

BOOK REPORT

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The Challenge of Jesus' Parables

Edited by

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The Challenge of Jesus' Parables contains three hundred and twenty four pages. It is the scholarly work of thirteen contributors edited by Richard N. Longenecker. Richard N. Longenecker (190-1921) was a distinguished New Testament scholar who taught for many years at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto. He was the author of numerous books, including Paul, the Apostle of Liberty, and The Christology of Early Christianity.

This book is divided into four sections and thirteen chapters. It is organized around the subjects of History, Genre, and Parallels, Parables of the Kingdom, Parables of Warning and Preparedness and Parables of the Christian Life. This is the fourth volume in a series that thirteen scholars, experts in their field, have dedicated themselves to examining the parables of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. This is in an attempt to discover the meaning and application of Jesus' parables in their original context.

Chapter 1 is primarily concerned with the various methods used to interpret the parables of Jesus, and to give a history of different methods used to interpret the parables of Jesus. The Theological Allegorizing writes Snodgrass, "From the earliest days and throughout most of the church's history, Jesus' parables have been allegorized." (pg.3). Allegorizing gives one the ability to

introduce whatever one wants into the parables which may not have anything to do with what Jesus was teaching.

Chapter 2 begins with a look at the modern discussion of parables, and points out the distinctions between similitudes and parables, and uses some examples from Julicher “absolute distinction between parables and allegories is generally not accepted today.” (pg.32) Various examples of parables are given in the Old Testament, place emphasis on the Hebrew word *mashal*.

Chapter 3 addresses parables in Early Judaism and shows how the parables of Jesus are not unique, but they are similar to the rabbinic parables, in their form and they are about the same length as rabbinic parables.

Chapter 4 deals with Mark’s parables of the kingdom and looks at the Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Parable of the Growing Seed. There are four parables in Mark, and three of them have to do with sowing seed and the mustard seed. Hooker writes “The fact that Mark has placed these two parables together as a pair suggests that he understood them both to be conveying the same message.” (pg. 97) The Kingdom is not some future event for Mark, but the kingdom is present now in the life of Jesus.

Chapter 5 addresses Matthew’s parables of the kingdom. Jesus begins with the parable of the sower, and the seed which falls in many places. The emphasis is placed on the heart of the hearer; the depth to which one hears and receives the word, and the responsiveness of the hearer when he hears the kingdom’s message. Hagner notes, “The parables of Matthew 13, in short, address realities that continue to be of great importance for the church today. They confirm to us the reality of God’s kingdom and motivate us in our discipleship. But they do so only if we have ears to hear!” (pg. 122-123).

Chapter 6 looks at Luke's parables of the kingdom by comparing the parables of Luke with the parable of Mark and Matthew. The structure and parallelism within Luke's gospel are noted along with the repeated use of important words, narrative and miracle stories. Also considered is the literary relation between Luke and Matthew against Mark in the parables.

Chapter 7 addresses the Parables of Judgment against the Religious Leaders and the Nation. Jesus' words were directed to the religious leaders who were offended and they were challenged to bring forth good fruits. The challenge was to follow the way of the righteous and produce fruit of righteousness by accepting Jesus as the Son of God.

Chapter 8 discusses the subject of being ready for the unexpected return of the Lord. How does one prepare for the coming of the Lord? This is to be done by living in such a way that when he comes, one will be ready; therefore, the reader is to ponder where he will stand when Jesus returns.

Chapter 9 discusses God's Love and Forgiveness. It shows that Jesus and the Pharisees had a different understanding of Holiness. The complaint is made repeatedly against Jesus that he associates with sinners. The Pharisees' idea of holiness was separation from anything that might be considered sin. Barton writes, "At the heart of the new order or economy is a truly radical insistence on divine compassion—a compassion that overflows in the forgiveness of sinners, hospitality to the poor, the healing of the sick, and the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom."(pg. 214)

Chapter 10 deals with poverty and riches. Jesus uses the parable of the rich fool and the shrewd manager to show the deceptiveness of riches and the importance of a relationship with God, while declaring that man's life does not consist in the number of the things that he possesses. The

rich fool is called a fool because he did not consider God, but thought only of himself and not others. Jesus issued a warning that the poor should not be like the rich fool.

Chapter 11 looks at Prayer. Pray was an important aspect of Jesus' life. In Luke's gospel Jesus stressed the importance of prayer by stating that men should always be praying, and in Mark's gospel Jesus demonstrated the attitude men should have concerning prayer (Mark 1:35). Jesus used prayer to show his disciples that despite the culture and society of the time, they could approach God boldly and confidently without shame for their daily needs. God will always be faithful in response to prayer since: "He is (1) a loving Father, who (2) will uphold His own honor and will not let us be ashamed when we pray; he (3) will be consistent and faithful, and he is (4) a wise and kind Father in his response." (pg, 252)

Chapter 12 addresses the parable of Strange Neighbor and Risky Care. Kessmaat stresses the importance of understanding the meaning of Jesus' parables of the Unforgiving Servant, (or the Forgiving King), the Banquet, and the Good Samaritan within their own context and within ours.

Chapter 13 addresses the parable of discipleship and stresses the importance of not only hearing the word of God, but doing the word of God. Those who hear his word and do them are the wise and they benefit from doing the word. Those who hear the word and do not do it are the fools who suffered greatly. Knowles write, "Implied here is not only the remarkable assertion that the acceptance or rejection of Jesus' words entails eschatological consequences, but also that Jesus possesses authority to command such obedience." (pg. 289)

I find that this book is well written and can be beneficial not only to pastors and teachers, but also to lay persons since all the parables address the questions of discipleship and the way believers should live. The fact that thirteen scholars have contributed to this volume gives a

number of interpretations of the parables. I will recommend this book to those who are serious about seeking to understand the parables of Jesus within the context in which they were written, and their relevance for today.