsidiary to the central theme, perhaps to the advantage of the teachings of Jesus. The fact that Jesus did not take advantage of this, indicates that He wanted to get across one lesson at a time in such a way as to make it "stick," without running the risk of confusing His hearers by introducing secondary ideas in connection with the primary theme.

On the other hand, having minimized the place of details in parables as to lessons they are meant to impart, let us hasten to add that the details have their place as a contribution to the whole. Leonardo de Vinci's painting of the Last Supper may focus our attention on Jesus administering the sacrament, but the variety of detail lends support and meaning to the central theme. A simple strong theme of a few notes may be the "heart" of a sonata, but it would have little beauty or meaning without the accompaniment and background. The same is true of the parables. For instance in the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, the introductory verse ("There was a man that was a householder, who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about it, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into another country.") --this verse (particularly the part underscored) lends no additional lesson to the parable (though many commentators have sought to do so) but it is important because it sets the stage for the action of the story.⁽¹⁵⁾

(15) This particular parable is an example of one of the few which nearly all commentators recognize to have some allegoric content. The enemies of Jesus could not fail to compare the following parts of the story: The householder: God; the husbandmen: the Jews; the servants: God's messengers and prophets; the son of the householder: Jesus. Yet even these analogies serve to strengthen one central idea: the Jews repeated rejection of God's increasingly strong overtures to secure their entire allegiance. But to find in the background details of the introductory verse any meaning is to miss the point of the parable.

Another example is that of the parable of the Ten Virgins. Probably there is more detail here in proportion to the lesson brought out than in most of the other parables. Yet the lesson is simple, clear and solitary: "Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour." The rest of the story has no meaning whatever, except to convey the idea of prepared watchfulness which should characterize the citizen of the Kingdom of God.

But we cannot establish a hard and fast rule here. For instance, the parable of the Prodigal Son presents an interesting exception. Jesus did not give a conclusion to this parable in spiritual terms as He did for the first two parables in the chapter ("There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.") although the same words are implied as the conclusion for the third parable as well. The love of the Father, his willingness to forgive and restore his son, the joy of the home in welcoming back the wanderer --these form the central thought. Yet who can fail to draw the secondary lessons or parallels: (1) the futility of the life of sin apart from our heavenly Father, (2) the necessity for humble repentance, (3) the obvious parallel between the attitude of the self-righteous elder brother and the Pharisees to whom Jesus was talking?⁽¹⁶⁾ Such lessons do not do violence to the heart of the parable, or to the general setting, or to the general

(16) Some go so far as to find in this idea the central thought of the whole parable, or to call it a second parable apart from that of the Prodigal Son. See George A. Buttrick, The Parables of Jesus (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928) p. 195 ff. "Jesus was compelled to relate the aftermath to the Prodigal's return so that Pharisees of that and every age might have a mirror whereby to see themselves and God."

teaching of Jesus elsewhere. Surely in this instance Jesus did not mean such details to go unnoticed. But when we begin to find a meaning in the "mighty famine," "the husks that the swine did eat," "the hired servants," "the robe," "the ring," "the fatted calf," "the music and dancing" --then we are allegorizing violently and desecrating the true spirit of the teaching of Jesus.

To summarize, we quote from Trench:

"it must be confessed that no absolute rule can be laid down beforehand to guide the expositor how far he shall proceed. Much must be left to good sense, to spiritual tact, to that reverence for the word of God, which will show itself sometimes in refusing curiosities of interpretation, no less that at other times in demanding a distinct spiritual meaning for the words which are before it. The nearest approach perhaps to a canon of interpretation on the matter is that which Tholuck lays down: -- 'It must be allowed,' he says, 'that a similitude is perfect in proportion as it is on all sides rich in applications; and hence, in treating the parables of Christ, the expositor must proceed on the presumption that there is import in every single point, and only desist from seeking it when either it does not result without forcing, or when we can clearly show that this or that circumstance was merely added for the sake of giving intuitiveness to the narrative. We should not assume anything to be non-essential; except when by holding it fast as essential, the unity of the whole is marred and troubled.' (17)

5. The Practical Application. The parable means nothing if it strikes no responsive chord in our hearts and stimulates the appropriate action in our lives. If with all our critical study and careful interpretation we fail to let the central point of the parable penetrate our own lives we have failed. Last fall I stood on a hillside watching a schoolboy paint a picture. The leaves of the trees on that hillside and a marvelous landscape spread below, with green

(17) Trench, Op. cit., pp. 34-35.

mountains in the distance and billowing clouds overhead presented a parable of nature--the beauty of God's creation. The boy had considerable talent, his canvass and paint were all right. But he was painting the most obvious object in the very near foreground--a filthy pig pen on the side of the hill! May we not see in the parable some off-center detail, some curious problem, some true but relatively minor truth, and miss the spacious beauty and power of its central message as the word of God capable of stirring our own souls. Every parable has a place in Christian living and thinking and believing today. The Kingdom of God is still growing according to the spiritual laws of growth, and the parabolic lessons uttered by Jesus are as penetrating and important now as they ever were.

"He that hath ears to hear,
let him hear."

--Luke 8: 8

Part II

Expositions

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Expositions

	<u>Page</u>
Index - - - - -	79
I. <u>How to Study the Parables</u> (a popular lecture embody- ing the main ideas of Part I) - - -	80
II. <u>The Spurned Invitation</u> (The Great Supper) - - - - -	91
III. <u>The Barren Fig Tree</u> - - - - -	103
IV. <u>A Parable Within a Parable</u> (The Two Debtors) - - - -	114
V. <u>Watch Therefore</u> (The Ten Virgins) - - - - -	128
VI. <u>Who is My Neighbor?</u> (The Good Samaritan) - - - - -	140
VII. <u>The Pharisee and the Publican</u> - - - - -	153
VIII. <u>The Mustard Seed</u> - - - - -	164
IX. <u>What to do about Tares in the Wheatfield</u> (The Tares)	175
<u>Bibliography</u> - - - - -	190

Note: The order of the studies above is without reference to any order in the Gospels, either by subject matter or chronologically. They are in what I believe would be a suitable order if presented consecutively as a series of studies or sermons.

How To Study the Parables

"And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? And he answered and said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." --Matt. 13:10-11.

The Preacher of Dubno, Jacob Kantz, was once asked why the parable has such persuasive power over people. The Preacher replied, "I will explain this by a parable.

"It happened once that Truth walked about the streets as naked as his mother bore him. Naturally, people were scandalized and wouldn't let him into their houses. Whoever saw him got frightened and ran away.

"And so as Truth wandered through the streets brooding over his troubles he met Parable. Parable was gaily decked out in fine clothes and was a sight to see. He asked, 'Tell me, what is the meaning of all this? Why do you walk about naked and looking so woebegone?'

"Truth shook his head sadly and replied, 'Everything is going downhill with me, brother. I've gotten so old and decrepit that everybody avoids me.'

"'What you're saying makes no sense,' says Parable. 'People are not giving you a wide berth because you are old. Take me, for instance, I am no younger than you. Nonetheless, the older I get the more attractive people find me. Just let me confide a secret to you about people. They don't like things plain and bare but dressed up prettily and a little artificial. I'll tell you what. I will lend you some fine clothes like mine and you'll soon see how people will take to you.'

"Truth followed this advice and decked himself out in Parable's gay clothes. And lo and behold! People no longer shunned him but welcomed him heartily. Since that time Truth and Parable are to be seen as inseparable companions, esteemed and loved by all." (1)

The disciples once asked Jesus, "Why speakest thou unto them (the multitude) in parables?" His reply is one of the most

(1) Nathan Ausubel, A Treasury of Jewish Folklore (New York: Crown Publishers, 1948) p. 13.

difficult passages among the teachings of Jesus. He began with the words: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." We find ourselves asking this question: "What did Jesus mean by this division of His hearers into two classes, one of whom apparently understands truth dressed up in the attractive and appreciable form of a parable, whereas the other group misunderstands. To continue in the vein of the illustration above: One group welcomes Truth clothed in Parable's clothes as a guest and friend in their homes and hearts; the other group is just as aware of Truth and just as properly introduced, yet continues to regard him as a casual acquaintance or stranger. And we are further led to this question: "How can we place ourselves in the first group, so that the parables of Jesus bring truth into our lives?" May the answer come as we introduce ourselves to the parable, the method Jesus used so often and so effectively in His teaching and preaching.

I. What is a parable? The simplest and most often quoted definition of a parable is also the best: "A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." Our word "parable" comes from a Greek word whose idea is the placing of two or more objects side by side for the purpose of comparison. Sometimes in the New Testament this word describes old maxims and proverbs as well as the stories we usually refer to as "parables." This is because this word for parable is the translation of a Hebrew word used in the Old Testament to cover all sorts of short popular sayings which we might describe as oracles, short utterances of wisdom, allegories,

and proverbs. The idea in them all was that of a deeper meaning than that which appeared on the surface--not necessarily a mysterious or secret meaning, but one which demanded the deepest thought and response in the hearer's heart. And that is what the parable of Jesus is--a simple enough story, yet it is the thin shell containing the profoundest truths God wants us to know.

We have to be careful how we regard the parable with reference to other figures of speech. The simile and metaphor are comparisons of one thing with another. Parables are usually extended metaphors and similes, but they are not just that. A proverb is a pithy statement expressing some truth common to our experience and observation, and sometimes the parable is very little more than that. But there are three forms of literary expression from which we must be careful to distinguish the parable. One is the myth, where a purely fictitious story involving supernatural persons and events often are made to account for natural events. The myths of Rome and Greece are examples commonly known to us all. The parables of Jesus never are myths; they never represent fiction as fact. Then there is the fable, such as Aesop's fables: tales where persons, animals and things are used to convey a moral. There are a few fables in the Bible, but the parables of Jesus are never fables, but rather are accounts of situations which are perfectly natural and normal to our human experience. Most difficult to distinguish properly from the parable is the allegory, where the objects, characters, and actions each are meant to suggest some quality or virtue or vice. There have been some people who

find meanings in every detail of the parables of Jesus. Yet with the exception of a very few parables, Jesus gave no indication of intending more than one simple lesson. Even when He assigns a meaning to a few details in the parable, as He did in the Parable of the Sower, He never makes it a true allegory by making every detail mean something, (2) as many have done, thereby obscuring the real gem of truth Jesus meant to convey, and running the risk of reading our own thoughts and doctrines into the parable.

What, then, is the parable? The parable is a picture of a situation or event taken from the realm of nature or human relations, a picture intended to focus the observer on one thought. This central idea may be enhanced by the attribution of meaning to certain (but not all) details. This central idea may have deeper implications than those first observed on the surface. The parable of Jesus was no new thing, nor was the use He made of it. Yet in His teaching the parable is at its best.

II. Why did Jesus use the parable? This was the question the disciples asked in Matt. 13. In this chapter (and its parallel passages in Mark and Luke) occur 24 of the 48 usages of the word parable in the New Testament, and it is here that Jesus gives us His only explanation of His purpose in using them. His words do not mean that parables were intended to blind the eyes and deafen the ears of some people. Rather that there are some people whose hearts fail to respond to the truth and as a result their sense of perception is progressively dulled. Jesus here merely stated

(2) Augustine's interpretation of the Parable of the Good Samaritan may be cited as an illustration of this method. See. p. 15.

the truth which Isaiah and Paul and all other true ministers of the word of God have always found, namely, as illustrated in the parable Jesus had just spoken, that the seed of the word falls on what are, basically, two types of soil, the good and the bad. Look at the pronouns of Matt. 13:11-17 and the two types of soil are clearly to be seen: Unto you, the good soil, the responsive and receptive, it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. For to whoever has the capacity to receive shall abundant measure be given. But to them, the poor soil, the dull of hearing and blind of sight, all truth means nothing.

The efficacy of the parables depends, not on the parables, but on the character of the hearers. The object of sowing is not to prevent growth or fruition but rather to see whether anything will grow and give fruit.(3)

The purpose of the parable, then, was not to conceal the truth, but to reveal it. If the purpose of the parable is thwarted and we learn no truth it is our own fault and not that of the parable. Jesus yearned for men to see the truth and respond to it, and when they gave evidence of real perception His joy knew no bounds. "Blessed are your eyes, for they see," said Jesus to His disciples, "and your ears, for they hear." (Matt. 13:16).

Jesus used the parable for other reasons--reasons which contributed to the success of His central purpose of revealing truth. (1) The parable attracted attention. The natural, homely flavor of those stories had an appeal for the common man. (2) The parable put truth into a form easily remembered. Years later their

(3) T. W. Manson, The Teachings of Jesus (Cambridge: University Press, 1945) pp. 76ff.

truths were still like wells of living water, ever refreshing and stimulating. (3) The parable was calculated to win the will of the hearer. When direct presentation of the truth would have offended and antagonized, the parable wooed and won. "The stories were part of the strategy of Jesus in attacking men's, proud and sinful hearts. They got under men's defenses." (4) (4) The parable often met a particular question or situation confronting the Master. Once Peter complained, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times?" Jesus replied with the story of the Unmerciful Servant who was severely punished because he refused to forgive a fellow servant a small debt although he himself was forgiven a very large one. "So shall my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."

What is the purpose of the parable? The central purpose of the parable is to reveal by means of an easily understood picture of an event or situation, a truth not otherwise ~~not~~ easy to grasp, while at the same time the deepest implications of a parable are known only to those who make the necessary response required by Jesus. Included in this purpose are its secondary purposes: to meet a definite situation, to attract ^{the attention} ~~attention~~ of the common hearer, to win his approval and acceptance of the truth, to strengthen his memory, and to make him think out for himself the significance of the truth imparted by Jesus.

III. Where in the ministry of Jesus do we find the para-

(4) Leslie D. Weatherhead, In Quest of a Kingdom (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1944) p. 59.

bles? The parables are variously listed, with some lists including more of the sayings of Jesus as parables than do others. I prefer to list about 33 parables, and about as many shorter "parabolic sayings." These parables occur in all the major periods of the ministry of Jesus recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, but are not found in John's Gospel. Although they were used by Jesus throughout His ministry we find them concentrated in three "clusters" which account for most of the parabolic material.

In Matt. 13 are seven parables. Here Jesus seems to have used more parables than usual in His teaching. He could detect a rising tide of unbelief and rejection beneath the waves of public popularity He was enjoying, so He turned to parables to reveal His truth in a way to penetrate deepest into the hearts of His hearers. The other two parable clusters are the ones spoken enroute to Jerusalem for the last time (Luke 10-19) and those spoken during Passion week (Mt. 18-25). Jesus was making a last effort to sow the seed of His Gospel, and He made abundant use of the parable. He used His parables at this time also to rebuke the Jewish opposition in a way which they could not openly get angry about.

Jesus had no home of his own, no school-building, movable tabernacle or auditorium. In the homes of friends or out on the hillside, Jesus taught the multitudes in parables. He poured out His heart in teachings fitted to the needs and circumstances about Him. The parable was the medium upon which He depended to transfer the truth from His heart to the hearts about Him and to strike a

responsive chord there.

IV. Another question we may raise in studying the parables is: Can they be classified, or divided into groups? There is such a wide diversity of viewpoints and methods that it is nearly impossible to group the parables according to any fixed scheme. Furthermore the attempt to do so often means "forcing" the parable into preconceived notions. One popular source of such error is the Scofield Reference Bible where by allegorizing the details of the parables and grouping them into a scheme based on wrong views of the nature of the Kingdom of God and of the nature of God's dealing with men throughout history the parables are twisted into meaning not what Jesus wanted to teach us but what a human interpreter thinks Jesus meant to say.

In general the parables teach us about the growth, the membership, the character, and final full development of the Kingdom of God which is the rule of God manifested in and through Christ, and which is evident in the Church as it grows through hindrances towards its final perfection in the world to come.⁽⁵⁾ In general I think we may group most or all of the parables under these 5 heads: (1) The laws of growth of the Kingdom of God, (2) The supreme value of the Kingdom, (3) The qualities and characteristics of its members, (4) How God invites and seeks out its members, and (5) Final rewards and punishments in the Kingdom of God.

V. Last of all we must ask: How shall we find the best interpretation of the parables? If we take the following five

⁽⁵⁾ Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Teachings of Jesus the Messiah (New York: E. R. Herrick & Co., 1886), Vol. 1, pl 270.

steps I believe we can put ourselves in the position of those who actually heard Jesus speak these parables, and can get the true meaning--not the meaning some other person has found in the parables. Actually these five steps are the proper way to approach the study of any passage of Scripture, but they are especially true of our study of the parables of Jesus.

