

Asking Our Hard Questions of the Bible

September 26, 2005

Jesus Way of Teaching and Ministry I

- I. Introduction
 - A. Announcements
 - 1. Open with prayer
 - 2. Any new people? If so, summarize need to bring paper, pen, and Bible (various versions OK for comparison, but NRSV will be main one for reading, NASB for studying).
 - 3. Get list of names and how to contact (email preferred)
 - 4. 90 minutes on 4th Mondays at 7 p.m.
 - 5. Read passages (volunteers)
 - B. We normally will discuss questions that you have raised in our previous sessions.
 - 1. Each session is designed to be complete in itself, so whatever question or questions we begin, we will finish the same night. There is no assigned “homework,” however the class does rely upon each of you to raise questions.
 - 2. So, continued reading of the Bible on your own is something I highly recommend!
 - 3. Does anyone have any questions for us to consider for next time?
 - C. Since this is our first meeting of the year, and we don’t have any previous questions to deal with, I am going to present something I have chosen; I hope you will find it helpful.
 - 1. Usually our topics are about a particular passage of the Bible; but it’s going to be broader than that this time. (Teacher’s privilege :~)
 - 2. Tonight I want to talk about a few of the methods Jesus used in his ministry and teaching.
 - 3. What most people normally think of as Jesus’ methods are really only a part of his range of interacting with different people in different circumstances.
 - 4. I think that if we can broaden our understanding and knowledge of what Jesus was up to and why, it will go a long way towards making the Gospel readings clearer to us all.
 - 5. Since most of our questions in the past have come from the Gospels, I hope this will be a helpful exercise tonight.
- II. By far the most important part of Jesus’ ministry is, of course, his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. It is the central focus and meaning and purpose of his entire time here on earth. And his ministry before that was all in preparation for that unique and all-important culmination.

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- A. But it is his ministry before Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday that I want us to consider today.
 - 1. In that time of ministry one of the things Jesus is best known for is his use of parables.
 - 2. But there are also a number of other significant ways in which he ministered and taught.
 - 3. Certainly there are his miracles (not enough time tonight to discuss them appropriately), but Jesus also used direct explanation, teaching by example, giving specific directions of do's and don'ts, and some memorable sayings that contained much in a few words. For example, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."
 - 4. It would take at least an entire course, rather than a single session to do justice to all of them, so for now I will leave these for your own studies.
 - B. We are going to narrow our focus and talk tonight about 3 of the different methods portrayed in the Gospels that can be seen in Jesus' ministry.
 - 1. Use of parables
 - 2. Briefly talk about an often overlooked aspect of his sermons
 - 3. Created moments for decision
 - C. For whatever method we are looking at, there are some key observations we will need to make to help us interpret and understand each in the way it is meant.
 - 1. This is not an exhaustive list, but it is a good summary to help us focus on the intent.
 - 2. Please write down these questions so you can easily refer to them during our discussion. (Hand-out sheet?)
 - a. *Who/what groups was/were Jesus addressing? (e.g., opponents, followers, people in need, Jews or foreigners/gentiles, or a mixed group?)*
 - b. *What was Jesus trying to do to/for the different people/groups in his presence? (Unite or divide, encourage or rebuke, challenge or reassure that all was well)*
 - c. *What is there about the method he used that helped accomplish his purpose with those present?*
 - d. *What was Jesus trying to reveal about himself and the Kingdom of God?*
- III. Let's begin with probably Jesus' most well known approach to teaching: Using parables.
- A. (Define) Parables are essentially short stories or snapshots of life, that are designed to reach different people in different ways, but carry one central message.

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1. Parables in Jesus' ministry were drawn from the real world. It would be hard to tell the difference between a parable that he might have made up and a real historic event.
 2. This was no accident. The power of parables is in their ability to draw people into the story or the picture.
- B. Parables are a subtle way of teaching. They are indirect and require the hearer to participate in them in order for them to be understood.
1. In a parable, Jesus didn't have to say anything directly about any particular person, but let each person figure out how it applied to him or her.
 2. For example, in the famous parable of the Good Samaritan, the hearers would be drawn into the story and because it was so true to life, they would be able to picture themselves as one of the people in it.
 - a. Which person would they identify with? The Samaritan, the wounded man, the priest, the scribe?
 - b. The overall meaning of the parable---to show mercy---would be clear enough to any who thought about it, but the **specific application** of it depended upon with whom the hearer identified. How they reacted revealed everything about who they really were, just as it still does for us today.
- C. Parables weren't invented by Jesus, though they certainly were perfected by him. His have a depth and power that far exceed those of any other rabbi.
1. But in one form or another, parables have a long history of use as a primary tool for teaching, and they can be found in the Old Testament as well as the New.
 2. Parables can be long or short, simple or complex, with one character or several.
 3. But they can be separated into two major types: The spoken parable and the acted-out parable that is like a living tableau.
 4. Jesus mostly used the spoken ones, but he did use both.
 5. Let's look at an example of a spoken parable. (Ask people to choose one or take parable in Mt 21:33-41, cf. Mk 12:1-12, Lk 20:9-19 parable of wicked tenants)
 - a. **(Get volunteer reader)**
 - b. Remember, we always consider the context to help us understand any passage.
 6. We aren't going to go fully into this parable or any other passage today, but let's apply our 4 questions to this one and the others we'll look at later.
 - a. *Who/what groups was/were Jesus addressing? (e.g., opponents, followers, people in need, Jews or foreigners/gentiles, or a mixed group?)*

