

And God Said What?

Parables
Session 7

The Direction of Intention

My God, give me the grace
to perform this action with you
and through love for you.
In advance, I offer to you
all the good that I will do
and accept all the difficulty I may meet therein.

Our Lady of Good Counsel, Pray for us.
St. Francis de Sales, Pray for us

Why this Bible Study?

- We each have lenses through which we see the world.
- In order for us to interpret Scripture effectively, we must have some knowledge of the author's worldview.

Historical-Critical Method

“A way of reading Scripture that makes use of historical research, literary analysis and the findings of anthropology, archaeology and other sciences.”

Source: *Youth Update Glossary* © 2002,
St. Anthony Messenger Press

What does the Church say?

“The historical-critical method is the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts. Holy Scripture, inasmuch as it is the “word of God in human language,” has been composed by human authors in all its various parts and in all the sources that lie behind them.

Because of this, its proper understanding not only admits the use of this method but actually requires it” [emphasis added].

Interpretation of the Bible in the Church (1994)
Pontifical Biblical Commission

Review: Gospel Genre

- Not written by Jesus or by Jesus' followers during Jesus' life on earth.
 - None of the apostles fully understood who Jesus was or what he was accomplishing during the time they were together on earth.
 - No historical, chronological narrative of Jesus' acts of power existed.
- Earliest units in oral tradition:
 - Jesus passion, death and resurrection
 - Accounts of his acts of power (isolated episodes)
- A desire to know what Jesus taught (sayings and parables) developed after people had come to belief.
- Not a biography
- Not history

Literary Form: Parables

■ *Parable* = “comparison”

- Function **in the Gospels**
 - TO CHALLENGE: to call that person to conversion and reform.
 - TO CRITICIZE: to personally criticize the person to whom the parable is told
 - TO TEACH: to raise that person’s consciousness to a new level of understanding **about the Reign of God**

In order to see the critical function of a parable, we must understand the social context in which it was told and its purpose



A Reminder about Oral Tradition

- Passes on the core of the teaching, but does not claim accuracy in social context
 - i.e., When a story was passed on, the identity of the audience to whom it was originally told *may not have been passed on.*
- What's the implication?
 - Since parables were passed down through oral tradition without their historical social context, *the Gospel editors had to provide the social contexts.*

Parables Interpreted as Allegories

- Members of the early church sometimes chose to turn a parable into an allegory rather than to treat it as a parable.
- What is an allegory?
 - 2 levels of meaning: one explicit, the other implicit.
 - Every element in the literal story line stands for something on the allegorical level.
 - Storyteller's intent: for audience understand the implicit message.



Literary Form: Parables

- Some difficulties:
 - In the Gospel, the early church's allegorical interpretations of the parables are attributed to Jesus.
 - Jesus is shown giving the allegorical interpretation to his disciples himself.
- Why did the Gospel writers show Jesus saying more than what he actually said historically?
 - Recall: Literature that has passed through oral tradition *is not claiming exact quotations*.
 - The Gospel writers are not attributing to Jesus only what Jesus actually said historically.
 - They are also attributing to him their hindsight understanding of the significance of what Jesus said and did.
 - The intent is always to make the *significance* of what happened historically clear to the audience being addressed at a later time in history.

Parable vs. Allegory

- Parables were interpreted as though they were puzzles that needed to be unlocked.
- Even in Scripture, failure to distinguish between a parable and an allegory.
- Problem most likely originated because of translation issues.
- Why bother making the distinction now?
 - Potential for harmful misinterpretations.

Parables in the Life of a Believer

- Jesus' experience of the Reigning God
- Through the parables, Jesus actually makes the Reign of God happen!
- More than a mere story or an allegory:
 - Produces shock or surprise in the imagination
 - This shock seduces one to see things in a new way; it leads to new insight
 - And the new insight challenges to a new decision as to how to live. How? According to the Reign of God.