

Discipleship

Discipling Through Metaphor

Lesson #2 for January 11, 2014

Scriptures: 2 Samuel 12:1-7; Isaiah 28:24-28; Matthew 7:24-27; 13:1-30; Luke 20:9-19.

1. Jesus was a master Storyteller. In the ordinary things of life among the people of ancient Palestine, He saw many common things which could be used to illustrate spiritual truths. Christ intended for Christianity to become a logical, reasonable religion. He was challenging humans to think. More than that, He realized that humans are capable of loving, feeling, hurting, crying, caring, laughing, and imagining. He used stories that appealed to the people in many ways and taught deep spiritual truths.
2. But, Jesus was not the first biblical author or prophet to use stories to illustrate a point. Read 2 Samuel 12:1-7. Nathan told that very clever story about the rich man who stole the poor man's sheep, and then he said to David—after David gave his own verdict—"You are that man!" Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel used illustrations warning the people that difficult times were coming. But, God knows how to take care of His people. Manasseh had Isaiah sawed in half in a hollow log. Jeremiah was threatened with death and thrown into a deep pit. Ezekiel was taken as a prisoner to Babylonia. Each of them was trying to understand and communicate God's unlimited mercy in difficult times. When we rebel against God's judgments, even greater judgments are sometimes called for. Think of what happened to Hosea and Jonah?
3. Think about the many stories that are told in Scripture to illustrate spiritual points. Do you have a favorite parable or story? Why do you like it? What is it about that story that appeals to you?
4. Read Matthew 7:24-27. There are many obvious lessons in this parable. What did it mean to the people in Jesus's audience? To many of them, the rock on which their faith was built was the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus was warning them that the temple was going to be destroyed. If their faith was built only on that, they would lose their faith as well. Think about how the Holocaust has affected the faith of many Jews in our generation.
5. So, what is our rock? On what is our faith built? Do we smugly claim that we belong to the one true church? Jesus was suggesting that if we do not live out in our lives the truths and principles that are taught in Christianity, our houses will collapse.
6. In the days of Jesus, very few of the people were truly literate. Writing materials were extremely expensive, and few could afford written documents. So, God presented salvation in stories that were easy to remember. More than that, virtually all of the stories could be understood at different levels. A child can understand simple truths. But, adults—even masters at spiritual lessons—realize that there are deeper meanings.
7. Read Luke 14:27-33. What was Jesus asking about us here? If Christians do foolish things like building towers they cannot afford, they will be laughed at. Discipleship involves preparation. When new people first become Christians, Christianity may seem to be an easy religion. But, it requires self-sacrifice, sometimes suffering, even humiliation and rejection. So, Jesus illustrated all of those things. They had to memorize many things.
8. Read Luke 18:31-34. Was that a parable? Wasn't Jesus speaking very clearly? But, it did not fit their plans for their "Messiah."
9. Jesus does not single us out and point out our errors. He speaks through parables which require us to think and really to confront ourselves. In looking at the parables of Jesus,

have you been challenged to confront yourself in areas such as materialistic tendencies, worldly entanglements, even lifestyle?

10. As we have suggested, parables require us to think. While they point to very definite conclusions, they challenge us to use our discernment in dealing with life and those around us. It is not our job to decide who should be in the church and who should not.

In Christ's parable teaching the same principle is seen as in His own mission to the world. That we might become acquainted with His divine character and life, Christ took our nature and dwelt among us. Divinity was revealed in humanity; the invisible glory in the visible human form. Men could learn of the unknown through the known; heavenly things were revealed through the earthly.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 17.

11. Review the parable of the sower. (Matthew 13:3-9) This parable has so many aspects and so many things to think about. Where do you find yourself in this parable? Are the cares of this world choking out your spiritual interests? As a new Christian, did you become really enthusiastic only to gradually grow colder over time? Do you picture yourself as the sower? Or, is that God? Are we some of the seed? Or, perhaps, one of the types of soil?
12. What do you think people said about Christ's parables as they were on their way home? What did they say to their families? Don't you suppose that those parables were discussed again and again and again?
13. Read Matthew 21:28-32; Luke 14:16-24; and 20:9-19. As Jesus came to the end of His ministry amid ever greater threats from the Jewish leaders, His parables against them became more and more pointed. The Jewish leaders could see clearly that He was talking about them. But, because He told the stories in parable form, there was nothing specifically for which they could condemn Him. And what about us?

The parable of the vineyard applies not alone to the Jewish nation. It has a lesson for us. The church in this generation has been endowed by God with great privileges and blessings, and He expects corresponding returns.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 296.