1. We must study carefully the context of the parable. Does it tell us when and where Jesus was, to whom He was speaking, what truths He was trying to teach? This sometimes gives important clues as to what "point" Jesus intended for any particular parable. Sometimes the writer of the Gospel tells us what lesson Jesus was trying to convey. Sometimes He spoke a key sentence at the very beginning or at the close of a parable. For instance, at the close of the parable of the Five Wise and Five Foolish Virgins, He said: "Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour."

2. And then we must read and reread the text many times so that it is completely real to us with every detail blending into a story picture we can clearly see in our mind's eye. This is called the art of observation--looking until the object becomes a real part of us. "Nothing is ours, however it may be presented to us, except we discover its truth and except it prove itself again in our experience." We must look on the parable as a beautiful gem, and let the sparkle from each facet strike our eyes with its natural beauty and brilliance.

3. Our third step is to find the central truth, the heart, the "point" of the parable. Occasionally we are told what this is.

In many of the parables a law of nature, or human nature, or human society is the symbol of the way God's spiritual laws for the Kingdom of God operate. For instance, just as a seed planted in the ground grows mysteriously and regularly so also the Kingdom of God grows. As a shepherd rejoices over the finding of a lost shipp, or a woman over the recovery of a lost coin, or a father over the return of a prodigal son, so there is great rejoicing in the presence of God over the "finding" and "recovery" and "return" of repentant sinners. We call such parables symbolical, because the law of nature is the symbol of the laws of the spiritual. There are also typical parables, where the parable gives us a direct example or type to be followed, as in the case of the Good Samaritan, or not^{to be} followed, as in the case of the rich man who glories in the accumulation of treasure on this earth. By such observations as these we can find what Jesus was trying to tell us in a parable.

4. A fourth step is to find what relation the details of a parable have to this central truth. Occasionally some of the details bear a meaning, as, for instance, in the parable of the Sower where the seed is the Word, the thorns are the cares of this world, the various kinds of soil are various types of hearers of the Gospel. But usually the details of the parable are just bold stabs of the brush which contribute to the meaning of the central object. But just how they contribute and what additional information we gain from such detail we must seek constantly.

5. Lastly we must find the practical application of the parable to our own world and our own lives. The parable means

nothing if it strikes no responsive chord in our hearts. It should stir our souls, driving us to our knees to ask pardon for sins, and rising up with power and vision to establish the Kingdom of God in our own lives and in our world.

Such is the nature of the parable as we find it in the teaching of Jesus, and such are the principles on which he made use of parabolic teaching. He made many parables, long and short, in many moods, addressed to all kinds of people; scribes and lawyers, his own disciples, the great multitudes. Yet all are governed by a single purpose--to show directly or indirectly what God is and what man may become, and to show these things in a way that will reach man's hearts if it is possible to reach them at all. And when we come to think of it, the greatest and most effective parable of them all is his own life. (6)

(6) Manson, Op. cit., pp. 80-81.

The Great Supper

Luke 14:15-24

And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. But he said unto him,

A certain man made a great supper; and he bade many: and he sent forth his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a field, and I must needs go out and see it; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. And the servant came, and told his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor and maimed and blind and lame. And the servant said, Lord, what thou didst command is done, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper.

* * *

The Spurned Invitation

The Great Supper

The Bible reverberates with the call of God to sinners, "Come!" He ever hold, forth a glorious offer to all who will, to come. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Harken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." (Is. 55:1-2) Jesus said: "Let him that heareth say, Come." "Let him that is athirst, come." "Whosoever will, let him come." The parable before us centers around the same invitation, "Come; for all things are now ready."

I. Background for study. The parable of the great supper is part of a discourse of Jesus delivered at the house of a Pharisee. It was the sabbath, and Jesus had been asked to dinner. This was no ordinary Pharisee, but a ruler~~of~~ of the Pharisees. The invitation was extended not out of courtesy and hospitality but out of curiosity and hatred. The text says that as He ate "they were watching him." They wanted to see how Jesus would fall for a carefully laid trap. A man afflicted with dropsy was present--not invited by the Pharisees because they pitied him, but to see whether or not Jesus would heal him on the Sabbath. Of course He did heal the man, countering their unspoken criticism with

words such that "they could not answer again unto these things."

Jesus then discoursed at length on the subject of hosts and guests. If His remarks seem a little rude or startling when He himself was at the moment a guest, let us remember that the atmosphere was already charged with a spirit of critical antagonism against Him. First of all, noticing the unseemly clambering of the guests for first place at the banquet table he advised them to always take the lowest seats, and then have the honor of being asked to take a higher seat, rather than suffer disgrace by having the procedure reversed. "For every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Then Jesus turned to his host saying: When you invite guests to a feast don't invite your prosperous friends who can return the favor by inviting you. But "bid the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind" who cannot return the invitation and you will be blessed and rewarded in the day of resurrection. Then follows the parable of the Great Supper, again following the same theme centering around a feast and those invited. One of the guests in the Pharisee's home had sought to relieve the tension set up by Jesus' first remarks by uttering a pious, high-sounding phrase with which everyone would agree: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." But Jesus countered with a parable showing how many would not avail themselves of this blessing of eating bread in the kingdom of God--simply by making silly excuses.

Following this parable Jesus spoke further of the invitation to enter the kingdom of God. While it is like an invita-

tion to a great feast--free and joyous, nevertheless there are penalties and costs. It costs the one invited: "If any man cometh unto me, and hate~~th~~ not his own father, and mother, etc... yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." It costs the one who invites--the next chapter indicates how God searches for us, as a shepherd looks for a lost sheep and a woman looks for a lost coin. Yet in every instance the ultimate end is joy --feasting and dancing and singing in fellowship with the Great Host and our fellow guests. Logically it is ridiculous to assume that such an invitation could be spurned. Yet our parable very clearly indicates that this is ^{sometimes} the case.(1)

II. The Invitation Spurned. A certain man prepared a great supper, and he invited many to come. We Westerners often

(1) I adopt the view that this and the parable of the Banquet of the King's Son (Matt. 22:1-10) are different. The setting and circumstances are entirely different. It is in line with the Rabbinical tradition for Jesus to have used a similar parable-idea with slightly differing details and purposes on different occasions. Buttrick's note adequately covers the position of leading commentators: "Thus interpreters are divided into two main classes: (a) those who hold that the two parables are similar in theme but different in original occasion--'the same theme handled twice by the same artist, but in different languages and for diverse purposes.' (Bruce, p. 461) and (b) those who hold that the two parables were originally one story. Among (a) may be listed Trench, Arnot, Monro Gibson (in Expositor's Bible), Maclaren, Dods, and Flummer (I.C.C.). Among (b) Calvin himself finds a place and with him Grieve, Allen (I.C.C.), Box (Century Bible) and Murray. Most of those who identify the two parables believe that Luke's version is nearer to the original in substance and Matthew's in context. There is no sufficient data for a final opinion. This book suspects that the two stories were originally identical in content but is content to base its exposition on the undoubted fact that they are similar in teaching." George A. Buttrick: The Parables of Jesus (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928) p. 224, note 3. See also the full discussion in W. O. E. Oesterley, The Gospel Parables in the Light of Their Jewish Background. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1936) pp. 124-26.

fail to understand the idea of an Oriental Feast. We may have our formal dinners of many courses, or enjoy a big "spread" at a "home-coming reunion" or other gala occasion. But these are nothing compared to an Oriental Feast where food is prepared in enormous quantities and varieties. Ornamentation and appearance play a large part. A feast is not simply a matter of an hour's dinner--it lasts all day and night long, or perhaps several days. People who may normally never have enough to eat will go into debt to put on such a feast. Invitations are issued to nearly everyone in the community. If everyone came at the same time there would not be room for all about the table. Significantly enough for our study here, I have observed often the custom of issuing a second invitation by way of a servant (or in the case of a special visitor, by the host himself) at the moment when the feast is at its very height. (This is often true of an ordinary dinner invitation too). After all, how is the guest to know at what point in the feasting his presence is wanted? --unless somebody comes to invite him, although the initial invitation had been extended long ago.(2)

In this parable, the servant sent out to call in the guests met a strange reception. Actually it was absurd and laughable that guests who had known of the feast since the invitation was first issued should not have their affairs in order, and even more ridiculous that such obviously silly excuses should be made.

(2) See A. B. Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ, (New York: Hodder & Stroughton, 1886) p. 329. Also B. T. D. Smith: The Parables of the Synoptic Gospels (Cambridge University Press, 1937) p. 204.

Yet Jesus wanted to make exactly this point. One guest said: "I have bought a field, and I must needs go out and see it." Could such not wait until the next day? Surely he would not buy it sight unseen anyhow. A Second said: "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them." Here again it is unlikely that anyone would buy that many animals without knowing their performance--and this proving could also wait until the next day. Someone has pointed out that such suppers were held after dark--how could one look over a field or try out five yoke of oxen in the dark? Another excused himself by saying: "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." Mosaic law did prescribe a young man's duties to his wife for a year after marriage but this would scarcely keep him from attending such an important social function as this. (3)

When the servant came and reported these excuses his master in anger said to him: "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in hither the poor and maimed and blind and lame." Again the servant reported that this was done and yet there were places to be filled and food to be consumed. Again he was sent forth with the command to go out into the highways and hedges and constrain them to come in that the house might be filled. "For I say unto you, that none of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper." The implication of this last statement is not so much the exclusion from the supper

(3) Richard Chenevix Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (New York, N. Tibbals & Sons) p. 280. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children...he cannot be my disciple."

of those originally invited as the desire of the host that every place will be filled by gathering in those from the highways and byways in spite of those who originally refused to come.

III. The Lesson of the Parable. Like many of the parables of Jesus, this one presents both the negative and positive aspects of one fact, or spiritual experience. Here we are told that certain ones for very foolish "reasons" excused themselves from the feast to which they had been invited, whereas others, less worthy, accepted the invitation and participated in the joys of the feast. There is nothing in the parable itself or in any comments by Jesus or the Gospel writer to indicate to what principle Jesus meant this parable to be applied. Our only clue is the exclamation of one of Jesus' fellow guests at the Pharisee's table--"Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." We conclude that the parable takes up the metaphor of this exclamation and that the invitation slighted by the invited and accepted by the diseased and strangers and beggars is the invitation of our Lord, constantly extended by His servants, to enter into and partake of the joys of the kingdom of God.

We are here confronted with certain details which demand exposition in relation to the central truth. Are the three excuses meant to typify the usual excuses for not accepting the Divine invitation? We can of course see a real parallel, but certainly the main point is the absolute absurdity of them. It is true that possessions, business activity, and social obligations are excuses for refusing or procrastinating in our acceptance of the Gospel invitation. Incidentally they represent three types

of excuses a minister often hears for non-attendance to church services or for failure to fulfill other Christian obligations. What minister has not heard the excuse: "Well, I've been away on business, so---." "I just bought a new car and had to take a trip, so---." "Her daughter's going to be married next month, so---."

The instructiveness of the excuses specified in the parable is to be found.... in the suggestion of a general idea embracing all the various kinds of influence by which human hearts are rendered indifferent to the chief end and good of life. That general idea is preoccupation of mind. Whatever preoccupies or fills the mind prevents the hunger which is necessary to the appreciation of God's feast of grace.⁽⁴⁾

The significant point here is not the excuses themselves but the fact that clearly these guests did not want to come. Their "cannot come" was really "won't come." And the fact that they did not want to come is just as unbelievable as that a guest would turn down an invitation to such a wonderful feast. But there are people who persistently refuse the clear call of God for just as trivial and inconsequential reasons. We call a man who makes a blunder in the social realm a fool. In business life, a man who turns down a free offer is considered crazy. How much more of a fool is he who manufactures excuses and turns down the invitation to partake of a feast of living bread and water which if a man eat and drink he shall never hunger or thirst again.

The other major contributing feature of this parable which demands examination is the passage about the two other groups invited to the feast after the formally bidden guests refused to

(4) Bruce, Op. cit., p. 333.

come. The first group, "the poor and maimed and blind and lame," are exactly those whom a rich and socially prominent host would be least likely to invite. They are the class which Jesus' host on this occasion would never think of asking to sit at a feast with him--in the preceeding paragraph the Master chided him for only inviting his rich friends and kinsmen rather than "the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind." But clearly the parable illustrates no ordinary feast, and no ordinary Host--for the allusion is to the offer of God to enjoy the rich bounty of His kingdom. And Jesus Himself, to the amusement of the Pharisees and the chagrin of His own disciples, consistently delighted in associating himself with the poor and diseased wherever He went. The other group urged to enter the feast are those in the "highways and hedges." Apparently these are strangers, outcasts and foreigners who would not only have to be informed about the feast but strongly urged to attend. Traditionally interpreters have sought to identify these two groups as meaning, first of all, the invitation of the Gospel as extended to the common people among the Jews, and secondly to the Gentiles. While certainly this is a fact and has its parallel in the logic of the parable, it need not necessarily be so interpreted. After all there have been many sick and physically healthy who have responded to the call of the Gospel, and many poor and sick who have not. The point here is that even though the Gospel invitation is spurned by many who ought to know better, it is open to all who care to come, and by no means excludes those with whom the Pharisees refused to have any

dealings. So today, those whom we would naturally expect to come readily into the kingdom of God(including many raised in Christian homes and churches and in a Christian social and national environment) excuse themselves from the banquet while the poor, the sick, the afflicted, the outcasts, the strangers, the foreigners respond and partake of the feast.

If the religious leaders of Israel proved recreant, a pristine response might be found among that dim crowd whom the Pharisees deemed 'accursed.' If the chosen people despised their election, the hated 'stranger' living in far fields beyond the city might prove worthier of God's favor. If the 'classes' forget the name of love, a Saviour may be born among the 'masses' as of old. If occidental 'efficiency' makes light of the spiritual, the 'effete' Oriental may speak 'words of eternal life'. It pleases God to open uncorrupted springs among His 'poor and maimed and blind and lame.' There is an end of privilege to those who construe privilege as vested interest rather than as faith and love: 'For I say unto you that none of these men that were bidden shall taste of my supper.' (5)

Conclusion

"Come; for all things are now ready." There is no child who will refuse the invitation to free candy and ice-cream. But there is many an adult, who ought to appreciate true values far better than the child, ~~yet~~ who will ^{yet} turn down the free offer of far more delicious feasting in the Kingdom of God. Jesus said, you know, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for to such belongeth the kingdom of God," and again, "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven." The guests who made excuses

(5) Buttrick, Op. cit., p. 228.

are the sophisticates, the worldly minded, the men absorbed in their own affairs who fail to grasp the greatest offer in all the world. There was nothing wrong in any of the affairs which occupied their attention except that they stood between them and attendance to the feast. It was a matter of priorities. In their case secondary things were given first priority. So, in the realm of the spiritual, we fail to indulge in the bounties of God's grace spread before us because we put other matters first.

This is a parable, I believe, which primarily refers to the acceptance of the invitation of the Gospel to enter into the Kingdom of God. Yet we cannot fail to see that many who have taken this step may in other spheres fail to feast upon the rich promises and gifts of God because other things, possibly good in themselves, stand in their way. And are there not churches so absorbed in their building program or other good works, who are letting these items take the place of sitting down to enjoy the very greatest blessings the Lord has to offer?

We stand before God without an excuse--that is without a real excuse, for all excuses are utterly ridiculous when we use them to absent ourselves from the feast to which He has bid us come. Need we be surprised then that the Divine Host turns to those who will enter the feast because they know they are hungry and need food, who know they are lonely and outcast and need fellowship, who know they are sick in body and soul and need the loving ministry of Him who not only prepares the feast for us but is willing and able to prepare us for the feast?

In this parable, as elsewhere, Jesus speaks of the hunger in the heart of God, hunger for his children, for their loyalty, for their devotion, and their love. It is his will, his fixed determination, that his house shall be filled. (6)

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
Because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor:
He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised,
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

So Jesus proclaimed his mission on earth (Lk. 4:18-19). When the invitation of God comes to our own hearts we have the choice of accepting or rejecting it. And any rejection is our own responsibility for no excuse is valid. No man has a right to say, "I cannot enter" only to say "I will not enter."

"Come; for all things are now ready."

(6) J. F. McFadyen, The Message of the Parables (New York: Funk & Wagnalls 1926), p. 102

The Barren Fig Tree

Luke 13:1-9

Now there were some present at that very season who told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered and said unto them,

Think ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they have suffered these things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, think ye that they were offenders above all the men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

And he spake this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit thereon, and found none. And he said unto the vinedresser, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why doth it also cumber the ground? And he answering saith unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit thenceforth, well; but if not, thou shalt cut it down.

