

Class #3 – Meaning and Application

A Summary of the Issue of Meaning

I. The AUTHOR'S Role in Meaning

- A. Look for the author's "intention" as expressed in the text's content.
- B. Supplement with insights from the author's historical setting to aid in understanding the text and the expressed intentions. The context of the author's life-setting that is invoked should be the most probable context. [See Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 238.] **Remember:** The text is primary and authoritative over any extra-biblical insights into "intention" gleaned from your background study!
- C. Summarize the author's intention or the text's content by means of an "intrinsic genre statement" or a statement of the text's "generic conception" which equals the author's "overall argument". [See Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, Ch. 3 - 'The Concept of Genre'.] This statement simply forces you to verbalize your controlling idea of the whole of the text that you have already formed! It should be improved the more you interact with the parts of the text.

II. The TEXT'S Role in Meaning

- A. All meaning is "in-formed" or expressed through the literary structure and forms of the text. More focus should be placed here than we have historically given!
- B. The "meaning" comes from the top down not from the bottom up. That is, more emphasis should be placed on the larger linguistic units (sentences, paragraphs, episodes, discourses, etc.) than on the smaller units (words, phrases, clauses). We tend to reverse this emphasis in conservative circles!

III. The READER'S Role in Meaning

- A. We should be in the process of exegeting our culture in addition to the text!
 1. As a healthily self-conscious interpreter, we should be aware of many of our cultural biases, personal needs and concerns, present emotional state, etc.
 2. We need to expand our cultural horizons, especially regarding Ancient Near East and Mediterranean cultures.
 3. We will need to learn to think in terms of how various sub-cultures and age groups within our church or class will ask very different questions of the text. (This is the value of cross-cultural vs. mono-cultural education!)
- B. HUMILITY must characterize our perspective (2 Tim 2:14-26) because of the complexity of the interpretation process and the cultural/temporal gap between the Bible and us.
- C. We have an absolute need for reliance upon the Holy Spirit in the whole interpretation process, of which one manifestation is an openness to growth in our understanding of the Scriptures.

The Parables of Jesus

(There are 44 parables + 2 allegories in the four gospels that are listed below)

Parable	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Good and bad trees	7:16-20			
Wheat and tares	13:24-43			
Treasure in a field	13:44			
Pearl of great price	13:45-46			
Fishnet	13:47-50			
Merciless servant	18:23-35			
Laborers in the vineyard	20:1-16			
Two sons	21:28-32			
Wise and foolish maidens	25:1-13			
Sheep and goats	25:31-46			
Only in Mark				
Seed growing secretly		4:26-29		
Only in Luke				
Two debtors			7:41-50	
Good Samaritan			10:25-37	
Friend at midnight			11:5-8	
Rich fool			12:13-21	
Barren fig tree			13:6-9	
Tower builder			14:28-30	
Warring king			14:31-33	
Lost coin			15:8-10	
Prodigal son			15:11-32	
Unjust steward			16:1-8	
Rich man and Lazarus			16:19-31	
Humble servant			17:7-10	
Unjust judge			18:1-8	
Pharisee and tax collector			18:9-14	
Only in John				
Good shepherd				10:1-18
True vine				15:1-8
				} allegories
Shared by Matthew, Mark, and Luke				
Bridegroom's guests	9:15	2:19-20	5:33-39	
Unshrunk cloth	9:16	2:21	5:36	
New wine	9:17	2:22	5:37-39	
Strong man bound	12:29-30	3:22-27	11:21-23	
Sower	13:1-9, 18-23	4:1-9, 13-20	8:4-8, 11-15	
Mustard seed	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19	
Wicked tenants	21:33-46	12:1-12	20:9-19	
Budding fig tree	24:32-36	13:28-32	21:29-33	
Shared by Matthew and Luke				
Wise and foolish builders	7:24-27		6:47-49	
Father and children's requests	7:9-11		11:11-13	
Two ways/two doors	7:13-14		13:23-27	
Leaven in a lump	13:31-32		13:20-21	
Lost sheep	18:12-14		15:1-7	
Wedding banquet	22:1-14		14:15-24	
Thief in the night	24:42-44		12:39-40	
Faithful and unfaithful steward	24:45-51		12:42-46	
Talents and pounds	25:14-30		19:11-27	
Shared by Mark and Luke				
Lamp and the measure		4:21-25	8:16-18	
Watchman		13:34-36	12:35-38	

The Interpretation of Parables

A Very Selective Bibliography:

Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, Ch. 8 on “Parables” and Appendix on “The Allegorical Nature of Parables” (Zondervan, 1984) [worth copying!]

