

Discovery Class

Session 7 of 9: Genre

Clayton Valley Church

Session Goals

- *Discover what kinds of genre are used in the Bible*
- *Recognize narrative, poetry, parable, and prophecy from a text's own signals*
- *Acquire helpful tools for studying parables*

A. Genre and Context

a. Defined

Definition: Genre = French for “way,” “style,” or “fashion.”

b. Explained

The literary style of a book or passage.

c. Importance

Context: One part of a text's context, alongside historical setting, cultural setting, and immediate surroundings. Missing it distorts a reading the same way missing any other piece of context does. A strong contributor to meaning, not the sole decider.

Example: a command in an epistle and the same words spoken by a villain in a narrative carry different force and meaning, since genre sets the style in which words are used.

d. Forms

(1) Figures of speech

(2) Forms within forms. Example: Nathan's parable of the poor man's lamb, told within the narrative of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:1-7). Example: the Song of the Vineyard, a poem carrying a prophetic judgment (Isaiah 5:1-7).

B. Narrative

Definition: Narrative gives a record of events.

Note: God chose to reveal a large portion of Scripture this way. The story itself carries the teaching about who God is, the human condition, and God's work through the history of redemption.

Two tools:

Plot: problem, rising tension, climax, resolution. Where a scene turns often shows what the writer wants a reader to understand and respond to.

Character: comes through action, speech, and interaction rather than direct description. Writers sometimes set characters against each other to sharpen the point. (Richard Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories*)

C. Epistolary and Didactic

Definition: Epistolary literature = Scripture written as a letter. Didactic literature = Scripture intended to teach or instruct directly.

Note: The two overlap constantly; most epistles are didactic throughout.

Practice: the sentence analysis and word study tools we've already covered apply directly here. Diagramming a passage's structure and running a word through its three steps rewards didactic material especially well.

D. Poetry: Parallelism

Note: Hebrew poetry does not rhyme sound. It rhymes thought.

Definition: Parallelism is one statement followed by another, done with art, style, and image. The same idea said in different words so the combined effect says more than either line alone.

Comparison: like listening to music in stereo. The thought comes from two speakers, each line; the sound only makes full sense together.

Question: what impression do the lines make together, beyond what either line says alone?

Six types:

Synonymous

Definition: the first line is echoed in the second, with a slight change of terms.

Psalm 2:1

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

Antithetical

Definition: the words of the first line are affirmed in the second, not by repetition, but stating the opposite.

Psalm 1:6

for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Climactic

Definition: a refinement of synonymous. The second line takes some words from the first, then completes the idea by building up a crescendo.

Psalm 96:7-8

*Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts!*

Synthetic

Definition: another refinement of synonymous. The second line develops the thought of the first a bit further, without quoting words from it.

Psalm 95:6

Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!

Emblematic

Definition: the first line carries a figure of speech that the second line explains.

Psalm 42:1

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.

Formal

Definition: a verse with two parts, but no clearly discernible parallelism between them.

Psalm 119:89

Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.

Note: different interpreters see different numbers of parallelism types. What matters is understanding how the lines relate, not sorting every poem into a category.

E. Parable

Definition: *Paraballō* = to place one thing alongside another for comparison.

Note: parables cluster in the Gospels and center on the kingdom.

Purpose: to make truth clear to those seeking it and hidden to those who are not (Matthew 13:10-17, 36; Mark 4:10-13).

Interpretive Guidelines

1. Check context carefully.
 - a) Does the context present emphasis or a recurring theme that helps explain what a point of the parable means?
 - b) Does the context specify any truth that would nullify a given meaning placed on some detail of the parable?
2. Attempt to discover the original audience to whom the parable was spoken.
3. Note the attitude and spiritual condition of the original hearers.
4. If possible, note the reason that prompted Jesus to employ the parable. Such effort will show that parables were part of Jesus' method of presenting fresh, living truths to audiences who were opposed to what they regarded as his innovations, who failed to see that he was putting new wine into new wineskins, or who needed instruction as to what the reign or kingship of God really involved.
5. Seek to understand the earthly details of the parables as well as the original hearers did.
6. State concisely the main point of the parable. Give reasons for your selection.

"If I can ascertain the one great and comprehensive idea of a parable, I have fixed a reference point or obtained a master key for the interpretation of each detail which serves it. I can see how the details lend to that main thrust. This anchors me within a certain defined area so that I am not so likely to wander off on my own tangents or blind alleys."

(Rosscup, p. 43)
7. Try to relate the main point of the parable to the basic aspects of Jesus' teaching. Keep in mind the centrality of the reign of God (i.e., the Kingdom) in all that Jesus said and did.
8. Where most of the details of a parable are explained, try even harder to uncover the main emphasis. Keep in mind that not every detail of a parable is intended to contain special meaning. Your goal is to discover the central point, teaching, thrust, or principle of the parable.

F. Prophecy and the Old Testament in the New

1. Predictive = Prophetic

Note: Much symbolic language.

Two extremes:

- i) Higher critical approach: Skeptical/naturalistic; eliminates predictive prophecy (declares it was written after the fact).
- ii) Applicational approach: Tries to explain everything by a present reality (i.e., Malachi 4:5-6 cf. John 1:19-28; Mark 9:12-13; Matthew 11:13-15; Luke 1:17).