* * *

The Barren Fig Tree

First impressions may be revealing and important but they are not always accurate. This is likely to be true of a parable such as that of the barren fig tree. We are likely to skim over it and miss completely the important truths which closer study reveal. This parable can point us both to the wrath of God and to the grace of God in dealing with human sin.⁽¹⁾

I. Background of the parable. The meaning of the parable of the barren fig-tree is dependent upon the passage just preceding it. At the end of chapter twelve Jesus was rebuking the multitudes for failing to realize the urgency of the times and repent of their sins. At the beginning of chapter thirteen we have the opening words, "Now there were some present at that very season"--indicating a continuance of the same scene. Someone in the crowd reported to Him a recent atrocity in Jerusalem where certain Galileans had been killed by Pilate and their blood mingled with their sacrifices. Galileans were known to be hot-headed and violently patriotic. No doubt some of their plotting against the Roman government was detected and the men apprehended as they offered sacrifices in the temple. Such plot-

⁽¹⁾ This parable is not the only reference Jesus made to fig-trees. Once He said: "Behold the fig-tree, and all the trees when they now shoot forth, ye see it and know of your own selves that the summer is now nigh~~t~~." But this was a lesson regarding the signs of the times and has nothing to do with the parable now under consideration. Some have tried to identify the passage regarding the cursing of the fig tree with this parable but there is little in the context, circumstances, and content of the two passages to justify this.

ting and the abrupt and brutal extinction of plotters is common even today under totalitarian regimes, and they were no less frequent under the Roman Empire. Suppression of such plots was usually ruthless and bloody. The implication of those who told this to Jesus is that these Galileans were unusually bad sinners or God would not have allowed them to be treated in this way.

This was the common notion of Jews in that day. (I suppose they naively concluded that had these plotters not been caught and punished it would indicate God's approval of what they were doing!) The Jews thought that all sickness, tragedy and misfortune was the direct result of sin. On another ~~po~~ccasion when the disciples saw a man blind from birth, they asked Him: "Who sinned? This man or his parents?" They must have been surprised when He replied: "Neither!" No doubt on this occasion, Jesus' hearers were ~~equally~~ surprised when He refused to recognize the validity of the argument that since a man endures tragedy, therefore he is a sinner. Here He said: "Think ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they have suffered these things? I tell you Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish."

To make His point even stronger, Jesus cites another example of eighteen people being killed when the ~~tower~~ of Siloam fell. Presumably this was an accident which rendered the victims far less culpable than the Galileans who may have been plotting the overthrow of the Roman government or the assassination of Pilate. Yet

of them Jesus says practically the same thing: "Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, think ye that they were offenders above all the men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay, but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Jesus was saying of both instances that the death of these concerned was not necessarily the result of some particularly terrible sin, but that his hearers, and all men, who did not repent were in danger of perishing.

There are those today who take a similar attitude. When an earthquake rocks Japan or a hurricane sinks a ship, when a nation is plunged into war and thousands of harmless citizens are killed, they piously fold their hands and say, "Surely it is an act of the Lord to punish them for their sins!" While not denying that God does at times use such means to punish human sin, Jesus does here expressly deny that all such events are due to God's wrath upon sin. That He did not mean to teach that God never punishes the sinner by total destruction is clearly shown in the parable we are now studying, as well as in other parts of Jesus' teaching. God does sometimes send a flood as in the days of Noah, or rain down fire and brimstone from heaven as upon Sodom and Gomorrah. The truth of the matter is that unless we repent, we shall all likewise perish.

II. The barren fig tree. "And he spake this parable; a certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit thereon, and found none." Palestinian vineyards are often planted on terraced hillsides where there is plenty of sun-

light but little usable soil. Naturally on such steep terrain there is considerable unused space between the rows of grape vines. Our parable concerns a fig tree which the owner of the vineyard had planted in just such a tiny unused corner of land, hoping to get this small addition to his usual crop. Unfortunately this fig tree failed to produce any figs. Earliest records show that figs were grown chiefly in Asia Minor and Syria, hence were known and mentioned in ancient Hebrew records. They grow well in the well-drained porous limestone soil of Palestine. A unique feature of the fig tree is its ability, especially in climates like that of Palestine, to produce two crops a year on separate shoots.

It was surprising then to the owner of this vineyard not to find fruit on what was usually a prolific producer. His words to the vinedresser make this particular fig-tree even more astonishing: "Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why doth it also cumber the ground?" How long the fig tree had been here, we do not know, but for three years this man, who knew when fruit was due, had come but had found no figs. During this time it should have produced five or six crops. Apparently it was not noticeably diseased or it would long ago have been destroyed. Its only fault was failure to produce figs. Inasmuch as its only warrant for existence was to bear figs, the owner was perfectly justified in ordering that it be cut down. "No use letting a tree occupy good soil when another in its place might bear fruit!"

But the attendant begged for another chance: "Let it along one more year while I give it special nurture. I will dig around the roots and fertilize it. Then if ~~the~~ fruit is produced next season it will be all right; otherwise we will cut it down." The vinedresser perhaps had worked over this tree before, and, discouraging as its barrenness was, he still wanted to justify the care he had given it by waiting to see if eventually it would not produce properly. Every gardener has had a similar experience of having some plants unaccountably slow in maturing in spite of much hard labor. And such gardeners, in spite of the advice to pull up this row of poorly developing plants and put something else in their place, continue to cultivate in the hope of getting a crop.

III. The Lesson of the Parable. With such a simple parable for which we have some background material one would think the interpretation would be relatively easy. But a study of the various shades of interpretation expressed by the commentators shows that such is not the case. Here are some of their opinions regarding the central message of the parable. (1) It teaches that fruitbearing is essential to being a citizen of the Kingdom of God--the same idea/as is expressed by a slightly different figure in John 15: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh it away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he cleanseth it, that it may bear more fruit." (2) It teaches that God's wrath in dealing with his non-productive subjects is tempered by grace which gives the sinner every possible chance. (2) (3) It

(2) A. B. Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ (New York: Hodder

teaches that God has nurtured Israel for a long time expecting fruit, but that the Chosen People now have their last chance-- the same idea as expressed in Isaiah 5, in the Old Testament parable of the vineyard carefully tended but which produced sour wild grapes instead of good grapes.(3) It is also possible to hold more than one of these views,(4) for in certain respects they do border on several aspect of the same truth.

The answer may be best found in the statement twice made by Jesus just before telling this parable: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Jesus was reversing the order of the thinking of His hearers. They said: "A man is the victim of tragedy: therefore he is a sinner because otherwise God would not allow him so to suffer." Jesus said, "A man fails to live up to the requirements of God; therefore he will perish." Those who were listening to Jesus were mistaken--their argument would mean either that God should at once destroy all other people in Jerusalem since they were just as wicked, or else that all the other people of Jerusalem were sinless--an assumption which Jesus would deny outright, and which His hearers could hardly fail to deny either. Jesus said, "That these tragedies indicate God's punishment

& Stoughton, 1886) p. 428. This is also the view of Trench. Bruce differs from Trench in restricting the parable more closely to the Nation of Israel: "for as Israel was the representative of all and each who in after times would be elected out of the world to the privileges of a nearer knowledge of God, therefore a warning is here for the Gentile Church, and for each particular soul." Richard Chenevix Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (New York: N. Tibbals & Sons) p. 271.

(3) G. Campbell Morgan: The Parables and Metaphors of Our Lord (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1943) p. 196.

(4) Siegfried Goebel, The Parables of Jesus (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1883) p. 164.

of the victims' sins, is beside the point. The point is: Unless everyone of you repents, you too shall likewise perish." The parable then becomes an illustration of punishment already deserved for sin but delayed by the grace of God that man might have time to repent. The "sin" of the fig tree was failure to bear fruit. Fruitbearing is essential to growth and vitality in the Kingdom of God. This lesson is best taught in John 15. But here the emphasis is directed toward the consequences of barrenness. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" is, in terms of the parable phrased: "Except ye bear fruit, ye shall all likewise perish."

Perhaps we are prone to forget the direct connection in Jesus' thinking between repentance and fruitbearing. We are likely to think of repentance as the negative side of Christian living--casting away our old sinful selves--and of fruit-bearing as the positive side--yielding rich spiritual increase, both quantitative and qualitative for the Kingdom of God. Logically the two may be thus separated, but actually they are one in the Divine scheme of things. John the Baptist had preached, "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance" and had mentioned some of these fruits--generosity, honesty, compassionate dealing, etc. His sermon threatening that "even now the axe also lieth at the root of the tree" reflects the opinion of the owner of the vineyard in our parable. Jesus, as always, went further with the note of grace--giving even the non-bearing trees further opportunity. The two are by no means contradictory, for even the vine-

dresser puts a limit on his indulgence: "If there is no fruit a year hence we will destroy the tree." The lesson of the parable then is this: "He who is not yielding fruit is in danger of Perishing for his sin, and only the grace of God stays the hand of destruction right now."

Some allegorize this parable, making the vineyard the world, the fig-tree Israel, the three years three periods of Jewish history, the owner of the vineyard God, and the attendant Jesus Christ. While this is allegory in quite a harmless form with analogies which must have been apparent to Jesus' hearers, nevertheless He did not so restrict its meaning. The fig tree best represents any man's life under Divine inspection. Persistent barrenness after a due course of time is under penalty of Divine wrath, but the same God who hates sin also loves the sinner. His grace therefore gives man the opportunity to yield the desired fruits of repentance under the culture of the Holy Spirit. It is justice tempered with mercy. If we identify God with the owner of the vineyard and Jesus with the attendant we put them in conflict and are forced to the field of theology to resolve the question. Far better here to realize the two fundamental attributes of God working here for His own glory and the good of the poor sinner. God is righteous, but God is also love. God's wrath demands the punishment of sin, yet His grace operating through Jesus Christ who "ever liveth and intercedeth for us" gives us the same chance on the brink of disaster that God has always been ready to give. "Sinners in the hands of an angry God" have always had their

chance to escape. This idea of the deferring of the judgement of God, so to leave men opportunity to turn, runs through all Scripture; before the deluge, a period of a hundred and twenty years was fixed (Gen. 6:3); Abraham prayed for Sodom (Gen. 18:24); the destruction of Jerusalem did not follow till forty years after the Ascension of the Lord; and the coming again of Christ is put off through the patience of God. (2.Peter. 3:9). Were it not so, worse than the falling of the tower of Siloam would occur to destroy every living creature from the face of the earth.

Conclusion. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." The Christian who occupies a sunny spot in the vineyard but produces no fruit can take warning. His presence is not only of no value to the Owner of the vineyard, but is actually harming the good ground where another plant might be producing fruit. "A fruit-tree's reason for existence is to bear fruit. It has no claim to live if, exacting man's labor and the soil's fertility, it yields no harvest. Responsibility is the price of privilege." (5) There is no such thing as true repentance without accompanying fruit-bearing. Otherwise there would be a vacuum in our lives. True repentance for the sin of hatred is impossible without corresponding love taking its place. Selflessness must needs accompany the expulsion of selfishness. The axe is at the root of the tree-- our tree--and the time is short. God through His Spirit is working desperately--digging about the roots and pouring in the fertilizer

(5) George A. Buttrick, The Parables of Jesus (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928) p. 105.

seeking to bring us to our knees in repentance and to supply the outside energy necessary for fruit-bearing. Jesus' hearers could scarcely fail to apply this parable to their own nation--the chosen people of God. Can we in a nation more highly favored than any in the world's history fail to see that the "three years" of Divine forbearance is past and that our opportunities are running short. Jesus' hearers also looked upon themselves as the children of God, yet they are warned to repent. Can we who have always regarded ourselves as Christians content ourselves with mere existence without fruit-bearing? There may be a determinate counsel of God ~~God~~ which man may not thwart, but there is yet a choice which only the sinner can make for himself. Failure to produce figs is the fault of the fig-tree and not the vinedresser who exhausts every means to help. The Spirit of God exerts the pressure upon our hearts to yield to God, to repent, and to bear fruit in our lives. The consequences are all too clear if we fail to heed. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

The Two Debtors

Luke 7:36-50

And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he entered into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And behold, a woman who was in the city, a sinner; and when she knew that he was sitting at meat in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster cruse of ointment, and standing behind at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee that had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying,

This man, if he were a prophet, would have perceived who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, that she is a sinner.

And Jesus answering said unto him,

Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee.

And he saith,

Teacher, say on.

A certain lender had two debtors: the one owed five hundred shillings, and the other fifty. When they had not wherewith to pay, he forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him most?

Simon answered and said,

He, I suppose, to whom he forgave the most.

And he said unto him,

Thou hast rightly judged.

And turning to the woman, he said unto Simon,

Seest thou this woman? I entered into thy house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath wetted my feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. Thou gavest me no kiss: but she, since the time I came

in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head
with oil thou didst not anoint: but she hath
anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I
say unto thee, Her sins, which are many are
forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom
little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

And he said unto her,

Thy sins are forgiven.

And they that sat at meat with him began to say with-
in themselves,

Who is this that even forgiveth sins?

And he said unto the woman,

Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

* * *

A PARABLE WITHIN A PARABLE

The Two Debtors

The parable of the Two Debtors is really a parable within a parable. One of the briefest of all of Jesus' parables --little more than an extended simile (1½ verses in the English Bible, 20 words in the Greek)--is set in a narrative which itself is a parable of profound implication to our Christian life. Commentators on the parable of the Two Debtors spend far more time on the setting than on the parable itself. In fact one book has a chapter entitled the "Parable of the Two Debtors" which never once discusses the parable itself! The parable is rich enough in itself, but the setting makes it sparkle like a diamond. One wonders how much fuller interpretation of the other parables we might have if the background were as well known. And yet, as insignificant as the parable gem might appear in its more elaborate setting, the narrative of this passage would be left hollow without the little parable with which we are concerned. It is the keen edge driving home a deep spiritual lesson to our own hearts.

I. The Scene. We can only guess why Simon the Pharisee chose to invite Jesus to eat dinner with him. Possibly the reputation of this teacher and wonder-worker who was creating such wide popular interest in Galilee was such that Simon was deeply curious to meet Him personally. If Simon happened to be an outstanding citizen of his city, it may have been expected of him to

entertain such a notable person who chanced to pass through his town. At any rate, Jesus gladly accepted, as He apparently always did, whether the home was rich or poor, noble or common. Jesus could scarcely move without the knowledge of the multitude and word quickly spread as to His where-about. One who heard the gossip was a woman, a sinner. The implication is that she was one of frail character, possibly a prostitute, certainly one with whom the "best" class of society would not associate.⁽¹⁾ Picking up an alabaster cruse of fine ointment, probably used in her seductive craft, she went to the house of Simon. Weeping with deep inner emotion, no doubt caused by unspeakable sorrow and penitence for her sin, she knelt at Jesus' feet, anointing them with her tears and with the precious ointment, and wiping them with her hair.

Simon was horrified and embarrassed. It was customary for strangers and non-invited guests to invade the privacy of a home--but the presence of such a woman was likely to create a scandal. That Jesus, the prophet whose teachings about purity of heart and conduct has reached Simon's ears, should allow such a person to touch Him, or that He should fail to recognize her true character, belied the claims being made that He was more

(1) It seems to me that this woman is not the one (Mary) referred to in Matt. 26:7, Mk. 14:8 and John 12:3. The various stories are similar, yet not enough so to be proved identical. The best statement of this position is in Trench's Commentary. See Richard Chenevix Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (New York: N. Tibbals & Sons) pp. 229-232. Buttrick calls her "Mary" (a name which does not appear in this story) although his note on p. 94 indicates he does not think this to be the same incident found in the other Gospels. See: George A. Buttrick: The Parables of

than an ordinary prophet--no Pharisee would deign to let a sinner come into such close contact with himself. Yet Jesus, because He was who He was, was the only person in the room who was not shocked. Reading the unexpressed judgment in the mind of Simon, the Master said: "Simon, let me say something to you." There followed a parable so simple that Simon forgot the sinful woman for a moment and, failing to see any implication in the parable for himself in the present situation, was caught off guard when Jesus asked the concluding question. The answer of Simon was Jesus' chance to point out the vast difference between the reception He had received from Simon and that accorded Him by this woman.

"Thou gavest me no kiss upon my cheek"--a common sign of oriental welcome; "but she has not ceased to kiss my feet"--token of lowliest homage! "Thou gavest me no water for my feet"--in patronizing condescension even that most customary act of hospitality had been neglected; "but she has given me the water of her weeping!" "Thou gavest me no oil for my head"--and oil was plentiful and always at a guest's disposal; "but she has anointed my feet with costly balm."⁽²⁾

She had given of her very best to perform the most humble service of devotion. Further, her conduct showed up the gross discourtesy with which Simon had treated Jesus. The Master would probably never have mentioned these discourtesies, accustomed to such treatment as He was, had He not detected the unspoken sneer of Simon the Pharisee at this woman's conduct and His acquiescence

Jesus (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928) p. 94, note 2. Dr. Peter Marshall assumes that there are two incidents recorded but that the woman in each case is the same. Peter Marshall, Mr. Jones Meets the Master (John Knox Press, Richmond, 1949) pp. 64-65. Bruce dismisses the whole argument as ideal speculation. See: A. B. Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ (New York: Hodder & Stroughton 1886) p. 238.

to it.

