

PARABLES, “THROUGH PEASANTS EYES!”

Study 3, Introduction, Part III.

1. In understanding the culture that informs the p is an internal question. We are not primarily concerned with geography, dress, formal customs, weather, and agricultural year. Rather we are interested in how people act, feel and respond. We want to ask the 5 key questions at crucial points in each p in order to recapture the music of the storyteller’s piano. These questions are;
 - a. Response
 - b. Value Judgment
 - c. Relationship
 - d. Expectation.
 - e. Attitude.How is a father supposed to respond when a prodigal son returns home? What is the relationship between a master and his student? What value judgment does the listening audience make when it fails to attend the banquet? What is the attitude of ME listeners to an imperialistic ruler? What kind of her does the audience expect in the p of the Good Samaritan? One time we ask these to the people themselves in the story and we ask them of the listening audience.
2. Some may object to do this is to ‘psycho analyze’ the characters in a p is irresponsible. The reality is that every culture has a ‘grand piano’ mentioned above with an entire complex of attitudes, value judgments and known responses. This whole communication system also existed between Jesus and his first listeners. In this communication system the meaning is to be found. It is precisely there where the theology of the p is found and the failure to ask about the ME response is to substitute other responses is failure to understand the p itself. It is analogous to looking at the placid surface of the water on a rocky shore and failure to put on a rubber mask to see the fascinating world of color and motion beneath the surface. Speculative mind reading of the characters in the parables is not the point.

Rather we seek out the basic ME responses to the human situations reflected in the p.

LITERARY STRUCTURE:

3. Literary structure is important. This is examining patterned repetition of words and phrases and their significance for interpretation. We need to look to the OT for a few illustrations and definitions. Remember, the OT is the NT _____ The NT is the OT revealed.
4. Prophecy and poetical books of the OT use a lot of Hebrew Parallelism. This literary device is built on the use of two lines that are related to each other in a special way. The 2nd line may be the same as the 1st line, this is *synonymous* parallelism. When the 2nd line is the opposite as the 1st, this is *antithetical* parallelism. The 2nd line may be the climax of the first, or an illustration of it, or said in a way to make it understood. This is sometimes called '*synthetic*.'
5. The 2 line parallelism is a tool the poets of the OT developed and there are three styles to related these different parts of the parallelism;
 - a. Standard,
 - b. Inverted,
 - c. Step.
6. We can see this in Isaiah 55:6-10. In verses 6-7 are three couplets of standard parallelism, and the theme stated in the first line is repeated in the second;
 - A. Seek the Lord while He may be found.
 - A. call upon Him while He is near.
 - B. let the wicked forsake his way
 - B. and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
 - C. Let him return to the Lord that He may have mercy on him,
 - C. and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.

Verses 8-9 are inverted parallelism, which can be seen here;

- A. For *my thoughts* are not *your thoughts*
- B. Neither are *your ways, my ways*, says the Lord.
- C. For as the heavens are higher than the earth.
- B. So are *my ways* higher than *your ways*.
- A. and *my thoughts* higher than *your thoughts*.

These are still pairs of lines, but they're arranged in a different order.

The theme, "My thoughts/your thoughts occurs at the beginning and is repeated at the end of the illustration and parable. Note, the parable is the middle line as the 'my ways/your way's occur in the 2nd and 4th line. This is parallelism, but *Inverted* in this case.

In verses 10-11, Isaiah turns to *Step* Parallelism, which can be best seen printed as;

- A. For as the rain and the snow came down from heaven.
- B. and turn not thither but water the earth.
- C. making it bring forth and sprout.
- D. giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
- A. So Shall be my Word that goes forth from my mouth.
- B. it shall not return to me empty
- C. but it shall accomplish that which I purpose
- D. and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

The four lines in the first verse match the four lines in the second verse in an ABCD-ABCD Pattern, making it a *step* design, and thus this poetic device can be called *step* parallelism. The first line of each stanza speaks about something going out. The second talks of it 'not returning and the last two are the results.

