

The Challenge of Jesus Parables edited by Richard N. Longenecker

Book Review

Richard N. Longenecker, with contributions by Stephen C. Barton, Craig A. Evans, Richard T. France Rector, Donald A. Hagner, Morna D. Hooker, Sylvia C. Keesmaat, Michael P. Knowles, Walter L. Liefeld, Allan W. Martens, Klyne R. Snodgrass, Robert H. Stein, Stephen I. Wright, *The Challenges of Jesus Parables*, 2000. ISBN 0-8028-4638 6

This book presents an in-depth interpretation and analysis by thirteen New Testament scholars based on the parables spoken by Jesus Christ according to the Synoptic Gospels. Each chapter covers specific details studied, and presented in article form. It is a well organized, direct representation of critically academic studies maintaining, and upholding the biblical narrative without much influence of outside sources. Some of the background information of the book lies within the mysteries sought after throughout history in relation to Jesus' identity, the belief in God, and the purpose of the words found in the Synoptic Gospels. The purpose of this book is to enlighten the reader to better understand the parables which were spoken by Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, and have a better capability of applying these teachings to their individual lives. The content of each chapter, and some important areas will be briefly summarized to give clarity to the reader. I will emphasize the unique analogies presented in *The Challenges of Jesus Parables* by Richard N. Longenecker, and assess the content that I have analyzed from the reading. I will point out several of my own opinions, and the attitudes of the writers, while addressing the personal development and knowledge that may be gained from the book. The conclusion will overlay the topics in the summary that are beneficiary to Christian readers, and believers alike.

There are four parts to this book, and each part is broken down into several chapters covering a specific topic. Part 1 "History, Genre, and Parallels", Chapter 1 "Allegorizing to

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Allegorizing” by Klyne R. Snodgrass, brings together the modern historic interpretation of parables, and the different methods used to identify the meanings behind them, such as literary, artistic, and existential. Snodgrass states that, “Such allegorizing of texts was not limited to the church” and “allegorizing is no legitimate means of interpretation” (p.4,5). He shows the reader the way scholars would interpret parables in the early 19th, and 20th century. This developed into an approach that would later be rejected due to interpreters “reading into them[parables] its[their] own agenda” (p.26). Each person has their own natural thought process, but the behaviors of humans are repetitive. This can be seen in the approaches discussed in chapter one. Chapter 2 “The Genre of the Parable” by Robert H. Stein, discusses the identification of styles, categories of literal structure, and composition. This is an expansion of the first chapter. Stein elaborates on the different approaches used by scholars. It covers influences, and the direction taken by people to undertake the challenges of parables. These studies have led to a variety of modern day analogies for parables. Part 1 concludes with Chapter 3 “Parables in Early Judaism” by Craig A. Evans. Following the previous chapter, Evans takes us to study parables prior to Jesus, and the culture surrounding their origins. The most important area to take into consideration is the reality of life pertaining to these parables. Jesus spoke in a different age, and the environment was completely different than ours in modern times. It is necessary to understand the way things actually were when his parables were spoken, so the context may be better understood. The analogy for Part 1 is that the study of parables has a history that has developed over time. The writers here were concerned with illuminating the similarities between parables, and the context in which they were written. It may be difficult to understand parables

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for a person who is unfamiliar, but Part 1 gives the reader a glimpse into the development of its study.

Part 2 “Parables of the Kingdom”, Chapter 4, 5 and 6 cover the Synoptic Gospels. The authors here do the best analyses of the parables in Mark, Matthew’s, and Luke that I have ever seen. In my opinion this is the most in depth, and important part of the book in terms of knowledge. The main topic of this section is the connection between all three books, and the way they are intertwined in structure, theology, and purpose. The most important thing to take away from Part 2, is the significance of the structure in each book and the appreciation for the parables found in them, what Morna D. Hooker calls “Mark’s parables were a call to action” (p.99). This understanding of the parables in Mark gives the reader a general knowledge of the context in which the parables are written in. There is a purpose surrounding the parables, not only within them. Donald A. Hagner writes that the parables teachings in Matthew expand on Mark’s. He reminds the reader that in Mark the emphasis was placed on our calling, while showing a slight difference in the parables found in the Gospel of Matthew. These differences can be found in the judgment mentioned in the parables. Hagner states that “they[parables]...motivate us in our discipleship. But they do so only if we have ears to hear!” (p.123). Richard. N. Longenecker shows the way the parables in Luke serve a different purpose and function. As part of the kingdom parables, Luke focuses on a different audience. Mark, and Matthew parables pertain more to the Jews, whereas Luke’s parables pertain more to the gentiles. This is important, because we are able to see the context that the parables are being prescribed to. This gives the reader insight into a bigger picture, shaped by three different accounts, coming together in

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purpose and meaning. In my opinion there is more to say about Part 2 than any other part of the book, but is too much to include altogether in this review.

Part 3 “Parables of Warning and Preparedness”, Chapter 7, and 8, are summarized as a statement of salvation. Here authors Allen W. Martens, and Richard T. France prepares the reader for a message of deliverance from judgment. These two chapters revolve around the theme of a concern for salvation. First, a judgment towards Jewish leaders, and the Jewish Nation are considered the focus of Jesus’ parables and ministry. This then begins to expand to the gentiles, and those that are outside this “Jewish” realm. The most important key point to Part 3, is the continuing godly life that needs to be sought out by the believer. In my opinion, Richard N. Longenecker does well to feed the reader a structural path of such deep knowledge. It is not a hidden meaning that is contained in this book. It is a very informative source for citing an area of New Testament theology. This means that Part 3, brings the reader closer to the parables in the book, by informing the reader about its context, which may now be set aside for self application.

Part 4 “Parables of the Christian Life”, concludes Chapters 9-13. Here the book is driven directly towards the Christian reader. After being overwhelmed with insightful information about the Synoptic Gospels, the reader may focus their attention on the way these parables shape our modern life. The main point to these chapters is to bring into awareness the life we should seek according to the way Jesus has taught. In regard to the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus allowed his listeners to be vulnerable, welcomed, forgiven and loved. Walter L. Liefeld states that, “parables of Jesus on prayer have portrayed God as (1) the one who will maintain his honor and not allow us to be ashamed in approaching him in prayer” (p.261). Part 4 concludes with an application of parables to ourselves, understanding that these words were spoken to other people in time, yet

The Challenge of Jesus Parables edited by Richard N. Longenecker still continues to apply to us. Michael P. Knowles states, “How individual readers hear these words — and whose voice they hear within them — is, precisely, a question of discipleship” (p.305). The most important element of this chapter is the growth and development of the reader. There is no doubt that the significance of these parables continues to play an important role in the lives of

modern believers. It is strengthening for the reader to understand Part 4 as a moment of self reflection.

To Summarize *The Challenge of Jesus Parables*, it is a book that should be read by every believer that desires a greater understanding of who Jesus is, and the parables he spoke. Some of the weaknesses in the book is the length of information thrown at the reader, who may be unfamiliar with biblical scripture. The order, structure and wording used in the book does make for a pleasant read. The messages are powerful, the content is indicative to each other, and gives the reader knowledge that is not easily obtained alone. The variety of authors creates an outstanding source of viewpoints. I would recommend this book to any believer that enjoys in-depth knowledge of scripture, and seeks more insight into the complexity of scripture.