Yet the closing words of this scene shed the most important light on the truth of this parable. Jesus said to Simon: "This woman's sins, which I grant are many, are forgiven for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." And turning to the woman, He said: "Thy sins are forgiven." Still missing the point, the Pharisees again whispered among themselves: "Who is this that even forgiveth sins?" But Jesus dismissed the woman with the words, "Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace." While we are left only to conjecture as to the career of this woman before and after this encounter with Jesus, we do know that she had come to Him out of a deep sense of sin, seeking forgiveness, and that she found what she was looking for. Jesus did not ignore or excuse her sinful past; He recognized how deeply aware she was of sin, and her faith in His power to forgive; He granted this forgiveness lovingly and gladly. This un-named woman's conviction of pardon secured even while it is being sought, resulting in an act of loving service is the part of this setting which gives deepest meaning to the parable itself.

II. The Parable. The rather awkward situation at the table in Simon's house provided the occasion for a parable which at one stroke defended the sinful woman and His attitude toward her, and placed Simon on the defensive to excuse his own conduct. The parable is this: A certain money lender had two debtors. One

(2) Buttrick, Op. cit., p. 97.

owed him five hundred pence and the other fifty. At the appointed time neither one was able to pay, so the lender forgave them both. That is all there is to the story itself. The two debts would equal roughly \$10.00 and \$100.00. While the fact that any creditor would forgive even such small debts is surprising, this is not the feature Jesus was interested in here. The important thing to notice is not the size but the relative value of the two--one was ten times that of the other--which occasioned differing degrees of gratitude on the part of the two debtors. This is evident from the question with which Jesus drives home the parable: "Which of the two debtors will love their creditor the most?" The small size of the debts had caught Simon off-guard--no such small items could implicate him! The situation was not unlike that of Nathan before David, and the results were equally startling and self-accusing to David as to Simon, both of whom rendered judgment on an apparently innocuous incident which immediately boomeranged on themselves in matters of larger consequence. Superciliously Simon replied to the question of Jesus, "Why I suppose the man who was forgiven the most will love the money-lender the most." Jesus replied, "You have answered rightly," and proceeded to indicate that by their reception of Jesus, the woman and Simon reflected the relative amount of love and esteem of a debtor who was released from a five hundred pence debt to his creditor and that of one who owed only fifty pence. "Why did" the woman "love intensely, and why this lavish outpouring of her love? Because she had been forgiven much! Why did

Simon love penuriously? He had been forgiven little!"(3)

What, then, is the heart of this parable? It is simply this: that there is a direct ratio between the size of the debt forgiven and the love of the debtor for his creditor--between the sense of forgiveness received in the heart of the sinner and the quality of service he is willing to render to his benefactor. In this passage of Scripture the parable illustrates the situation and the situation illustrates the parable. Both teach one great lesson: "A man's love for God will invariably be commensurate with his sense of divine forgiveness."(4) This is the truth illustrated in the parable; it finds actual expression in the deed of the sinful woman in Simon's house that day.

In most parables there are details which must be studied to discover their contribution to the meaning of the parable. Here there are virtually no details. Some have found secondary lessons. Surely we cannot fail to appreciate the forgiving and compassionate attitude of Jesus towards this woman and to all those whom the world frowns upon and casts out. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost." "They that are whole have no need of a physician but they that are sick." Nor can we fail to profit by the negative example of an uncharitable spirit as evidenced by Simon the Pharisee, yet this lesson is brought to us more impressively in another parable where one

(3) Buttrick, Op. cit., p. 95.

(4) George Henry Hubbard, The Teachings of Jesus in Parables (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1907), p. 415.

whose debt of millions of dollars is cancelled refuses to forget a trifling debt owed him by a fellow servant. But Jesus was here concerned only with the ratio of forgiveness to love for the one who forgives.

In this connection there are two questions which we must answer. One is the question raised by the Apostle Paul: "Shall we continue to sin, that grace may abound?" "Shall we go deeper into sin so that God's forgiving grace shall appear more magnificent and our resulting love be greater?

Are we to conclude...that there is any advantage in having multiplied transgressions; in owing five hundred pence rather than fifty; that the wider one has wandered from God, the closer, if he be brought back at all, he will cleave to Him afterwards? the more sin, the more love?⁽⁵⁾

I have heard college boys, reared in Christian homes, express the same idea. "Isn't it better to have my fling, do a little sinning, in order that I may know how sinful men live and thus better appreciate the forgiveness and salvation given by Christ?" The answer lies in the fact that the size of the debt is actually of no consequence. It is our awareness and concern and grief over our sin, and our desire for forgiveness which is important. Perhaps the woman had sinned more openly and flagrantly than Simon-- but not 10 times as badly. Simon, by not according proper honor and courtesy to his guest had sinned far more grievously against Jesus on this occasion than had the sinful woman. In fact there

(5) Richard Chenevix Trench, Notes on the Parables of our Lord (New York: N. Tibbals & Sons) p. 235.

is little indication that God looks upon one sin as worse than another. Often they who seem morally most upright have the deepest sense of inner sin and are most grateful for Divine forgiveness, whereas those who share all sorts of worldly corruption fail to appreciate the forgiving power of God. "To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" is not to be ^{para-}phrased "Let's indulge in more sin, that we may be forgiven more and hence love more" but rather "Whoever lacks the sense of the awfulness of his sin, does not appreciate the forgiveness of God and return love to Him."

A second question rises out of the grammatical structure of Jesus' words here: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much." Did this sinful woman in some way earn her forgiveness because of her love, as these words seem to indicate? Is not this in contradiction to the great doctrine of salvation by faith. Did not Jesus later say, "Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace"? Any attempt which some have made to make the words mean: "Her sins are forgiven, therefore she loved much" violates the wording of the text.⁽⁶⁾ Look again at the parable in the heart

(6) ἄφεωνται καὶ ἡ ἀπορία αὐτῆς αἰ πολλὰ, ὅτι ἡγαπήσεν πολὺ. One interpreter says this means: "I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven as is indicated by the greatness of her love." See Hubbard, Op. cit., p. 412. But there is no support for this practice of making ὅτι mean other than "because, since, for that, for." "No doubt, theologically, faith, not love, is the means of pardon (vs. 50) hence, some (with Calvin) interpret the 'because' a posteriori, and make it mean 'she is forgiven, as you may conclude from the fact that she loved much' (so Bengel). It is more than doubtful whether this was intended. Her love and her forgiveness were mingled with each other in mutual interchange. She loved because she was forgiven; she was forgiven because she loved. Her faith and her love were one; it was 'faith working by

of the narrative.

He who owed the larger debt is not forgiven it as freely as the other with his smaller debt, because of the greater love which he before felt towards the creditor; but on the contrary, the sense of a larger debt remitted makes him afterward love his creditor more. Moreover, were it meant that her sins were forgiven because...she loved much, the other clause in the sentence would necessarily be, 'but he who loveth little, to the same little is forgiven.'" (7)

Actually the love of this woman went hand in hand with her sense of forgiveness. Both processes were operative in the joy of the moment she fell at the feet of Jesus and unburdened her sins. In the moment she confessed those sins in the silence of her heart, love for the One who could grant forgiveness was born, and the realization that forgiveness was her even in the asking thereof flooded her soul.

III. The Application. Not long ago I was discussing with another minister the question of why it is that many of the smaller sects and denominations, relying upon emotionalism and ignoring the methods and organization so carefully planned by the larger denominations--why these groups seem to possess so much zeal and earnestness and are so enthusiastic and self-sacrificing in promotion of soul-winning and missions. Why do some individuals who may not possess a high degree of scholarship and training and who do not come from the so-called "better" classes seem to be endowed with a deep spirituality and earnestness of life and witness to the Lord Jesus Christ, when other morally

love' (Gal. 5:6), and the love proved the faith. Spiritual things do not admit of the clear consequences of earthly things. There is with God no before or after, but only an eternal now." F. W. Farrar: St. Luke, Cambridge Greek Testament. (Cambridge: University Press, 1884) p. 209.

(7) Trench, Op. cit., p. 237.

uprightly, carefully prepared cultured gentlemen and ladies go primly along, little soiled by sin, but not concerned or sorry about it either? Have we not to do with the modern parallels to the two debtors, to Simon and the poor woman? Both kinds of men have sinned. Both have incurred debts they can never repay. Forgiveness is offered free to all under the terms of faith. But out of two who profess Christ, one is set on fire with love and devotion and service, the other is not. Why?

Because many of us lack the overwhelming sense of sin forgiven. Our age has often taken a light and careless view of sin. "Who fails to apprehend the reality of sin cares little about forgiveness, and to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." (8)

In some externals we do not correspond to the Pharisee of our Lord's time; but in the great central fact of our complacency with ourselves, of our utter unconsciousness that there is anything seriously amiss with us, most of us might have sat for the picture. (9)

We frown on emotionalism in religion, and yet both sorrow and love are emotions. Sorrow for sin will bring forgiveness; assurance of forgiveness and what that forgiveness has cost will bring a flood of love into our hearts and lives. "We love, because he first love us." A sense of sin which leads to morbid brooding would never have led that sinful woman to the feet of Jesus. But a sense of His forgiving power over sin led her to this act of love.

Paul looked upon himself as the "chief of sinners," and constantly stood amazed that God should forgive such a one

(8) Hubbard, Op. cit. p. 418.

(9) J. F. McFadyen, The Message of the Parables (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1926) p. 163

as he. Consequently he loved his Lord deeply and showed this emotion in everything he did. "Faithful is the saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." He has been followed by a stream of men and women down to our day. Whether our debt of sin in comparison to that of another person be small or great there is not a one of us who can pay. We can all be forgiven. But in proportion to our awareness of this forgiveness will be our love toward our Lord. "Sensitiveness to sin is one side of that shield whose other face is sensitiveness to the undimmed radiance of God." (10)

The closer we grow to Christ, the more real His holiness becomes to us, ^{and} the more conscious we are of our own unworthiness. And with this consciousness comes a corresponding growth of the sense of forgiveness.

Always the spiritual life depends for its development upon this interplay of spiritual reactions. Growing out of a clear sense of sin is the desire for forgiveness. The reaction of the desire is the glad consciousness that God does forgive our sins; and this consciousness in its turn calls forth the response of love and gratitude from the soul. Love expressing itself in service and sacrifice is answered by further endowments of grace, and thus the process continues without end. (11)

All of us are in debt--so deeply so we can never through our own efforts extricate ourselves. But if we look to Him who can forgive our debt, and are deeply conscious of our inability to extricate ourselves through any effort of our own, then we can share with the debtor who owed five hundred pence, the

(10) Buttrick, Op. cit., p. 97.

(11) Hubbard, Op. cit., p. 417.

blessings of a greater love to Him. Which of the debtors loved the money lender the most? "To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" but to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth greatly.

The Ten VirginsMatthew 25:1-13

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For the foolish, when they took their lamps took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

But at midnight there is a cry, Behold, the bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, peradventure there will not be enough for us and you: go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

And while they went away to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage feast: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour.

* * *

WATCH THEREFORE

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Vital Christian living and witness has always been sparked by two great convictions on the part of the Christian. One is that Jesus Christ has come, and by His death offered forgiveness to those who accept Him in faith. The Parable of the two debtors illustrates the effect of such a conviction upon a saved sinner, to produce earnest love and devotion and humble service to Him who has forgiven our debt of sin. The other great conviction which has kept the Christian "on tip-toe" in his own spiritual life and development regardless of persecution and suffering, and has spurred his witness to others, is the knowledge that Christ is coming again. The Apostolic Church undoubtedly felt the drive of these two convictions. Paul's "woe be unto me if I preach not the Gospel" was rooted in these two foundations of his faith. I do not hesitate to say that I believe the average modern Christian is not as deeply concerned about either of these two facts as were the earliest converts of Paul's day and as are the newest converts of our day. Too often we have lopped off the introduction and the conclusion of Christian experience and are living in the middle--and the middle loses its meaning without the two ends. Too many of us take our salvation for granted, and are smugly sure that "it is well with my soul." Some of us may get a rude shock. We may wake up and find that, thinking our deposits are unlimited,

we have already overdrawn our account when life's final great payment is due. Such was the situation our Lord warned us about in the parable of the Ten Virgins.

I. A Final Sermon by Jesus. The 24th and 25th chapters of Matthew form one of the final sermons of Jesus. It was spoken to ~~by~~ his disciples. The passover was at hand. Opposition to Him was reaching a climax. This was no secret. Jesus had repeatedly warned His followers. They were worried. When He spoke of the coming destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, they immediately asked: "Tell us, when shall these things be?" This was the occasion of Jesus' sermon, a long discourse warning the disciples against being led astray and against being unprepared for "the end," and picturing in vivid language the disorders and sufferings which will continue until, and indicate the approach of "the end." Apparently Jesus took His own prediction of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (an event which actually took place in history during the life-time of many of the disciples) as the occasion to predict the end of the world and the second "coming of the Son of man."

Much discussion of this discourse has taken place. For our present purposes, suffice it to say that this passage clearly teaches that the Second Coming will take place at an indefinite future date. "But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only." It is equally clear that the three parables⁽¹⁾ of chapter 25 concern

(1) If the passage on the separation of sheep from the goats be called a parable as some commentators do.

our preparation for, and continual state of watchfulness for the S_econd Coming. In spite of the terrors and dangers which Jesus describes, the end is pictured as a time of joy and reward for those properly prepared. It will not be a funeral but a wedding. The return of the Master will be a day of reckoning, but for the faithful servants the reward will not be a mere receipt of wages for services rendered but to "enter into the joy of the Lord."

With the exception of 24:29-31 the emphasis in this entire discourse is not upon the Second Coming itself--(just when and how it will take place), but upon the state of mind and heart, the development of character, the fruitfulness of labor, the self-lessness of service in our lives as a condition of preparedness for our Lord's return. The teaching is not that we spend much time in conjecture about when and how these things shall be but that we concentrate on the present development of faith and charity in our lives. Perhaps the "text" of Jesus' sermon is 24:46: "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing." Especially is this true of the three parables of chapter 25. If we are properly to interpret them we must understand the nature of Jesus' teaching in this passage. The parable of the Ten Virgins has been allegorized and variously abused. Let us see what it says, in keeping with and shedding light upon the whole discourse of Jesus.

II. A Parable of Exhortation. "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins who took their lamps, and went

forth to meet the bridegroom." The introductory word, "then," clearly refers us to the preceding chapter and the scene of final separation of the faithful from the unfaithful. Jesus may have here (as is probably true in many of the parables) repeated a story which actually took place in Galilee. It is thoroughly in accord with the customs of His time, and more recent writers have seen similar incidents in India. There is some difference of opinion as to just when and where it was customary for these members of the wedding party to meet the bridegroom.⁽²⁾ The best opinion is that they met the bridegroom as he came from his home to that of his bride. According to their custom, engagement and betrothal had taken place months prior to this. Now, at the appointed time the groom came to lead his bride to his home where, if he were wealthy, a week's feasting would take place. All these proceedings would involve much mirth-making and pageantry, of which this greeting by bridesmaids was a part.

These ten virgins took their lamps, since such wedding feasts were at night, and waited--perhaps along the roadside, or in a home. These lamps were probably small brass or pottery vessels about the size and shape of a six year old child's shoe. For this occasion the lamp was tied to a stick so that it might

(2) The commentators have gone at length to discuss the point as to whether these bridesmaids met the groom before or after he had been to the bride's house, etc. It seems to me that this is only a matter for conjecture and of no value to the point of the parable at all. Trench gives the fullest discussion of this. See Richard Chenevix Trench, Notes on the Parables of our Lord (New York: N. Tibbals & Sons) pp. 498-501. The marriage customs of Jesus' day are fully discussed by Oesterley. See W. O. E. Oesterley, The Gospel Parables in the Light of Their Jewish Background (New York: MacMillan Company, 1936) pp. 134-135.

be held aloft. Both the oil and the wicks were crude (as is true of lamps today in the Orient) and required constant cleaning and trimming to keep them from smoking and going out. On this occasion the bridegroom tarried or was late. Perhaps he came from afar. This is a key point in the story. The unspoken implication is that had he been on time all would have gone well. But while he tarried the bridesmaids, perhaps exhausted already (not unusual with bridesmaids before a wedding), began to nod and finally dropped off to sleep.