_____, *Words of Life: A Literary Introduction to the New Testament*, Ch. 3 on “The Parables” (Baker, 1987) [copy it!]

*Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (IVP, 1990) [best!]

David Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus* (IVP, 1989) [also helpful]

Klyne R. Snodgrass, “Parable,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (IVP, 1992) 591-601 [note great bibliography on pp. 600-601]

_____, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008) 846 pages [very comprehensive!]

A Suggested Sequence for Interpreting the Parables

(Note the 8 helpful guidelines given on pp. 597-599 in the “Parable” article)

1. Determine where this parable falls on the “Allegorical Continuum”:

Continuous allegory	Partially allegorical	Main-point allegory	Realistic reporting
(most pts. have corresponding meanings)	(a few main pts. have corresponding meanings)	(only the main thrust of the parable has a corresponding meaning)	(there are essentially no allegorical elements)
e.g., Parable of the Soils (soils, seed, ground, etc. have corresponding meanings)	e.g., Parable of the Prodigal Son (Father & sons are all that have corresponding meaning)	e.g., Parable of the Good Samaritan (the Samaritan’s actions personify being neighborly to anyone we encounter)	No parables on this end; all parables are on the left half of the continuum.

2. From the parable’s setting within Jesus’ ministry and within the gospel’s structure, determine if the parable answers a question (e.g., Who is my neighbor?), addresses a concern (e.g., Lk 15:1-2-Jesus’ relationship with sinners), clarifies a new teaching (e.g., Mt 13 - unexpected form of the kingdom of God), etc. (This should reinforce your literary identification in #1 and specify the intended audience as multitudes, disciples, etc.)

3. Be sensitive to historical and cultural features that heighten the parable’s impact on its original hearers (e.g., view of Samaritans by Jews, insult to father to ask for inheritance early, etc.). Research this aspect in your background sources!

4. Determine the theological significance of the parable and draw applications that (culturally) parallel the impact on the original hearers.

Luke 16:1-14 (NASB)

1Now He was also saying to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and this *manager* was reported to him as squandering his possessions. 2And he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' 3The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg. 4I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes.' 5And he summoned each one of his master's debtors, and he *began* saying to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 6And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' 7Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' 8And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light. 9And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings."

10"He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. 11Therefore if you have not been faithful in the *use of* unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true *riches* to you? 12And if you have not been faithful in *the use of* that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? 13No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

14Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.....

Interpretive Questions

1. How many characters are in this parable? 1, 2, or 3? Is the parable a main point allegory, or partially allegorical, or a continuous allegory?
2. Is the manager being dishonest and doing an illegal thing by lowering the debts owed to his master? Or is he actually doing a good thing?
3. Why did the master praise "the unrighteous manager" in v. 8a? Why do you think he praised him for this?
4. When does the parable proper end? Who is speaking in v. 8b? How is v. 8b helpful in interpreting this parable?
5. How does v. 9 help us in interpreting the parable? Do the parable's characters have correspondences within the allegorical nature of the parable?
6. How do verses 10-13 relate to the parable?
7. How does v. 14 help us regarding context for the parable?
8. Why do you think Jesus told this parable to his disciples (v. 1)?

Some General Principles for Making Applications from the Various Biblical Genres

1. The genre characteristics of the biblical passage should dictate the form of the applications.

2. Interpreters must establish the "type of meaning" and intended application(s) of the passage in its original literary and historical setting before moving to its application to contemporary hearers.

3. The common saying "One interpretation and many applications" should be replaced by "One interpretation that establishes a specific range of applications appropriate to the various genres".

In opposing such a widely-held hermeneutical dictum, we step on sacred ground that seems unassailable. However, a little reflection about this issue should help clarify how to draw good applications from the various genres of the Bible. All that we have to ask about a given passage is, "Are there any applications that are not legitimate applications?" Of course, the answer is "Yes."

The question is, "What establishes the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate applications?" There can be only one answer. The author's intention as expressed through the chosen genre in the specific idea or type of meaning of the passage is what establishes the boundary for legitimate applications. In other words, as a part of authors' intentions expressed within the particular genres they used, they intended that certain specific applications be made in response to what they wrote.

This discussion about proper applications is very closely tied to the issue of the genres of the Bible. Interpreters must have a meaningful understanding of the genre of a passage before they can discern proper applications from the passage. In other words, applications are rather genre-specific! Therefore, one of the primary losses that interpreters who do not attend to the genres of Bible will experience is the penalty of errant applications that are outside the boundaries that both the genres and the specific passages intend. This is a rather large price to pay for such negligence!

How Applications are Made