7. These three stylistic devices can be used in various combinations, but the basic literary building blocks are the three types of parallelism outlined above. A great variety of patterns are often found in *inverted* parallelism (Sometimes called a chiasm). This this device needs special attention.
8. Isaiah 55:8-9 examined above is *inverted* parallelism. In Biblical literature we see couplets, paragraphs, chapters and even entire books being composed this way. This leads us to inversion principal. Let's look back at Isaiah 55:6-7, The first couplet is to seek the Lord, the second tells of the wicked and the that third couplet we return to the theme of the first. Many times, not always, the writer places the climax at the center. The center is often times the 'point of turning,' of the differences in the first and second parts. There are many ways the author can heighten the message by the use of inversion, these are rhetorical devices, they are important for any passages of Scripture and the question, is what is the significance for parables?

9. Let's look at two P; Luke 7:36-50 and 18:18-30. The parable is in the exact center of the dialogue and the dialogue occurs in structure with the inversion principal. P can be short or long stanzas. Sometimes they can be p ballad. We must study them and we can see a discernable pattern in the p or the Good Samaritan. The *internal* pattern can add deeper interpretation.
10. We can see parallelism beyond almost anywhere in the Bible. Theological themes can be seen throughout the NT if you study them. (Some relate this to a saxophone, it is an instrument that is easy to play poorly). We must caution ourselves to try to not find correlations that really aren't there. The author presents a very large study about types of rules that could be followed, however for the sake of this study, these don't seem to be very beneficial to us.

THE PROBLEM OF THE ONE and the MANY

1. In the past parables were pulled apart to examine every very part and interpret every part with some form of mystical meaning (Me too!). P interpretation can become very confusing. We must affirm that no theological doctrine can ever be based solely on P! With allegory, one can read anything into any parable.
2. There are some scholars who say that there is really only one main teaching in each p. This author believes that there can be more than one theme in each parable and this doesn't destroy the unity of the p.
3. Let's take a look at Nathan and David. (See II Samuel 12:1-6). Can someone retell it. Are you familiar with it?
The rich man symbolizes David.
The poor man symbolizes Uriah
The lamb symbolizes Bathsheba.
4. We must note the set of symbols. Remember, a symbol represents something else! These are symbols not allegorizations. A symbol represents something else and an allegory is something else and has no other existence (Chronicles of Narnia) These three symbols are presented so the original audience can understand. We could add more symbols, the flock, the traveler, the morsel and assign them meanings of one kind and

another, and eventually make it into whatever we want. The Theologian Moule compares a p to a political cartoon that the reader has to understand, as it has symbols. The cartoonist makes symbolic representation that only the reader can interpret correctly. Likewise P have symbolic meaning. THE SYMBOLS TO LOOK FOR ARE THE ONES THE ORIGINAL TELLER PUTS IN THE STORY FOR THE PURPOSE OF COMMUNICATING WITH THE ORIGINAL AUDIENCE.

5. The symbols are used to press the listener to make a decision/response. David is pressed to say, "I AM THE MAN!" In that response the unity of the p is found.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

6. We are 3000 years from David and his world. What can this p mean to me as I'm not an Oriental King? The meaning is found at the theological cluster of motives the work together to make a single response/decision. Nathan is using a number of theological themes and combining them into the story to lead David to make that move. How does it move to you?
7. Here are some possible answers.
 - a. David is not above the law, it's God's law, not his, God is offended.
 - b. The law gives special rights for the "The stranger within the gates." Uriah is a Hittite, David needed to give Uriah that right.
 - c. Unlike Egypt or Babylon, the women are not for the king's choosing like grapes on a vine.
 - d. David had many wives, Uriah has only one, justice is violated!
8. Even though we are not an Oriental King who did this sin, the p leaps centuries forward and applies to all of us. Once we know the theological cluster, we know that it's for all people, of all places and all time. The lesson in Nathan's P is more than "Don't steal your neighbor's wife." Primarily it answers that ageless question-the king is not above the law.
9. In this study we will identify the original listener and understand what Jesus was trying to get them to understand and do!
10. We will then see what the text says to us!

Next time 8 basic steps for the non-specialist which a specialist could dig deeper into for more significant meaning!