At midnight there were shouts that the groom was approaching. Rising in haste, the ten virgins set about trimming their lamps. I think the lamps had been ^{burning} all evening. Some commentators think that the lamps were not already lit, and that the foolish virgins had brought along no oil at all, ~~and that~~ ^{while} the wise not only had their lamps filled but had some in an extra vessel. The words of the foolish virgins ("our lamps are going out") seem to me conclusive that there had been enough oil in their lamps for an ordinary evening, but not for an emergency, i.e., the delay of the bridegroom. There were no matches to strike at the last minute in those days. The lamps had been kept lit in readiness for the bridegroom. But they were black with carbon and nearly out of oil at this late hour. At this point five virgins saw that their lamps were going out because the oil had burned up--but the other five had prepared for this emergency by carrying extra oil. Five were foolish; five were wise. There are always some people in every group who remember to look out for

emergencies while others--more happy-go-lucky we say--are forever having to ask their wiser friends to help them out. This is exactly what the five foolish virgins had to do. But the wise virgins replied: "No, for then the oil in all our lamps would give out before the evening of merrymaking is over. Go to the store and get your own oil."

The final scene of this story shows the bridegroom and they that were ready entering joyfully into the banquet hall. The door was shut. Some claim that such wedding feasts were open only to the properly invited and properly dressed who entered in the wedding procession. Afterwards and otherwise there was no admittance. And so the five foolish virgins who called through the locked door were told, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not." It is easily possible that this was literally true--the groom would not know his bride's friends and only those who entered with the wedding party, would be acceptable to him. Hence to these foolish, the words "I know you not."

III. Watch therefore. "Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour." Aside from this exhortation, Jesus says nothing more in explanation of the parable. Evidently this is the point of the whole parable. The fact that the bridegroom tarried made watchful waiting necessary. Jesus knew that Christians would become discouraged, disallusioned, and careless when the expected Second Return (of the Lord) failed to materialize. As the virgins had gone out early in the evening and were forced to wait by the unexpected and unexplained delay in the coming of

the bridegroom, so Christians of the first century consistently looked for the immediate return of Jesus but were disappointed. Jesus has sometimes been blamed for misleading His followers about this matter; some scholars have bluntly said that Jesus thought He would return shortly but was mistaken. This parable would indicate that He warned His followers how to behave should the bridegroom tarry. It was the disciples and not Jesus who misunderstood. The Master's emphasis upon continual watchfulness and preparedness for His return was mistaken as a promise of immediate return. In this parable, a state of continual readiness is demanded of us, "for ye know not the day nor the hour."

The details of this parable have been variously explained. Do they have a lesson, and if so what are the lessons and their contribution to the central theme we have just set forth? (1) Is the bridegroom coming here intended to mean Christ coming for His bride, the Church, as many interpreters claim? I do not believe Jesus intended this full teaching here, although the bridegroom of the Parable is indeed the Son of man and although the figure is used elsewhere in the New Testament. If so, why is the bride never mentioned in the parable? and where do the ten virgins fit in, if that is the case? This is a parable, and the point here is the preparedness of the five virgins and not to teach the doctrine of Christ's final return for the Church, His bride, as such. (2) Some commentators see lessons in the number of the virgins--ten being the perfect number. It is more likely that Jesus was just thinking of a round number--as we would say, a dozen.

(3) Pages have been written as to the significance of the

lamps, and particularly of the oil.(3) The oil has been called nearly every conceivable virtue and means of grace.(4) It is a fact that the only difference between the wise and the foolish virgins was the possession and lack of oil, and because of this one group was ready and the other was not. At the Second Coming of our Lord there will be some who lack and some who have. I do not see how we can avoid this from the parable, because this is what differentiates the two groups. Now what is this something the possession of which determines preparedness? Jesus did not say here, but the context helps us. We should be true to Him and not led away by some false Christ (24:5) or by persecution, tumult, the falling away of some, and the apparent triumph of evil (24:6-12). We should be growing in righteous living and not absorbed in mere temporal pleasures as were the people of Noah's day (24:37-39). We should be busy about our Lord's affairs (24:45-46) and in glorifying Him by multiplying His possessions through our own diligent labor (parable of the talents). We should be exercising Christian charity towards our neighbors (passage on the separation of the sheep from the goats). Here is the oil which will make us ready for the coming of the Lord. He who is storing up oil is the one who is exercising faith and love and all the other Christian graces which through the exercise thereof are increased. And he who fails in these things is slowly

(3) "Origin, said their oil consisted of good works... Martin Luther said that the oil consisted in faith, living faith. But was not Grotius right when he said that the oil is the symbol of the Holy Spirit?" G. Campbell Morgan: The Parables and Metaphors of Our Lord. (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co. 1943) p. 150.

(4) Trench, Op. cit. pp. 195-198.

but surely burning up what oil he did have and is in danger of having no oil for his lamp when the moment comes to greet the bridegroom.

There are those who do not connect this parable with the Second Coming but see in it a sort of Boy Scout motto of "Be Prepared" for whatever event or crisis comes our way--particularly the moment of death. We have already shown how this parable is a part of a discourse of Jesus about the Christian's continual readiness for the Second Coming. I think that is what Jesus is talking about here, but surely the Christian who is practicing the Christian virtues and is employing every means of grace for living close to God is ready for anything not just for the Second Coming. He is ready for the crises of life come what may. He is ready for death too. Just as the man who can lift a 200lb. weight can easily muster the strength to lift a 20 lb. weight so the Christian whose stores of spiritual vitality are continually replenished and enlarged so as to be ready for the return of the bridegroom can meet any emergency while the bridegroom tarries.(5)

(4) Some see a significance in the fact that the bridesmaids fell asleep. Here again, however, the point of the parable

(5) "The parable will obtain a wider application if we keep in memory that, while there is one crowning advent of the Lord at the last, He comes no less in all the signal crises of His Church, at each new manifestation of His Spirit; and at each of these, too, there is a separation among those who are called by His name, into wise and foolish, as they are spiritually alive or dead. Thus at Pentecost, when by His Spirit He returned to His Church, He came: the prudent in Israel went in with Him to the feast, the foolish tarried without. Thus, too, He came at the Reformation: those that had oil went in; those that had empty lamps, the form of godliness without the power, tarried without. Each of these was an example of that which should be more signally fulfilled at the end." Trench, Op. cit., p. 202.

does not hinge upon this feature, and to give it meaning strains the message. (5) Others find fault with the five wise virgins for not sharing their oil and for sending their stupid sisters off into the night to buy oil at a time when they were likely to find the stores closed and the merchants in bed. But if anything at all is meant here it is that hard but true fact that the Christian virtues and spiritual stores which we interpret the oil to mean are such that by their very nature cannot be transferred from one person to another like a commercial commodity. While there are ways of assisting one another to gain these treasures and even of bearing one another's burdens, there is a sense in which each must strive and attain for himself. The primary duty of the five wise virgins was to the groom and not to the five foolish girls. And the foolish virgins, who, acting entirely in character, wandered off into the night looking for oil will find their parallel in those who having failed to prepare themselves spiritually for our Lord's Return (or for any other emergency for that matter) will hunt wildly for some quick and easy way to make up for their loss.

(6) The final detail of the parable is that of the door closed in the face of the five foolish virgins. It seems to be a very weak view that flings this off saying, "There is an end to opportunity." (6) The "therefore" of Jesus' concluding words points to the closed door--"Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour." In a passage so full of admonition about the Christian's proper conduct while the bridegroom tarries and the preparation for

(6) Buttrick, Op. cit., p. 239.

his coming, and so full of the consequences of following or disregarding these instructions, that door slammed shut forever is the logical end to the parable. While Jesus did not try to terrify us into obeying His commands, these two chapters certainly teach the finality and the awfulness of the condition of those who fail to measure up to the standards He requires of His followers. Never is the door shut arbitrarily in our faces without giving us a chance. It is through our own neglect, our own laziness, our own failure to heed His word, that we find the door shut in our faces.

Conclusion

It should not be difficult to find the application of this parable to every one of us Christians. We have already anticipated its application in the discussion above. "Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour." The return of our Lord is to be taken more seriously than a mere inclusion of it in the Apostle's Creed. It is to be constantly expected and awaited. Yet the continual absorption of one's thought in the fact of His return is not the teaching of Jesus so much as our constant state of preparation through the possession of increasing spiritual vitality and productiveness. We must keep our lamps filled with oil, that when the moment comes we may enter into the feast with the bridegroom. The penalty for thoughtlessness and lack of preparation is to find the door shut in our faces.

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and made trial of him, saying,

Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

And he said unto him,

What is written in the law? how readest thou?

And he answering said,

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.

And he said unto him,

Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

But he, desiring to justify himself, said unto Jesus,

And who is my neighbor?

Jesus made answer and said,

A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, who both stripped him, and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance a certain priest was going down that way: and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. And in like manner a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion, and came to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring on them oil and wine; and he

set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow he took out two shillings, and gave them to the host, and said, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, I, when I come back again, will repay thee. Which of these Three, thinkest thou, proved neighbor unto him that fell among the robbers?

And he said,

He that showed mercy on him.

And Jesus said unto him,

Go, and do thou likewise.

* * *

Who is My Neighbor?

The Good Samaritan

Charity is a virtue admired and applauded by Christian and non-Christian alike. "He is a good neighbor" may be the compliment paid to the man next door who makes no pretence of being a Christian, and no avowal of religious motives at all. Yet good neighborliness is a distinctly Christian virtue, for Jesus gave it special prominence by teaching it in the parable of the Good Samaritan. That many a so-called Christian has placed the teaching of this parable foremost and central in his Christian living, thereby putting his charity on the same level as his non-Christian friends' good-neighborliness is not the fault of the teaching of Jesus who clearly placed love of God first--this love to be expressed, in the second place, by love of our neighbors. This parable

is popular because to the casual reader or hearer it seems as though it makes religion very simple indeed, and for the layman it has a most gratifying way of dismissing official religion."⁽¹⁾

We can see here the necessity for proper ballance in Christian thinking: Jesus spoke this parable to one whose so-called religion was so restricted and bound by laws involving religious duties and charities that it left no room to put into practice the spirit of the law in cases not specifically covered by that law. On the other hand, some modern philanthropist will be so

(1) Leslie D. Weatherhead, In Quest of a Kingdom (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1944) p. 140.

absorbed in his works of charity that he substitutes them for true faith and love for God and adherence to the requirements God makes upon our lives. There are those who emphasize doctrines and politics to the near exclusion of obligations of a charitable nature toward society; others exactly reverse the process. In this parable Jesus is calling us from the two extremes. Bearing in mind the double emphasis Jesus was making, let us turn to the second where, by means of the parable of the Good Samaritan, we are taught the meaning of true neighborliness. We are here dealing with one of several parables which deal with the ethical or practical manifestation of Christian faith.(2)

The parable of the Good Samaritan is another example of Jesus' skill in turning what threatened to be an embarrassing argument into a well phrased lesson. One day, evidently while Jesus was teaching, one of his hearers, a lawyer, stood up and asked a question to test Him. I do not think it is necessary to assume that the lawyer was deliberately trying to trap Jesus and make Him appear ridiculous before the crowd. This, of course, could have been the result had Jesus been unable to pass the test. The lawyer probably really wanted to know what Jesus, whose fame as a teacher was widespread, would answer to a question often

(2) I do not agree with the allegorical interpretation of this parable, such as that quoted on page 15. It is surprising that Trench, who usually avoids such methods, gives such large place to an allegorical rendering of the parable. The fact that he is in good company with many Church Fathers and Reformers does not excuse him from violating his own principles and the clear teaching of the text. Christ may be the supreme example of the spirit of true neighborliness exemplified by the Samaritan, but that is no warrant for allegorizing all the details of the parable. See Richard Chenevix Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord. (New York: N. Tibbals & Sons) pp. 247-252.

discussed by the Jews. This lawyer was an authority on Jewish law and was interested to see how this distinguished teacher, who often placed a different interpretation on the law, would answer to the question: "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" The lawyer probably expected some dissertation on the necessity for (or futility of) sacrifices and other ritual observances. But Jesus asked him a question: "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" In other words: "How do you interpret the law yourself?" Not prepared to give a precise answer the lawyer hastily replied with the fundamental statement behind the Ten Commandments and all the other Jewish Law which of course was broad enough to answer his own question, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."

Jesus, pleased with the answer, replied, "This do and thou shalt live." In effect Jesus told him to give the law he knew so well full expression in daily living and all would be well. The lawyer's conscience must have been stung, for he immediately wanted to know just where the realm of his responsibility lay, asking, "And who is my neighbor?" He was "desiring to justify himself" that is, clear his own conscience (and perhaps clear himself before the crowd) that he had been expressing his duty of love in the proper fashion.

He who inquired "Who is my neighbor?" who wished the entire extent of his obligation to others to be declared to him beforehand, showed in this how little he understood of that love, whose essence is that it

owns no limit except its own ability to proceed further, receives a law from itself alone, being a debt which they who are ever paying, are but contented still to owe (Rom. 13:8).⁽³⁾

The answer of Jesus gave ample assurance of the quality and extent of true neighborliness.

I. The Good Samaritan. "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, who both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead." The modern road from Jerusalem to Jericho follows the old Roman highway, and is in some places constructed by pavement spread over the old square stones laid by the Romans two thousand years ago when they built a highway over this same route. It descends some three thousand feet in about thirty miles, to Jericho thirteen hundred feet below sea-level. Although an important and frequently travelled highway, it was beset with many dangers, particularly from roving robbers who lay in wait to commit just the crime Jesus described. A trip along the highway today is enough to convince ^{the traveller} ~~one~~ of the ease with which robbers could attack and then disappear into the wild mazes of gullies, rocks and caves, where they could never be found, or if followed could easily defend themselves. The necessity to garrison and patrol the highway in the time of Jesus is continued today. I remember seeing police cars on this very road in the summer of 1935, on the lookout for modern robbers. When Jesus mentioned this notorious crime setting, His hearers would know instantly the whole scene to which He referred. He probably got as undivided atten-

(3) Trench, Op. cit., pp. 242-243.

tion as a modern speaker who might draw an illustration from Chicago gang-land.

This traveller is described as being left half-dead by the roadside. Possibly he had struggled with his attackers; perhaps they had beat him up to make sure he would not follow them; maybe it was just plain meanness. At any rate, he lay there where three travellers soon saw him. By coincidence a certain priest came by. Seeing the poor fellow, he passed by ^{on} the other side. The same was true of a Levite who came shortly afterwards. The priest and Levite both had official duties at the Temple. They would presumably know well the Law which the lawyer had just quoted to Jesus. They may have been in a hurry, they may have had duties to perform in the Temple right away which meant they must not defile themselves with the blood of this stranger, or they may have felt that he was getting his just punishment for sins (a common Jewish theory as to the cause of such misfortunes). While there is no word of condemnation of these two in the parable, the implication is that even in the act of not committing a crime themselves, they were sinning the sin of omission. The point of the parable is not what they failed to do, but what the next traveller did do; their behavior is the dark background against which the third traveller's conduct shines brilliantly. Here is a structural feature common to many of Jesus' parables.

The third traveller was a Samaritan with whom the Jews had no dealings. The Samaritans seem to have been a mixed race resulting from the mixture of Jews living in the old Northern

Kingdom with their conquerors, the Assyrians. Jews and Samaritans treated each other as meanly as possible.

To the Jews the Samaritans were "strangers" and were regarded with supreme contempt; the scribes had an especial dislike for them. The Samaritans were publicly cursed in the synagogues; and a petition was daily offered up praying God that the Samaritans might not be partakers of eternal life. The testimony of a Samaritan was inadmissible in Jewish Courts.⁽⁴⁾

That such a person is picked out by Jesus as one who illustrated true neighborliness must have been a sharp lesson to the lawyer or scribe who had raised the question in the first place. This Samaritan stopped by the half dead traveller, who was, presumably a Jew. Unlike the priest and Levite, this man was "moved with compassion," an emotion Luke liked to observe in Jesus Himself. Stooping over the poor man, he bound up his wounds, pouring on them oil and wine (the usual medicines in those days) set him on his beast (probably a donkey or camel) and took him to an inn, where he further cared for him--possibly spending the night nursing life back into the bruised body. The next day, he too, had to get on with his journey but he did not neglect the sick traveller. He saw his act of charity through to completion by leaving a little money with the innkeeper, instructing him to care further for the sick man and promising to pay any further expense when he returned. The Samaritans' handling of financial aid is one modern philanthropists would do well to observe: The aid was sufficient but not extravagant--it took care of the need without running the

⁽⁴⁾ W. O. E. Oesterley, The Gospel Parables in the Light of Their Jewish Background (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1936), p. 162.

danger of wasting funds and possibly pauperizing the recipient, who, after all, was a stranger to him.