Balance:

- i) Interpret in light of genre and authorial intent. Avoid both hyper-literalism and hyper-symbolism. Utilize the principle of scripture interprets scripture.
- ii) Interpret prophetically. See it as prophecy, not something written after the fact.
- iii) Interpret carefully. Do not try to read a present truth into every prophecy. Examine the symbol in a Biblical context.

2. Quotation of the Old Testament in the New Testament

Note: The New Testament writers carry the sense of the Old Testament into the New Testament. They may change the words (i.e., paraphrase), but the sense remains the same.

Example: Mark 12:36 quotes Psalm 110:1, "Yahweh said to David's Lord." How is he David's Lord as well as David's son? The Jews saw the Messiah to be humanity, David's son, but not deity. Yet they understood Psalm 110 to be a Messianic Psalm. How is it that David addresses a human descendant as Lord?

G. Types and Antitypes

Definition: a type is a person or event in the Old Testament that God intended to picture something greater still to come.

Example: Melchizedek's priesthood pictures Christ's (Genesis 14; Hebrews 5, 7).

See appendix for interpretive principles for Typology.

Homework

Question 1: The Pearl of Great Price

Matthew 13:45-46

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Using the eight interpretive guidelines (p. 60), state the one main point of this parable and explain in a sentence or two how you arrived at it.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Response guide: The kingdom of heaven is worth more than everything else a person owns. The merchant is searching, not stumbling onto the pearl by accident, and when he finds the one pearl of surpassing value he sells everything else to have it. The point is not simply cost but glad exchange, trading everything for the one thing worth more than all of it combined.

Question 2: The Sower and the Soils

Luke 8:5-8

A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold. As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Luke 8:11-15

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

Jesus gives his own interpretation of this parable in verses 11-15. Using the eight interpretive guidelines, explain what determines whether the seed bears fruit, and describe each of the four soils in your own words.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

Response guide: The seed is the same in every case, the word of God. What differs is the soil, meaning what happens in the heart that receives it. Three of the four soils fail to produce lasting fruit: the word is snatched away, or it has no root and fails under pressure, or it is choked by the cares, riches, and pleasures of life. Only the good soil, that receives the word and holds the word fast, bears fruit.

Handout: Typology

Definition:

A type is a representative relationship in which persons, events, and institutions bear a symbolic relationship to corresponding persons, events, and institutions occurring at a later time in salvation history.

“A type is an illustration connected with an Old Testament person, animal, object, event, or institution that first has its place and design in an actual historical situation itself, but at the same time is specifically intended by God to picture some greater future reality. This is usually and most prominently with regard to Christ in His person or work, but may also relate to God or His people.”

(Rosscup, p. 54)

Types and Prophecy:

“The form of prophecy may be either verbally predictive or typically predictive. The former are those prophecies which in poetry or prose speak of the age to come (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53); the latter are those typical persons, things, or events which forecast the age to come. Thus a type is a species of prophecy and should be included under prophetic studies. Typological interpretation is thereby justified because it is part of prophecy, the very nature of which establishes the connection or link between the two Testaments.”

(Ramm, p. 216)

It should be noted that types are more illustrative of future realities than predictive literature.

Schools of Typological Interpretation:

- i) Excessive Typology. Those who see too much as typical. They tend to make almost everything in the Old Testament typical of something in the New Testament. Some reasons for that position are given by Ramm, pp. 218-219.
- ii) Denial of Typology. Those who deny typology as a legitimate field of study. This came as an overreaction to the first school. Some liberals also hold this view.
- iii) New Testament Designation. Those who hold that a type is valid only if the New Testament specifically designates it to be a type. That position helps safeguard against some of the typical excesses of past generations, but may overlook some legitimate types.
- iv) Innate and Inferred Types. Those who view types as being of two kinds, innate and inferred.

a) An innate type is one that is specifically declared to be such in the New Testament. Examples:

- Melchizedek (a person) was typical of Christ, whose priesthood is after the order of Melchizedek (Genesis 14; Psalm 110; Hebrews 5, 7).
- The Passover Lamb (Exodus 12) (an animal) was typical of Christ, the greater Passover Lamb (John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7).
- The Brazen Serpent (an object) lifted up in the wilderness (Numbers 21) was typical of Christ lifted up (John 3:14-15).
- The Passover itself (an event) was an historical event of the deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt and is a type of Christ's deliverance of believers from the bondage of sin (1 Corinthians 5:7; Luke 9:31).
- The Tabernacle (an institution) in various aspects foreshadowed Christ in His person and work (Hebrews 9-10).

b) An inferred type is one that is not specifically designated in the New Testament, but seems justified by comparison with other types.

“Joseph, to this group, could be accepted with reasonable confidence to be a type because many correspondences are so clear and apparent in his case, even though no direct statement in the New Testament links him with Christ.”

(Rosscup, p. 53)

Principles of Interpretation (see Ramm, pp. 229-231):

- i) Note the typology of the New Testament and see how it treats the subject. It deals with the broader realities, not the minutiae and incidentals.
- ii) The two major areas of New Testament typological materials are the Tabernacle with its priesthood and offerings, and the Wilderness Wanderings.
- iii) Do not prove doctrine solely from types unless there is clear New Testament authority. Types will often illustrate doctrine, but will not always teach or establish doctrine.

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