

### **The Parables by Brad Young**

I like the way Young starts off his book on the first page with the first line; "... word pictures of a parable". Second line is just as good; reaching the "heart through the imagination". Wow!! Could this book be one of the best for me in my library? When an author begins with capturing the heart and the imagination, then I am enthusiastically looking forward to a real good sit down. And a real book of pages that I could purchase, underline, scribble, highlight and write notes in the margins.

Through the life experience in the Rabbinic culture and in their heritage, comes the classic parable (Mashal, a comparison or analogy). The Hebrew Bible is at the root of how the parables speak about God. We experience the "rhythmic cadences of Hebrew poetry" when reading about God. Images are portrayed through the spoken words. And God is revealed through His mighty acts and everyday ordinary living experiences. In both Rabbinic and Gospel parables are told within a story telling methodology. The parables have a theological significance in its undergirding elements. This reveals a "spiritual dimension" along with the reality of the world in which we live, "God is the ultimate reality". Above all, the Rabbinic and the Gospel parables tell us about God. Telling stories about daily living, the old Rabbis "tried to communicate" God's character and His will. This is also the way "with Jesus and His Jewish parables". So, it is clear that "one must understand parables to know Jesus".

The authentic meaning of the parables was often distorted at the time of the reinterpretation with the Greek translation. Young states that the parables became "far-fetched allegories and teaching became directly opposed to Jesus and His Judaism...."

Haggadah is storytelling with a message and usually demands a decision and “centers on God’s way among people whom He loves.” The Haggadah finds its way to the heart and then “challenges the mind.” The written Word comes alive with Haggadah. Parables reveal the likeness of God in the story through metaphoric languages; (Metaphor- a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them as in drowning in money, or you are a peach.). Therefore, we must be trained to see the likeness of God in the parables. “The rabbinic parable describes the relationship between God and His people.” The human experiences of life that are known, reveal the unknown about God. Yet, “the parables are designed to portray a reality.” This helps us to see things the way God sees them. Gospel and Rabbinic parables are different and unique. Other literature can be inclusive of style and how they come together in their literary content, but, not so with the parables. One example is real characters. Another point to think about is the teaching and moral content of the parable. Mostly, God is at the center of the content. Just as critical is that the story is a reflection of everyday life. Jesus’ parables are directed towards the people who shared the same language, which was Hebrew. Also, the cultural heritage was unique in Jerusalem. In addition, the historical sphere of the people in the region is important and most relevant. The storyteller often relates the human experience in their encounter with God. Real life again is pictured in the exchange and has a deep meaning. “Faith” is key in the parable story. God is held high in awe and the story emphasizes the instruction towards God’s teachings. But deeper still is the spark of light that the parable ignites in the soul of all of us. Learning is a step forward to change through “spiritual truth.” Young puts forth six basic steps to storytelling. Starting off with being able to create “anticipation”.

Introducing the cast is next. Followed by the “conflict.” The parables will move forward towards a remedy in the story then the moral or point of the message.

What is God like? Jesus teaches this through the Torah and the Prophets. Again, Young reiterates that the purpose of the parables is for instruction. A moral or point is a constant characteristic of the parables. In addition, the parables were at first an oral story, Jesus taught extensively through His parables, and they were popular. Young estimates about one third of His instructions were in the form of a parable. To emphasize a point and make clear He would use dual parables. In His attempt to show God’s character Jesus would use a comical parable in describing who God is not.

Young contends that digging a bit into Jesus’ words that are in the Gospel texts and a thorough study of their setting, one can see a clearer picture of Jesus’ message. Going on to the next step or one step further, we should look at the parallel Rabbinic early Jewish literature and the “Hebrew Character” of Jesus’ sayings. Young calls it “linguistic Analysis.”

Telling a story can be dramatic if the storyteller can presume and anticipate the thoughts of the listener. Even more so if the storyteller uses “vivid everyday life examples” in his story. We need to remind ourselves often that parables were told orally and passed down through the generations. Also, we must remember that the Arab culture is unique in respect with hospitality. I don’t know how many of my neighbors would say to me at zero dark thirty in the morning “my house is your house;” and then proceed to honor any of my requests.