His parable ended, Jesus turned to the lawyer: "Which of these three, thinkest thou, proved neighbor unto him that fell among the robbers?" The lawyer could make only one answer-- but even here he could not force himself to say the hated word "Samaritan"-- "He that ~~sh~~ owed mercy on him." Jesus replied, "Go, and do thou likewise." The Master says the same to all who study this parable: "Go, and do thou likewise."

II. Charity the true sanctity. (5) There is virtually no difference of opinion about the meaning of this parable possible. It is simply to answer the question of the lawyer: "Who is my neighbor?" We see the answer in the action of the Samaritan in contrast to the lack of action on the part of the priest and Levite. Bruce has aptly phrased it, "Charity the true sanctity."

This is the key to the construction of the parable, especially to the selection of the dramatis personae--a priest and a Levite--persons holy by profession and occupation, and a Samaritan stranger of a different race from that of the man in need of neighborly succour. Through the introduction of the two former the lesson of the parable is accentuated by suggesting a contrast between the genuine holiness of love, and spurious forms of holiness; through the introduction of the latter, as doing the requisite good deed, the supreme value of love is acceptable to God; wherever it is there is true goodness, and therefore eternal life; like faith, love, wherever manifested, breaks down all conventional barriers: 'Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.' (6)

The non-Christian may profit from the message of this parable but

(5) A. B. Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ (New York, Hodder & Stroughton, 1886) p. 343.

(6) Ibid., p. 343.

it is he who is in the right relation to God who is most capable of fulfilling its principles. Eternal life already belongs to those with the Samaritan spirit.

The spirit of the Samaritan does not come by chance. It is the bestowment of God--His best gift to us. Though neighborliness may be suddenly proved (being invoked by crises as we journey), it is not suddenly grown. Heroism in the crucial test has its source in that habitual readiness to the heroic, that courageous bent of soul, which is induced by minor braveries day after day. Only so does neighborliness become instructive. Such a quality and 'set' of character is eternal life; the God-given heritage has been realized.⁽⁷⁾

Some have sought to find in this parable an effort on the part of Jesus to condemn the Jewish religious leaders in the conduct of the two who passed by on the other side of the road. While form without real content in religion was one fault Jesus found in the religion of his day, I do not think these details in this parable have that intention. Had this been the case, Jesus would have made more use of it. The question at the end of the parable focuses our attention on the one who was a true neighbor. The facts about the priest and Levite are introduced to sharpen up the remarkable action of the Samaritan.

The key lesson of the parable is also strengthened by details which point out the following lessons: A true neighbor is genuinely concerned over those in trouble--the Samaritan "was moved with compassion." His charity was not motivated by a sense of duty, or because he was "pressured" into being kind by finding himself in circumstances where his conscience would hardly

(7) George A. Buttrick, The Parables of Jesus (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928) p. 155.

let him do otherwise. His concern was genuine and spontaneous--the natural impulse of a loving heart in one who habitually saw the other man's plight as his responsibility regardless of all other considerations. Then, a true neighbor is not bound by precedent or prejudice. He could have done as the other two, now disappearing far up the highway. He could have reasoned: "If two Jews will not help their countryman, why should I, a Samaritan?" He raised no such questions. Every action of the Samaritan in caring for the poor traveller indicated total disregard of such barriers of precedent and prejudice. His only concern was the speediest method of making "his neighbor" comfortable. A third detail is that a true neighbor is thorough--absolutely complete in his attentions. He went far more than the second mile. There was no hasty attempt to aid and then run along before further complications and expenses were incurred. He did everything necessary and important before leaving--and even then he assumed personal responsibility for what further care this man might need. He was "loving his neighbor as himself."

We can never carry the application of the parable of the Good Samaritan far enough, so long as we see it is the natural corollary of the true love of a child of God for his heavenly Father. In the Parable of the Two Debtors our emphasis was on the basis of a Christian's love for God (Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with the expression of that love a secondary lesson (an evidence of the inner love of the heart). Here the basis is the same--and it must always so remain--but the emphasis is upon

the outflowing of love in true neighborliness (Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself). Every one of us must find our consciences stung as we realize how far we fall below the precedent set by the Samaritan. We are too often blind to needs about us. This blindness may be unintentional or it may be wilful. The parable teaches us to cultivate our awareness of needs--and, of course, scorns wilful blindness as was the case with the priest and Levite who saw the "case" but did not see the "cure." We have turned over the care of human derelicts and of the victims of wretchedness and tragedy to the charitable organizations which abound in modern society. But as good as these institutions are, we have lost so often the personal touch of human kindness, or rather, of Christian love. We are too content with the mistaken notion that other agencies can do such work more efficiently. What we mean is that they can do it with less trouble to us. Our money does the work our hands should do. "I can hire a man to do some work, but I can never hire a man to do my work," said Dwight L. Moody.⁽⁸⁾ It is a paradox that this should be true in an age when social considerations have assumed such a large place in Christian thinking and in the program of the Church. But now we are running the risks of divorcing the two commandments quoted by the lawyer to Jesus, of misplacing the emphasis, and of taking the personal element of neighborliness out of our program of charity. Let us find ~~in~~ the true spontaneous concern of a man for his helpless brother, let us drop precedent and prejudice as will be necessary to follow the Samaritan's example, and let

us be thorough with our kindness--something we can do only on a personal man-to-man basis where our concern is to love our neighbor as ourselves.

(8) Quoted in Buttrick, Op. cit., p. 154.

The Pharisee and the Publican

And he spake also this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought:

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I get. But the publican standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God, be thou merciful to me a sinner.

I say unto you, This man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

* * *

The Pharisee and the Publican

Nobody admires a conceited man. When this conceit is open and manifests itself not only in a lofty opinion of self but also in depreciation of others we all abhor it. There was nothing which seemed to disgust Jesus more than pride, self-satisfaction, and hypocrysy. And the target of His particular scorn was the religious bigot. It is not surprising then to find that "he spake also this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought." The following parable concerning a typical Pharisee and a typical Publican is one of our favorites. Unlike many of Jesus' parables it present practically no problems or differences of interpretation. It is so rich in implications that one sermon cannot cover all the helpful lessons it contains. Jesus calls it a parable and so it is, teaching one lesson which is equally plain from this introductory verse and from the story itself. And yet without allegorizing and without reading into it the processes of our own imaginations we can find a wealth of contribution ideas in every detail, ^{some} ~~nothing~~ which makes this parable different from others.

The setting is interesting. Jesus was enroute to Jerusalem for the last time. He had had the opportunity not only of observing the religious life of current Jewish leaders, but also of His own disciples as they followed His spiritual guidance. The parable is followed by several incidents which clearly illus-

trate how the religion of Jesus was not for the high and mighty but for the lowly and meak, i.e., Jesus' reception of little children in spite of the disciples' rebuke of them, the demand that the rich young ruler surrender the object of his pride--wealth, the cure of the blind beggar, and the invitation to that beggar to follow him, and His gracious words to the publican, Zaccheus, "Today is salvation come to this house; For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost."

In the paragraph just before this parable, Jesus has urged the necessity for persistent prayer, a matter right at the core of any man's religion. He had noticed tendencies towards pride among His disciples, and so it was to them perhaps more than to the Jewish religious leaders that He directed this parable, observing how they "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought." And no where can the inner vanity and conceit of a man's religion be found so quickly as in the way he prays. For in prayer we are forced to reveal our view of our selves as we seek to establish a relation between our selves and God. If we are to profit from studying this parable we must not see in it a lesson for some other person we know who reflects the Pharisee's point of view (something we are prone to do) but a lesson for ourselves.

I. The Pharisee and the Publican. This parable, like several others, makes use of two contrasting figures. Some have raised the question as to whether a Pharisee would ever act this way, or whether a publican would ever demonstrate such a contrite

heart. While certainly not many Pharisees would want to get "caught" at such a prayer, there seemed to have been many Pharisees of this general type.

The Pharisee's prayer is not so very unlike the prayer which every Jewish boy was taught: 'My God, I thank thee that I was born, not a Gentile, but a Jew; not a slave but a free man; not a woman but a man.'⁽¹⁾

That a Publican should so repent of wickedness is more surprising yet such things happened within the experience of Jesus, Zaccheus being a case in point. These two characters would be effective object lessons in themselves; placed in contrast they are doubly so. There is nothing in the parable to indicate that these two men were not absolutely sincere, and that each was accurate in his estimate of himself. And yet it was precisely this estimate of self before God which determined the true character of the religion of each man.

Look at the Pharisee. He was a refined, educated, clean citizen. He was

a pillar of the Church, an ardent patriot, and respected in his community as a citizen of highest character... in his own eyes and by common assent he was a virtuous man.⁽²⁾

According to habit and in compliance with the strictest regulations he went "up into the temple" to pray. Standing (in accordance with the usual Jewish custom) he "prayed thus with himself." This does not mean, as some have interpreted it, that the object of the prayer was himself rather than God, but that it was silent or

(1) J. F. McFadyen, The Message of the Parables (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co.) p. 145.

(2) George A. Buttrick, The Parables of Jesus (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928) p. 87.

or whispered prayer, not audible to those about. Not even a Pharisee would dare offer such a prayer aloud. "God, I thank thee." What follows proves that although God is addressed, the object of using His name is not to adore or worship but to call His attention to the virtuous life of the Pharisee. Thanks are offered, as is proper in any prayer, but it is not thanksgiving for what God has done but rather for how good he himself is and how well he has behaved. The Pharisee approvingly judges himself by two standards: (1) his superiority to all other men (particularly noticing the tremendous contrast between himself and the wicked Publican whom he saw out of the corner of his eye standing afar off) and (2) his careful adherence to the law--even going well beyond the requirements thereof. In comparing himself with other men, the Pharisee was thoroughly human--we all do this. But his comparisons, like those of his counterparts of all time, were negative, and should have been taken for granted by anyone who claimed to be a Pharisee. These were things naturally expected of a man in his position. "I thank thee Lord that I have not extorted money wrongfully, or been unjust in my business and social relations, or committed adultery --as you Publican does." "In prayer we look up in aspiration or we look down in humility; we never look around in criticism or curiosity." (3) No word about positive virtues such as love and service except such as were requirements of statute law which

(3) G. H. Hubbard: The Teachings of Jesus in Parables (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1907), p. 339.

was the Pharisee's other cause for self-congratulation. He fasted twice a week, when only once was required. He tithed all that he received. Possibly he tithed even his garden vegetables, or even tithed what he purchased, lest by eating untithed produce he should be party to the violation of the Law.⁽⁴⁾ No prayer, if prayer this may be called, ever reflected more clearly the true spirit of that Pharisee. It is a marvelous tribute to Jesus' ability to describe that He could picture a man's whole heart and life in twenty-one words. Our immediate reaction is one of revulsion and disgust at such a character--until we see things in ourselves which are mirrored in that revolting character, the proud Pharisee!

In deep contrast stood the Publican, hated and despised by all men. As a tax-collector he shared a profession unpopular in any society. As a collector under the system then in vogue, he was in a position to extort a far larger amount than was due the government--and publicans usually took advantage of this situation. But he was mostly hated by all Jews because he represented the Roman government. As a collaborator he was treated with the cold disgust accorded a traitor at large. One who stooped this far could well be suspected of indulging in the worst forms of wickedness. But this particular publican was different. He came to the temple to pray--a fact in itself unusual. His whole attitude depicts heart-felt sorrow, and a sense of deep unworthi-

(4) B. T. D. Smith, The Parables of the Synoptic Gospels (Cambridge: University Press, 1937).

ness. Conscience-stricken he stood "afar off," not deigning to draw near the holy of holies in his defiled condition. He could not lift up his eyes--so thoroughly ashamed was he. As he prayed "he smote upon his breast" an outward sign of inward grief or self-accusation common among Orientals. His prayer, though brief, was a true prayer, probably repeated over and over again in abject despair. "God, be thou merciful to me, the sinner." No list of sins, no list of compensating virtues, no claim of mercy deserved, simply the frank yet terrible recognition of the fact that he stood before God as a sinner. Yet the cry of anguish from such a sin-stricken wretch includes the hope and the petition that God would grant mercy. Not until sin is thus fully recognized, not until the utter impossibility of any good on our part to counterballance the evil of our nature is felt, not until a full picture of self in this true light is seen, can a man really throw himself completely at the mercy of God.

Two went to pray: oh! rather say,
 One went to bray; the other to pray.
 One stands up close, and treads on high,
 Where th' other dares not send his eye.
 One nearer to God's altar trod,
 The other to the altar's God.(5)

Jesus concluded the parable thus: "I say unto you, this man (the Publican) went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled:

(5) Crashaw, Divine Epigrams, quoted in R. C. Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (New York: N. Tibblas & Sons) p. 385 note b.

but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." How was the Publican justified?" God did not simply ignore this man's sin; probably the Publican went home, relieved of a burden he had been carrying, yet still despondent over the depths to which he had gone; but he went home nearer to the approval of God than did the Pharisee. For he had humility.

The term 'justified' (δικαιωμένος) is used in a sense kindred to the Pauline, and the comparison between the two dramatis personae has reference not to character, but to the relation to God in which they respectively stand. (6)

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Ps. 51:17) The Pharisee no doubt went proudly home, confident that he had done his duty. But the estimates of these two men in their own eyes were reversed in God's sight. "Everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled: but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

II. The Message of the Parable. There is no need to argue the purpose Jesus had in delivering this parable--it is all too obvious. The lesson is not confined simply to prayer life, as profoundly as it does affect that. It concerns every aspect of our lives and thought. Self-complacency, self-satisfaction, smug sense of security resting upon a moral life conforming to the best that society and religion demand--these are pictured by the Pharisee who failed to receive the approval of God. A true conviction and acknowledgement of sin resulting in absolute humility

(6) A. B. Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ (New York: Hodder and Stroughton, 1886) p. 316.

before God--this spirit sent the Publican home "justified" in the sight of God. How can we fail to see the Pharisee in ourselves more often than the Publican? Church attendance, gifts to benevolent causes, personal devotional life--these and all other phases of Christian living, so valuable and necessary in themselves, so often become ends in themselves and in our satisfaction at having achieved a perfect record we rely upon that as automatically winning God's stamp of approval. This parable strikes the leaders of the church as hard as anyone. So often ministers and others in positions of influence in the church are so satisfied in their personal success or the success of the program or institution they are promoting that they become victims of pride and self-complacency. There are all too few of us who ever beat upon our breasts and cry "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

We have already pointed out that every detail of this parable points up its lesson, and in the very examination of the parable we cannot fail to find application of these details to our lives. Let me point out three views of self which these details indicate.

1. Self as righteous. This is revealed in the posture and prayer of the Pharisee, who rejoiced that he was able to refrain from sin and to keep the requirements of the Law. "He trusted in himself that he was righteous." "Woe unto you Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and every herb, and pass over justice and the love of God: but these ought ye to have done, and not to

leave the other undone." (Luke 11:42) When we look upon self in this light we place ourselves where even God cannot save us without imposing some catastrophe to humble us and bring us to our senses. There was only One who had right to claim absolute innocence before God, yet He chose the path of humble obedience.

2. Self as better than others. This is again the attitude of the Pharisee, one of those "who set all others at naught." Many a man today seeks to justify himself before society and God because he is so much better than Sam Jones who went to jail and John Smith who beats his wife. We even seek to justify faults in ourselves by the fallacious argument that we are not as bad as we might be. There is no room in the Christian religion for this sort of thinking. We all, as the expression goes, "have to reach up to touch bottom" so far as attaining personal righteousness is concerned. With Paul we are all "chief of sinners" which leaves no room for invidious comparisons.

3. Self as a sinner. This is the only path to success in the kingdom of God. We have to go down in humility before we can go up in God's approval. "Except ye turn and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." It was no easy thing for a Publican to shed his profitable, if dishonest and immoral, life by admitting that he was a sinner--and the material riches of our way of life may be equally blinding us to our sin and hence hard to sacrifice. But it is even more difficult to shed the blind-fold of smug satisfaction in our own righteousness worn by Pharisees of all time, and to humble

ourselves in full recognition of our sinfulness. But not until then will we go down to our house justified. Repentance for sin is necessary to obtain forgiveness and eternal life. Full recognition of our own sinful nature will quickly humble even the most proud of us. A humility based on full awareness and penitence for sin puts us in the place where God can accept us and raise us to the exaltation of new creatures in Christ. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

With broken heart and contrite sigh,
A trembling sinner, Lord, I cry;
Thy pard'ning grace is rich and free:
O God, be merciful to me!