14. While the Jews in the times of Jesus lived lives that were highly oriented to spiritual matters, we are the most blessed generation of all time. Never have spiritual truths and various translations of the Bible—and for Adventists the writings of Ellen White—been so readily available. If we cannot understand some spiritual point in one translation, we can go to a different translation. God is doing everything possible to get the message through to us at this critical time in human history. What excuses do we have for not taking time to learn the lessons? Through self-deception, how many of us have skipped over some really important spiritual lesson we should have learned? Remember that self-deception is the Devil's forte!
15. Undoubtedly, the ministry of Christ was the golden age of parable and story telling. None of His disciples were as good at it as He was. Paul used some interesting illustrations. (See Romans 7:1-6; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10.) Jesus's brother James also used some interesting illustrations/parables. (See James 2:2; 1:10; 3:4.) Peter's vision in Acts 10 was a kind of parable, but God was the One who gave that vision. And in the book of Revelation, there are many symbols and many stories that require interpretation and understanding. Are you sure you understand the implications of the fall of Babylon in Revelation 18? Or, even of the Rider on the white horse in Revelation 19? Metaphors, similes, parables, allegories, and other forms of creative thought and language help us to

communicate in interesting ways. Christ and His disciples used them very effectively. We should do the same. So, why did Jesus make so much use of parables and stories?

Jesus desired to awaken inquiry. He sought to arouse the careless, and impress truth upon the heart. Parable teaching was popular, and commanded the respect and attention, not only of the Jews, but of the people of other nations. . . .

Again, Christ had truths to present which the people were unprepared to accept or even to understand. For this reason also He taught them in parables. By connecting His teaching with the scenes of life, experience, or nature, He secured their attention and impressed their hearts. Afterward, as they looked upon the objects that illustrated His lessons, they recalled the words of the divine Teacher. . . .

Jesus sought an avenue to every heart. By using a variety of illustrations, He not only presented truth in its different phases, but appealed to the different hearers.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 20,21.

16. In His parables, Jesus used things with which the people of His day were very familiar. What objects or events or ideas would He use in our day? What urban images might He use today? Would He use computers and the Internet?
17. Read Luke 16:19-31. Where did this story come from? Is it a true story? Why was Jesus using fictional stories? Why did Jesus tell it?
18. Have you ever tried to compose a parable like the ones that Jesus used? Let me help you. "The kingdom of heaven is like...." Try to use modern ideas and modern illustrations to see if you can communicate gospel values. What do you think? Did Jesus Himself, as a human being, think up those ideas? Or, was He guided to those parables by the Father and the Holy Spirit? Did He communicate with Them every night in prayer, gaining ideas to use the following day?
19. Why do you think Jesus almost always left His parables open-ended? Was the story truly on-going?
20. Think about some of the best sermons that you have heard. What made them interesting? Wasn't it the stories? Did the stories clearly illustrate significant spiritual lessons?
21. Some experts on personal evangelism have suggested that one of the best ways to start is to give a personal experience. It is hard for someone to argue against your personal experience!
22. Do you think that if you want to use a story or a parable in modern times, you have to dress it up with modern media?
23. Do you think Jesus with the help of His Father designed almost all of His parables in such a way as to appeal to people throughout the ages, to different cultures, etc.? What are the implications of realizing that the Bible is really a collection of stories? If we are asking the right questions, these stories tell us mostly about God Himself.
24. Do you think that the Bible has lost its punch? Is it difficult to get people's interest in the Bible stirred up when there is so much attention-getting television and Internet material to look at and listen to?
25. Have you ever known of a case where it would have been appropriate to use a story like the one Nathan did in confronting David? It is important to notice that David apparently had a keen sense of justice when it applied to other people! Was it a lot more difficult for him

to see the need for justice being applied to himself?

26. Look again in Matthew 13:1-23, at the story of the sower, the field, and the seed. What can we learn about the Christian experience from the farmer? Was the farmer being wasteful when he scattered seed in places that were unlikely to produce a viable crop? Does God scatter His seed in places that do not look very promising? Of course, God has an unlimited supply of seed!
27. What can we learn from the seed itself? The seed appears to be basically helpless. It is entirely dependent on what others do to it.
28. And what about the different soils? Which type of soil do you think most closely fits your life? What about the lives of those to whom you are trying to witness?
29. Are there ways in which we can scatter the seeds of the gospel more broadly? Can we make the seeds more fertile—perhaps by the use of stories and parables appropriate in our day? Would that make it more attractive to our listeners?
30. And what about the soil? Are there ways in which we can “loosen up” and fertilize the soil and better prepare it to receive the gospel?
31. Read Matthew 21:28-32; Luke 14:16-24; and Luke 20:9-19. It was clear to the original hearers of these stories that Jesus was talking about the Jewish leaders. Will we ever face a time when we might need to rebuke those in higher positions through the use of stories or parables? Jesus actually knew that in telling these stories, He was putting His life on the line.
32. Jesus told most of His stories about farmers and religious teachers. What kind of people would be useful in our day to illustrate spiritual principles? Would we talk about professional athletes, public personalities, great scientists, or doctors? Do we need more poets and those who have English majors to create appropriate metaphors in order to spread the gospel in our day?
33. We need to do our very best to find ways to grab people’s attention. Attention spans are much shorter today than they used to be. People expect to get almost everything in sound bites or three minute presentations. Try to imagine how Jesus would act, behave, and tell stories if He were in your place today. Does that give you any ideas?

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