As Young focuses on the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, he contends that Jesus is a “religious leader” who is inspiring Israelites to take a fresh new insightful look at the everyday struggle for a livelihood and making changes in the social and economic realities of living in first century Israel.

It is Flusser, contends Young, that most closely relates Jesus to the early Rabbinic teachings of Judaism in the area of grace and reward for obedience. Grace is God acting outside of anything you can do to have God's favor. Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard is one example. Jesus' method of teaching this characteristic of God is by getting his hearers to participate in the story. The landowner represents God, showing fairness and unlimited grace.

The Jewish view of how God sees His creation is that all belongs to Him. Praise is due Him daily. Because of His mercy and compassion, His gift of the abilities we have needs to be used to be increased. This will honor the Lord for His glory. Based on one's faithfulness in the minor things in which God entrusts with his servants, if proven faithful, then larger things in higher roles will come. Faithful service in "stewardship" goes back to ancient Jewish thought and teaching. Young provides examples with David and Moses. Both were shepherds who were tested and provided faithful service.

As we have outlined, the Nimshal of the parable is understood in different degrees. The good Samaritan is just such a parable and the one who showed "compassion." In the same vein, Rabbinic thought teaches being merciful to others and in Heaven you will be shown mercy. This is reflected in Jesus' parable of the "unforgiving servant." Historical Jewish teachings need to be understood for the background in Jesus' parable. If one does not forgive in dealing with personal relationships, then watch-out, God will be reluctant in dealing with your fate. We need to show mercy like God does, and this goes for compassion as well. And this Nimshal of repentance is strong in the Jewish "faith and practice" as Jesus portrays the story of the prodigal son. Also, in the same theme from the Israelite sages, is that God will do His part to provide for your return to Him after you initiate the "journey." He wants you back, so to speak. We need to know how much God "longs for the repentance of His people", no matter how big the sin or sins. Ingrained

in Jewish thought is the powerful and merciful God who longs to forgive if you did the same with your neighbor.

Because of God's grace, we need to be grateful no matter how many, or few is our sins. We need to remember that Jesus teaches of God's great "love and acceptance." This is His teaching on Divine Grace.

Finally, Young winds up his book with the "outcasts," then discipleship, and final judgement. Jesus' message is of God's acceptance, and the "open invitation." However, don't miss the invitation because it is time sensitive.

In a sense, we are our brothers' keepers. Therefore, it is important that we focus on those who are lost. The work is taxing, yet there is much Joy in the great commission.

Great debate occurred when Jesus pressed the right buttons with his style and teaching. Even though He was in line with the Rabbinic religious leaders and Torah scholars, the issues were highlighted over His teachings that "stressed doing good deeds over and above the study of Torah." Also, in agreement with this is Rabbi Rarfon, a leading sage who believed that "Action took precedence over learning." Jesus was about action, "hear and obey." Doing unto others.... is at the core in Jesus' message and is front and center to learning Torah just to gain knowledge. Jesus does not put the Torah aside but puts the heart into Moses' message from God. The "heart is glad" and stirred when the message from Jesus is heard. The "Kingdom" parables are the gem of gems. When understood, which most likely will take a lifetime, everything is turned upside down. The cost? All one has and more. God's reign begins to come into focus. The reverence of God was one of the primary goals in Jesus' teaching. Great joy is the prize while here in discipleship; Eternal joy is yet to come.

The “Kingdom” parables are taught to us from the human experience of daily life, and they give us a glimpse of the “reality of the Kingdom,” and to Jesus the Kingdom “is above all.” Being joyful in the pursuit of “the Kingdom” will in itself provide for your needs while still here on earth. Young’s closing remarks and final contention is to pursue knowledge of Ancient Judaism, which is the key to the rich understanding of Jesus’ parables. This is a lifetime endeavor.