I smite upon my troubled breast,
With deep and conscious guilt oppressed;
Christ and His cross my only plea;
O God, be merciful to me!

Far off I stand with tearful eyes
Nor dare up lift them to the skies;
But Thou doest all my anguish see;
O God, be merciful to me!

Nor alms, nor deeds that I have done
Can for a single sin atone;
To Calvary alone I flee;
O God, be merciful to me!

And when, redeemed from sin and hell,
With all the ransomed throng I dwell,
My raptured song shall every be
God has been merciful to me!

The Mustard Seed

Another parable set he before them, saying,

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is less than all seeds; but when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the heaven come and lodge in the branches thereof.

* * *

The Mustard Seed

The parable of the Mustard Seed lifts our eyes beyond any present discouragement to a vision of the future glories of the Kingdom of God. As one of only three parables which are found in all three Synoptic Gospels, the brief parable of the mustard seed must have enjoyed prominent place in the thinking of the early Church--and with good reason. In its small and insignificant place in the world of its day--scarcely a ripple on the surface of humanity--the early Church clung desperately to such teachings of Jesus as that found in this parable.

Surprisingly enough, the parable of the Mustard Seed is interpreted in two extremely differing ways by modern interpreters. We will look more carefully at the interpretation of this parable following examination of the parable itself, but it is well to know that some look upon the mustard seed as a symbol of the rapid growth of the Kingdom of God from a small beginning to a magnificent end, while others see in it the unnatural and artificial expansion of the Kingdom, filled with evil as well as with good.⁽¹⁾ One view is optimistic, the other pessimistic. What is

(1) The Scofield Reference Bible takes the following position: "The parable of the Mustard Seed prefigures the rapid but unsubstantial growth of the mystery form of the kingdom, from an insignificant beginning to a great place on the earth. The figure of the fowls finding shelter in the branches is drawn from Daniel 4:20-22. How insecure was such a refuge the context in Daniel shows." C. I. Scofield, The Holy Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917) p. 1016 note 2. It is surprising that so great a Bible scholar as Dr. Morgan follows the same line of interpretation, though his chapter is permeated with a defensive argument as though he realizes he is on insecure footing. G. Campbell Morgan, The Parables and

the correct interpretation?

The context of this parable as we find it in Matthew is in the 13th chapter where it is the third of seven parables of the Kingdom, and also the third of three parables drawn from plant life--the planting and growth of seed. Jesus was in Galilee, and probably saw in the landscape about Him the objects from which He drew lessons. It is likely that the multitude was listening as He spoke. Mark's gospel indicates the same circumstances, and puts the parable in close connection with the parable of the Sower. Luke records the parable under slightly different circumstances but in close connection with the parable of the Leaven. The evidence then points to the fact that Jesus spoke all these parables of growth in the Kingdom on at least one occasion in connected discourse. Mark records the parable of the seed growing secretly (4:26-29) in connection with this parable of the Mustard Seed. Many have noticed the various aspects of growth indicated by the parable of the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, and the Seed Growing Secretly, where we are shown the small beginning, the permeating influence, and the orderly stages of growth of the Kingdom.

I. The Parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field." Most modern Americans associate the word "mustard" with a spicy

Metaphors of Our Lord (New York, Fleming H. Revell Co. 1943) p. 54ff. Dr. Charles Erdman expresses both views, giving preference to the view of Scofield and Morgan. Charles R. Erdman, The Gospel of Matthew (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1920) p. 107. All the other authorities cited in this paper take the other view: i.e., the growth of the Kingdom from a small beginning to a glorious size.

sauce rather than plant life. Nevertheless mustard is a common plant, and was a common plant in Palestine in the days of Jesus. The seed of this plant had a spicy taste and aroma and, as it was easily grown, was quite commonly planted in the gardens and fields about the villages. (2) The significant feature which Jesus carefully points out is not the fiery flavor of mustard seed but its size--"which indeed is less than all seeds." There is ample evidence in ancient Hebrew literature, and in writings of the time of Jesus, to show that the mustard seed was commonly used as a symbol of smallness. (3) It is indeed one of the smallest of seeds and very likely was the smallest seed with which the Jewish farmer was acquainted. The fact that there are other smaller seeds is beside the point; Jesus and His hearers commonly associated the Mustard Seed with the smallest of all objects. Perhaps a modern teacher would have to refer to some subdivision of the atom to impress an erudite audience with the absolute in smallness. On another occasion, Jesus said: "If you have faith even as much as a grain of mustard seed--even if it is infinitesimally small--it will be sufficient to move mountains."

- (2) Mt. 13:31 --field (ἐν τῷ ἀγρῷ)
 Mk. 4:30 --Earth (ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς)
 Lk. 13:19 --garden (ἐν τῷ κήρῳ)

I see no reason for quibbling over these different wordings. They have no effect on the point of the parable.

- (*) Mt. 13:32 - "it is greater than the herbs, and becometh a tree"
 Mk. 4:32 - "and becometh greater than all the herbs."
 Lk. 13:19 - "and became a tree."

The scholars enjoy discussing these differences. Matthew's account probably is closer to what Jesus actually said, and the fact that each of the other two seized upon only part of the detail does no damage to the meaning which is the same in any case.

(3) W. O. E. Oesterley, The Gospel Parables in the Light of Their Jewish Background (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1936) p. 76

But although this seed is so small, it grows into a great tree (or herb).⁽⁴⁾ Some have taken great pains to prove that this or that variety of mustard, now found in the Near East, was here mentioned. Actually there is one common variety growing six or eight feet tall which probably is the plant Jesus had in mind. No doubt in some cases they even grew exceptionally taller. Some writers have spoken of being able to climb the branches of a mustard "tree" or to ride a horse under its branches. At any rate, the point is that an exceptionally small seed produced an exceptionally large plant--in fact Jesus said that the smallest seed was capable of producing the largest herb.

As if to stress the unusual size of this plant, Jesus adds that "the birds of the heaven came and lodged in the branches thereof." Modern observers of this plant in Palestine have said that such is actually the case. Small birds, such as goldfinches and thistle finches, fly into these "trees", not so much making their nests there, but resting among its branches and eating the seed of the mustard tree. If such be the case, we need not attribute anything unusual to Jesus' use of such a plant as an illustration --the unexpected element is that such a small seed produces a plant with branches like a tree. This is a natural growth of the species of mustard with which Jesus was familiar--our own astonishment at this phenomenal growth makes it appear "un-natural" to us.

II. The Parabolic Lesson. There is no comment of Jesus or of the Gospel writers or evidence from the context to help in the interpretation of this parable. But it is placed in conjunction with other parables of the Kingdom of God, and these parables with

which it is immediately associated concern various aspects of growth in the Kingdom. This parable presents a phase of this development not emphasized in the other parables of the growth of the Kingdom. This idea is that of the unexpected size which the Kingdom will attain in spite of its small--almost imperceptible--beginning. This has been the generally accepted view of this parable.

Yet strangely enough some interpreters want to force the parable into another mould. Dr. Campbell Morgan, speaking of this parable, warns us that, "Whatever the popular interpretation may be, it is not therefore necessarily the correct one"⁽⁵⁾ but he fails to note that it is equally erroneous to press an interpretation which requires violating the natural meaning of the words. He says that the usual view of the parable of the Mustard Seed is wrong because Jesus never changed His symbolism--in the parable of the Sower, the birds who snatched away the seed had represented evil, and therefore the same must be said of the birds who lodged in the branches of the mustard tree, and hence the parable must mean that the Kingdom will become the refuge of many who are evil. But Dr. Morgan forgets that the birds in the latter parable may not have any significance at all so far as ^{the} ^{of the parable} meaning is concerned, and that Jesus spoke of birds elsewhere without their symbolizing evil: "Behold the birds of the heaven...your heavenly Father feedeth them," and "the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his

(5) Morgan, Op. cit., p. 54

head." But the fundamental error of this interpretation is its insistence that an unnatural growth of the Kingdom is meant--inferring the presence of evil accretions to the true plant. Dr. Morgan says that the growth of the Kingdom has proved unsatisfactory:

We talk today of the Kingdom of God, and of Christian nations. There are no Christian nations. There are nations that profess to be founded upon Christian principles, but there are no Christian nations. What are the unnatural notes? Exactly the opposite of the natural, loftiness, pride, dominance. Wherever in the history of Christianity these things have manifested themselves, loftiness, pride, seeking for dominance and mastery, they have proved not a normal development, but an abnormal and false one.⁽⁶⁾

Such interpreters need true vision (insight at least the size of a grain of mustard seed!) This interpretation is valid for the parable of the tares in the wheatfield where the natural growth of evil among the good is taught. But the point of this parable of the Mustard Seed is that the growth is natural for the species. It would be unnatural for this type of mustard to produce a plant of a few inches height where no birds could find branches stout enough to rest on. The striking thing about this parable is that its principle of enormous growth has been so gloriously exhibited in the marvelous growth of the Kingdom, as we shall presently point out. This lengthy rebuttal of the interpretation of Dr. Morgan, whom I greatly admire as a Biblical Expositor, is necessary here, I feel, not only because of the damaging result to this particular parable, but also to show the danger of "forcing" a parable into new or preconceived molds.

Having established the interpretation of this parable

⁽⁶⁾ Morgan, Op. cit., pp. 55-56.

as illustrating the phenomenal growth of the Kingdom from its small inception, let us examine the details of the parable to see if they have contributing meanings. These details concern (1) the man who sowed the seed, (2) the field, and (3) the birds of the heaven. The man who sowed has often been interpreted to mean Jesus Christ. Certainly we can say that Jesus did sow the seed of the Kingdom, but I do not see that we need confine the meaning there. The Kingdom has a personal as well as a world-wide application. The Holy Spirit may sow the seed in a human heart so that it grows up in that individual to gigantic proportions. Again, the Holy Spirit, or a human instrument, or the printed Word of God, may plant the seed in some foreign land, where the Kingdom takes root and grows like a mustard plant. We must here focus our attention on the growth, rather than the man who sowed the seed. The same reasoning applies to the "field" which could have meant the world of Jesus' day when He first planted the Gospel, or the human heart or area of society today where the Kingdom gets its start. As for the birds--we have already denied that they here symbolize evil. Some see in them the flocking of people of all nations into the shelter of the Kingdom. This is a beautiful and perfectly true idea, but it seems to me that here the mention of birds is merely to emphasize the size to which this mustard "tree" had grown from such a small seed.

III. The Parable and Its Modern Application... The parable of the Mustard Seed should have meant much to the disciples who heard Jesus talking of the wonders of His kingdom but were faced

with the stark reality of how small His following was--both in quantity and quality. As we read it today we cannot help but do three things: (1) Look backward through history and trace the marvelous progress of the Gospel--evidence of the truth illustrated in this parable; (2) Look about us at the current examples of such growth even now in progress; (3) Look forward in anticipation to ~~yet~~ fuller and more complete fulfillment of the prophecy latent in this parable.

Who can fail to see the marvelous growth of the Church in 19 centuries. The handful of men Jesus left behind on earth were certainly unpromising in numbers, appearance, and ability. Yet they themselves were responsible for the greatest surge forward, the greatest period of growth, of the Church. Now its members number millions, its influence has reached into even non-Christian society, and whole nations recognize her Lord (although all their citizens may not belong to the Kingdom.)

Nineteen hundred years (after the death of Jesus) in Jerusalem, where he died, there was a conference of missionary societies at which over fifty nations and millions of Christians were represented. Behold how vast a tree has grown from so small a seed! (7)

We see evidence of "mustard-like" growth on the Foreign Mission Fields of the Church today. Missionary literature and statistics and reports are full of ample evidence to support this. Often the stories amaze us by their startling fulfillment of this ancient parable.

Recently the chairman of a missionary meeting claimed that he was the founder of a flourishing Christian com-

(7) Leslie D. Weatherhead, In Quest of a Kingdom (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1944) p. 122.

munity in India, although he had never been out of England. To the amazed listeners he said that when he was five years old he wanted to give a penny to the missionaries but strongly objected to putting it in a brown box. He had no proof that it ever went abroad! The local minister was a friend of the family and also a friend of an Indian missionary. So the minister, to please the child, sold him a copy of the New Testament for his penny, and directed the boy how to post it to the missionary in India, having first written on the flyleaf an inscription giving the name of the boy. The missionary gave it to a poor native who had walked miles through the jungle to procure a Testament, but who couldn't afford to buy one. Nothing was heard of the incident for twenty years. Then another missionary, preaching in a jungle village to people whom he thought had never previously heard the Gospel message, noticed that his words were causing excited delight. Pausing in his preaching to ask questions, the preacher found that the people knew a great deal about Christ and that many were serving him. No preacher had ever been to the village before. The little Christian community had been born through the love and life of the native who had been given the Testament--the Testament which was sold for a penny to a child of five. The Testament was produced then under the palm trees; the precious seed had become a mighty tree."⁽⁸⁾

The history of modern Missions is full of similar stories and every missionary can tell scores of them out of his experiences. The "mustard-like" kingdom of God still grows with the same vigor it ever did.

There is no limit placed on this growth for the future. The principle operative in society at large will continue to operate in the world. If we sometimes get discouraged about the church and its failures and short-comings, let us read this parable and take heart. We are assured that that which has begun so small will continue to grow to great proportions. This principle will also operate in individual lives as we "grow in grace

(8) Ibid, p. 123.

and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." May the growth so evident in the past continue in our own spiritual growth, and in the growth of every new planting of the seed. There are other world philosophies, world organizations, which have mushroomed rapidly in their growth and then suddenly perished. The Communist movement has been unparalleled in the history of the world. Its growth in the past century has also been phenomenal like that of the mustard seed. Yet it too is doomed eventually to wither and die as have all such man-made schemes to re-fashion the world according to the concepts of human brains. The Christian can rest assured that only the Kingdom of God will continue to grow until it compasses all men and nations. It alone has the promise of a time when every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour of all.

Let us try as we will to limit God, to put boundaries around ourselves or our Church, to stop the flow of Christian duty, to restrict the sphere of Christian charity, the tree will burst all bonds asunder and go on growing. The tree will bring forth nothing that was not in the seed; but it has brought forth many things, it will bring forth many things, that we never imagined were in the seed. The growth of the tree is the gradual revelation of the meaning of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ; for revelation is not an event but a process, and God is writing still, and will go on writing, the pages of his New Testament. Here and there a branch may be lopped off as the once flourishing Christian Church of North Africa perished under persecution and disappeared from the face of the earth. But the tree of life grows and grows forever, because it is the tree of God, planted near by a river, the river of the water of life. (9)

(9) J. F. McFadyen, The Message of the Parables (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company) p. 124.

The Tares in the Wheat-field.

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

Another parable set he before them, saying,

Then he left the multitudes, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying,

Explain unto us, the parable of the tares of the field.

And he answered and said,

The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a (1) man that sowed (3) good seed in his (2) field.

He that soweth the good seed is (1) the Son of man, and the field is (2) the world; and the good seed, these are the (3) sons of the kingdom.

And while men slept his (5) enemy came and sowed (4) tares (darnel) also among the wheat, and went away. But when the blade sprang up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. And the servants of the household-er came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? whence then hath it tares? And he said unto them, An enemy hath done this. And the servants say unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he saith, Nay, lest haply while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the (6) harvest: and in the time of the harvest I will say to the (7) reapers, Gather up first the tares, and bind them in (8) bundles to burn them; but gather the (9) wheat into my barn.

and the tares are the (4) sons of the evil one and the enemy that sowed them is (5) the devil.

and the harvest is the (6) end of the world; and the reapers are (8) angels. As therefore the tares are gathered up and burned with fire; so shall it be in the end of the world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into (8) the furnace of fire: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as (9) the sun in the kingdom.

What to do about Tares in the Wheat-field.

A common excuse among non-Christians is, "When I see how bad Christians and church members are, I don't want to join." A frequent complaint of those inside the Church is, "Why does God allow so much sin, error, and worldliness among my fellow Christians." Religious zealots have ever cried, "Let us excommunicate the heretics, let us blot out erroneous thought." Jesus recognized how serious this question would become as the number of His followers grew. They would become more conscious of error as they came closer to the truth. Perhaps the disciples already had misgivings about brother Judas, or about some of the multitude who identified themselves with the Master but were known to be unworthy or insincere or counterfeit in their "Christian profession."

Jesus answered this problem in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, one of the few to which He gave an extended interpretation. Only Matthew records this parable--one of the seven found in Matthew 13, three of which are based on plant growth. Whether or not all these parables were spoken at one time we do not know, but it is evident that Matthew chose them as representative of Jesus' teaching regarding His kingdom. At the height of His popularity, Jesus taught the multitude by the seaside in Galilee. Knowing that so serious a matter demanded a full explanation, He explained this parable of the Wheat and the tares to the disciples privately lest they be tempted to adopt a "Holier than thou" complex and seek to call down fire

from heaven upon their less orthodox or less sanctimonious brethren.

