

The Parables of Jesus- Brief History of and Rules & Tools for Interpretation:

History:

Early Centuries: Origen, Augustine

The earliest interpreters often used a three-fold method of interpretation when dealing with scripture.

- Literal Meaning
- Moral Meaning
- Spiritual Meaning

Spiritual Meaning was often found through allegorizing. This is a common and practical way for interpreting passages of scripture that might be difficult to make it meaningful.

Middle Ages: Cassius- Fourth level added (Anagogical/Heavenly). Was called the Quadriga.

Example: Jerusalem

- Literal: City itself
- Moral: The Soul
- Spiritual: The Church
- Heavenly: The New Jerusalem

Rule: You can't read into an allegory anything heretical

Reformation:

The Catholics interpreted most of scripture with the four-fold method. They also head to a the three-fold source of truth: papal authority, scriptures, church fathers

The reformers held to Sola Scriptura. Believing scripture to be perspicacious they did not interpret scripture allegorically.

Except for parables, and except for Calvin who was a lone voice who said that there is plain meaning in the parables. "We should have more reverence for scripture than to allow ourselves to transfigure its sense so freely."

Late 19th/Early 20th Century:

German Liberals- Literal Sense of the story to understand the meaning- usually one point. Stein gives a disclaimer- they usually came to the same main point for each parable, and it was usually the wrong one.

C.H.Dodd- Jesus did not teach to 20th Century Christians- How would a Jew in the first century understand it?

Stein

Rule 1: There is one main point

Rule 2: Find the point Jesus was trying to make

Rule 3: Find the point the Evangelist was trying to make

Rule 4: Find the meaning and significance God has for you

Blomberg

A Parable has as many points as there are main characters. Most parables follow a structure that consists of three characters. King/Land-owner/Father and two other characters compared to one another.

Three Point Parables: Three main characters- three main points.

Stein and Blomberg are pretty close in Stein's estimation- Blomberg makes more complex sub-points that support the main point.

This Class

1. There is a basic point in each parable but there may be sub-points depending on the length and number of characters
2. We should seek to understand the point Jesus was making to those who heard it
3. We should seek to understand why the Gospel writer included it in his account
4. We should seek to understand the implications and significance of the parable for our own lives. (Application in 2023, Tucson, AZ)