The parable of the Wheat and the Tares presents a world fact which to many may appear as great a mystery today as it did in the time of the first disciples. Why does God permit the existence of so much evil in the world when its elimination on the part of Him who is all-powerful would put all things right? Why is not the prayer 'Thy Kingdom come,' poured forth from the lips of millions, answered? (1)

I. The Parable. Jesus, according to His custom, drew this parable out of observation and experience. It probably reflects two different methods Galilean farmers had of dealing with tares in a wheatfield. No doubt Jesus had observed the results of both methods. Like all of the parables, this one is simple and brief. A certain farmer sowed good seed in his field. Later, under cover of darkness an enemy-- perhaps because of some grudge or ^{out} ~~ought~~ of pure malice--planted other seed in the same field. These seed would produce plants called tares, or darnel. Sure enough as the wheat began to mature, the tares became evident to the servants of the owner of the field. Knowing how carefully he had selected and sowed good wheat seed they reported to their master in alarm: "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where have all these tares come from?" Their master replied, "This is the work of an enemy." The servants ask, "Do you want us to go pull out these tares." "No," replied the landowner, "You may do more harm than good by rooting up the good wheat when you pull out the tares. Let them alone until the harvest, and then I will tell the reapers to separate the two, gathering the tares into bundles to burn, and saving the wheat to store in the barn."

The Galilean multitude had no difficulty understanding

(1). W.O.E. Oesterley, The Gospel Parables in the Light of Their Jewish Background (New York: The Mac Millan Company, 1936) p.69

a simple story like this. However, certain features need to be observed by those of us unfamiliar with the Jewish agricultural background. The idea of a man's enemies sowing tares in a wheat field may seem strange and childish to us, yet Roman law provided the proper penalty for committing such a crime and even today in India similar crimes are committed. Spite and hatred may have caused someone to do just this thing to one of the farmers of Galilee known to Jesus and His listeners. It was a mean but effective method of ruining a good crop. There is nothing more frustrating than having the fruit of one's hard labor nullified--particularly as the result of someone else's treachery and spite.

The tares sown were not, as we often assume, a kind of prickly weed or briar or thorn. Rather they were plants closely resembling wheat in its early stages. Tares were so much like wheat that they were sometimes incorrectly classed as degenerate wheat. Not until the wheat heads out can the two be distinguished. Then the farmer faced the choice of either pulling out the tares, risking loss of much of the good wheat whose roots would be intertwined among the tares, or of waiting to separate the two at the harvest.

II. The Central Message. What did Jesus teach in this parable? He gave an explanation to His disciples in which ^{seven} ~~five~~ features of the story are represented as having meaning. (1) The ^{sewer} is the Son of man, Jesus himself. (2) The field is the world. (3) The Good Seed are the "sons of the kingdom. (4) The tares are the "sons of the evil one." (5) The enemy is the

devil. (6) The harvest is the end of the world. (7) The gathering of the wheat into the barn is compared to the final glorious reward of the righteous.

Actually this leaves only one item in the parable unexplained. I refer to the servants and their report to the Master of the presence of tares, with the three questions. "Did you not sow good seed? Whence then hath it tares? Do you want us to go gather the tares and burn them?" Obviously the disciples would quickly see that these servants and their questions about the tares represented themselves and their own questions about the presence of evil in the world. It was not necessary for Jesus to point this out. Looked at from the viewpoint of those disciples it seems to me that the central message of this parable is to answer the question of those servants--the question in effect put by Jesus into the mouths of His own disciples and then answered: What about evil; does not a good God purpose good ends in the world; what should we do about such evil?

Before stating this central message of the parable, the answer to this age-old question, there are several problems we must settle to our own satisfactions. First of all, is Jesus talking about evil in general throughout the whole world or about the presence of evil among citizens of the Kingdom? The parable begins with these words: "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto..." The explanation of the parable says that the good seed are the sons of the Kingdom

and concludes with the words about gathering "out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling and them that do iniquity," and send them to destruction leaving, as though by elimination of the wicked, the righteous to shine forth "as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." But at the beginning of the explanation of the parable Jesus says that the field is the world. Did Jesus mean that the kingdom and the world are, or would be, identical, or did He accidentally contradict Himself, so that actually the parable deals with evil in one or the other of the two realms? Over these words a battle has been fought, greater, perhaps than over any single phrase in the Bible except Jesus' words about the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Centuries ago the separation from the Roman Catholic Church of a group called Donatists aroused keen discussion as to whether this parable justified their conduct. "They deemed it a duty to exclude from the church everyone guilty of heresy."⁽¹⁾ The parable was construed in various ways during the Reformation to excuse or to accuse. Modern commentators disagree--some of them flatly taking the words "the Kingdom of heaven is likened..." as the key, others "the field is the world..." and still others both views correlated.⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ George A. Buttrick, The Parables of Jesus (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928) p. 61.

⁽²⁾ Buttrick: "This parable does not concern church discipline for the reason that the Christian Church did not exist when the parable was spoken. The parable bears on life and the disconcerting presence of evil; it is applicable to the church only as the church is a province of life and beset by evil influence. It offers more than a rule of thumb; it breathes the spirit from which alone wise action can proceed. Buttrick, Op. cit. p. 63.

Trench: "the parable is, as the Lord announces, concerning the 'king dom of heaven,' or the Church." Richard Chenevix Trench, Notes

It seems to me that Jesus was by the expression "the field is the world" indirectly guarding His disciples from a narrow view of the Kingdom as the realization of Jewish hopes of a national kingdom ruled by the Messiah in Jerusalem for the benefit of the Jews. The field is the world, says He interpreting His parable, with which the kingdom of God is co-extensive even though all the world does not belong to the kingdom. The good seed is sowed in the world, not the Jewish church. The sons of the kingdom comprise the kingdom throughout the world which will be faced with the problem of evil within itself. The disciples would be particularly perplexed by this and not by the presence of evil in general throughout the world where they would take its presence for granted. Hence this parable especially concerns Christians who find fault within the Church. We cannot deny, however, that the parable does have real value in determining our views of the problem of sin and evil in the world at large.

on the Parables of Our Lord (New York: N. Tibbals & Sons) p. 76.
Bruce: "Christ is not here laying down a rule for the regulation of ecclesiastical practice, but inculcating the cultivation of a certain spirit—the spirit of wise patience; especially by Christians, the children of the kingdom.... The lesson applies not only to the evils in the world, but also, and more particularly and chiefly, to the evils in the Church." A. B. Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ. (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1888) pp. 54-55.

Oesterley: "The field in which the good seed is sowed is not the Jewish Church, but the world." W. O. E. Oesterley, The Gospel Parables in the Light of Their Jewish Background (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936) p. 65.

Morgan: "The field is not the church but, as Jesus says, the world." G. Campbell Morgan, The Parables and Metaphors of Our Lord. (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1907) p. 78.

If then, Jesus was preparing His disciples' thinking relative to the presence of error in the Church, was He instructing the Church never to use discipline in cases where Christians in name were clearly not Christians in their hearts and lives but were rather pseudo-Christians--harmful and dangerous tares among the good wheat? Was Jesus teaching absolute tolerance? Here we have a question with wide implication to our Church life, and to our individual attitudes. It seems to me that if we try to bring the question of church discipline into the field of this parable we are in danger of forcing the parable to teach something Jesus did not intend. It has bearing, of course, but only in so far as the Master was urging His followers of all time to a spirit of careful, prayerful waiting for evil to bring forth its true fruit before indulging in vengeance. Vengeance is God's, not ours to wreck. Punishment of sin is His sphere, not ours. The question of the servants in the parable was "Wilt thou that we gather up the tares." "Not you, but I will give command concerning the tares at the proper time," says the Master.

Jesus was not referring to Church discipline, for the disciples who listened likely had no idea that disciplining others would ever rest upon their shoulders, but rather to the spirit they should have towards Christian brethren with whom they differed, or who seemed in error and sin. The words of Jesus about plucking out a diseased eye or cutting off an offending hand teach us quite plainly that we are to be severe with evil in ourselves about which we become aware. But dealing with sin in ourselves and deal-

ing with the sin we detect in others are two different matters. We may behold a mote in our brother's eye and consider not the beam in our own. Before criticizing or damning another Christian's faith or works, we do well to ponder the question: "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone."

Yet we cannot be blind to error in the Church. We must point out sin and at times deal severely with sinners. Jesus Himself denounced the pride and hypocrisy of the Jewish church leaders, and used a whip to break up an evil practice in the church.

Even so, while the world lasts, there will be need and room in the Church for the exercise of discipline, that ~~that~~ the reality of Christian life in the holy commonwealth may come as near as possible to its high ideal; and yet the lesson of our parable will always be valid as a protest against all Church censures springing out of an impatient view of the evils inseparable from the kingdom of God in its present state, and as an admonition to those who have authority in the kingdom to exercise their authority in accordance with the rule so well expressed by Augustine: "Let discipline preserve patience, and let patience temper discipline, and let both be referred to charity, so that on the one hand an undisciplined patience may not foster iniquity, and on the other hand an impatient discipline may not dissipate unity." (3)

The central message of this parable then is this: The presence of tares among the wheat is a fact in the Church (as well as in the world at large). There will always be a certain admixture of evil along with the good. Our attitude toward those groups or individuals whom we feel are not the true sons of the kingdom must be marked by a spirit of true patience and forbearance, awaiting the full out-cropping of evil

(3) Bruce, Op. cit., p. 56.

at which time the false and wicked will be destroyed and the true and righteous rewarded according to their merits. We are warned against stern intollerance and censoriousness, heresy hunting, and purges lest we harm the good while seeking to destroy the evil, or lest we mistake for evil something which may later reveal itself by its fruit to be the true wheat.

III. Details in the Parable. Now, what about the meaning and value (if any) of the details in this parable? More than any other parable, this one is given meaning in its details by Jesus Himself. It actually approaches allegory because of this. These details do point up the central message. While our handling of the problem of the tares among the wheat in the Church is the central message, there are in addition two clearly taught auxiliary truths. In this respect the Parable of the Tares and the Wheat differs from most of the other parables, and we are justified in pointing these lessons out only because Jesus Himself does so, and because they are the natural truths which should be revealed in a parable whose central message concerns our attitude toward evil within the church. Interestingly enough, these two truths are those which Jesus brought out in His own interpretation of the parable, whereas the heart of the parable message (which we have already discovered) required no further interpretation, for it is self-evident in the parable itself in the reply of the Master to the servants: "Nay, lest haply while ye gather the tares, ye root up the wheat with them." These two truths concern the origin and the final outcome of sin and are just as true of sin in the world as they are of sin in the Church.

The Christian who is troubled by the presence of evil in the Church inevitably raises the cry to God the Creator: "Didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? whence then hath it tares?" The answer in the parable is "An enemy hath done this;" and Jesus interprets: "the enemy that sowed the tares is the devil." Jesus does not attempt here to explain why God permits this, or exactly in what form it all takes place. He merely points to Satan as the root and fountain of sin. Satan is an intruder into God's field. With deliberate malice he pollutes God's creation, pronounced as good by God Himself. Particularly does this enemy endeavor to sow tares among the wheat, to spoil the harvest of loyal sons of the kingdom by getting them mixed among the sons of wickedness. Dr. Morgan quotes another preacher as saying: "The devil is a squatter. A squatter is a man who settles on land he has no right to, and works it for his own advantage." (4) While the wheat is growing the tares are also growing. Even as the kingdom of God grows and matures, evil is also bringing forth its rotten fruit. Jesus made no attempt to explain all the related problems. He merely warned His disciples that the evil with which they would have to deal was the work of a malicious enemy--the devil--the manifestations of whose wickedness would become increasingly evident.

If we could conspire with God, we would sweep away wickedness with a strong hand and make an instant paradise. But--we are not God. We are very far from Godlike...If the righteous were to be uprooted, could any of us hope

(4) Morgan, Op. cit., p. 51.

t to be spared?"(5)

And the Christian who faces evil will also be perplexed as to its final outcome. "How long!" The Lord of the harvest assures us in this parable that though the tares grow to ominous size and may appear to take over the field, yet in the end He has the purpose and the power to separate the wheat from the tares and deal with each in the proper fashion. That this parable is clearly intended to teach the final triumph of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked is without question, both from the parable itself and from the interpretation Jesus Himself gave. More than half the words of interpretation concern the final judgement of right and wrong. Five other parables of Jesus point to a similar time of reckoning, particularly the parable of the draw-net: "So shall it be in the end of the world: the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the righteous and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth." The mystery of God's tolerance of wickedness and the command to us to let both the tares and wheat grow together until the harvest would be incomprehensible to us if it were not for the assurance of the ultimate outcome.

...evil is not, as so many dream, gradually to wane and disappear before good, the world to find itself in the Church, but each to unfold itself more fully, out of its own root, after its own kind: till at last they stand face to face, each in its highest manifestation, in the persons of Christ and of Antichrist; on the one hand, and incarnate God, on the other, the man in whom the fullness

(5) Buttrick, Op. cit., p. 66.

of all Satanic power will dwell bodily: Both are to grow 'until the harvest,' till they are ripe, ^{one for} destruction and the other for full salvation. (6)

The answer of Jesus to the perplexity of the Christian who cannot understand why God allows the tares to grow is strengthened by what He says about the origin and final outcome of this evil. Jesus did not give all the details or answer all our questions about these two matters but He does grant assurance that the enemy and not God is responsible, that God has not let the crop get out of hand--that He will surely destroy the tares once their true nature is evident, and it is possible to destroy them without also uprooting the wheat.

Conclusion

^{Let}
~~Each~~, each of us examine his own heart and life in the light of this parable. Of the many applications we find are these two in particular. The presence of error need not depress or discourage us. Remember that wheat--the sons of the kingdom--is abundant and the crop is growing! And evil is inevitable so long as the adversary, the devil, is free to beget his sons. But God's wondrous power will in the end render to them their just deserts. And we know from assurances not included in this particular parable that God can transform even the tares into wheat, often due to the influence of the wheat in proximity to the tares. A second application is this: The presence of those with whom we differ, and those who seem to represent the Devil more than God must excite not anger and intolerance but patience and willingness to wait for the fruit to bear witness to

(6) Trench, Op. cit., pp. 81-82.

the true nature of the plant. Are you a heresy hunter? Are you seeking to enhance your own prestige by the discovery of wickedness in others? There are those who delight in discovering error in others. This practice encourages a sort of false pride in ourselves whom we naturally regard as the correct standard of righteousness. Remember that there is none righteous, no, not one. And what to you may be a heresy may manifest itself later on as true wheat. The history of the Christian Church has not always been a pretty one. In total disregard of this parable, men have literally slain one another in their efforts to gether up the tares--and often the wheat has suffered just as Jesus predicted. There are strong currents in the Church today seeking to sweep one another off the ecclesiastical map. Many of the "new fangled notions" persecuted today will become standard tomorrow. And conversely much of the spiritual power of certain "sects" and relatively minor groups frowned upon by the intellectual snobs of the "regular" church denominations will reap an abundant harvest of true wheat.(7)

None of these remarks based on this parable are to be construed to mean a watered down, spineless, compromising religion which welcomes any and all to its fellowship regardless of faith

(7) Peter and Paul at first were condemned by their fellow Christians for taking the Gospel to the Gentiles. But these "tares" soon gave evidence of being good wheat. The Roman Catholic church looked upon Luther and Calvin as tares but (though the Catholics would not admit it) the Protestant movement has yielded much fruit. Glaring examples of the harm caused by the attempt to root out the tares are abundant. In Korea the efforts of a few who looked upon themselves as the true Church to denounce their fellow Christians for worshipping at the Japanese shinto shrine years ago are still threatening to disrupt the entire Church, and

and evidence of a regenerate heart. This would be a false view of real tolerance. Let us not take a cheap and easy notion about sin. Wheat is still wheat and tares are tares and Jesus says nothing about mixing the strains. Of course there are evils to be discerned and shunned and at times denounced and expelled. Of course we must stand up for what we know to be true and right, and declare boldly the revealed will of God to men. But let there be a spirit of patience and Christian tolerance that gives God His rightful chance to deal with a problem which ultimately He alone can solve, and which spares us from adding guilt to guilt by rooting up the wheat with the tares.

cause harm to the true wheat as well as to those who, we grant, may represent the tares. A campaign in a church newspaper of slander and abuse of a church leaders whose view or whose actions are regarded as wrong may undermine the confidence of the church at large in its leaders and the organs they represent thus doing irreparable harm to the peace and purity and growth of the true crop.

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