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- a. *Who/what groups was/were Jesus addressing? (e.g., opponents, followers, people in need, Jews or foreigners/gentiles, or a mixed group?)*
 - b. *What was Jesus trying to do to/for the different people/groups in his presence? (Unite or divide, encourage or rebuke, challenge or reassure that all was well)*
 - c. *What about the method he used helped accomplish his purpose with those present?*
 - d. *What was Jesus trying to reveal about himself and the Kingdom of God?*
4. In this acted-out parable, we need to look very carefully at the context. The fig-tree incident, the cleansing of the temple, and the saying about faith moving a mountain all work together to convey a startling message---(No fruit=no good, get rid of it. Mountain-throw it away because no faith: the temple was cursed and would be removed!)
 5. Any of these three interwoven parts could easily be misinterpreted on its own, but seeing the nature of the parables and how they work together here gives us Jesus' meaning.
- G. That's all we will be able to do with parables tonight, but I hope everyone is starting to get a sense of how to approach them and understand them.
- IV. The Bible doesn't record a lot of Jesus' sermons.
1. We know he did preach in some form or another, often to large crowds, because the Bible tells us that, but for the most part we don't have the contents of those sermons.
 2. There are a couple of well known exceptions (that we won't go into except to mention them.)
 3. The Sermon on the Mount in Mt 5-7 is certainly the most well known. There is also a shorter version of the same or a similar sermon in Luke 6:20-42.
 4. And in the Gospel of John, just before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus essentially preaches a final sermon for his disciples (John 14-16).
 5. From these examples, we know that even his sermons were filled with parables.
- B. But there is another kind of sermon Jesus preached on occasion, that we don't usually talk about.
1. These are sermons that pronounce judgement. They are prophetic messages preached as warnings.

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2. In the O. T., the prophet Jonah was sent by God to the city of Nineveh to pronounce God's judgement/warning to the people there.
 3. You may remember that Jonah didn't want to go because he was afraid the people would heed God and repent, and that then God would forgive them. And Jonah hated Nineveh and didn't want that to happen.
 4. As it turned out, Jonah was right. That was exactly what happened.
- C. Jesus preached some sermons very much like Jonah's, but the people did not repent. (And judgement did fall on Jerusalem/temple. 70 A.D. Romans destroyed.)
1. Mt 11:20-24 woe to unrepentant cities (**vol. to read**)
 2. Mt. 25:31-46 judgement at the end of age
 3. Mt 23:1-3, 13-36 woe to hypocrites (focus on v. 13, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29, and 37-39) (**vol. to read**)
 - a. *Who/what groups was/were Jesus addressing? (e.g., opponents, followers, people in need, Jews or foreigners/gentiles, or a mixed group?)*
 - b. *What was Jesus trying to do to/for the different people/groups in his presence? (Unite or divide, encourage or rebuke, challenge or reassure that all was well)*
 - c. *What about the method he used helped accomplish his purpose with those present?*
 - d. *What was Jesus trying to reveal about himself and the Kingdom of God?*
 4. Notice one crucial difference between O. T. pronouncements of judgement/warnings to repent and Jesus' statements.
 - a. O.T. "Thus says the Lord."
 - b. Jesus just says on his own authority. Another way of saying to the perceptive who he really is.
- V. The last thing for us to consider tonight is how Jesus created moments for decision.
- A. In one-on-one encounters Jesus made it a practice to bring people to a point of commitment or rejection.
1. He wanted them, out of their own convictions and in their own words to say what they believed and to act upon that faith.
 2. Like the use of parables, this was also a long-established practice among rabbis and others in the ancient world.
 3. But, as it is true in the case with parables, here too, Jesus takes it to a new level.
 4. It shouldn't be surprising, should it? After all, who better knows the hearts of people than the one who created them?

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- B. There are two primary ways Jesus created these moments for decision.
1. There is the sort of Socratic method of asking penetrating questions, and
 2. Making statements---sometimes challenging ones---that forced a response.
 3. Let's quickly look at two examples of each, in which decisions are made, but they are opposite decisions.
 4. We will again use our 4 questions to guide us through each.
- C. Penetrating questions (2 examples)
1. Mt 16:13-17 (Who do people say that I am?) **Volunteer to read.**
 - a. 4 questions.
 - b. Notice Jesus observation that no one told Peter, he spoke from his own convictions.
 - c. Does this help explain what Jesus says in v. 20?
 - d. Of course, Jesus pushed it further in 21-23. Why? (So disciples would understand what Messiah's true role is.)
 2. Mark 2 1-12 had a different outcome. Forgave sins of paralyzed man before healing him. When some in crowd are shocked by Jesus forgiving sins, notice the penetrating question he asks them (**read v. 9**): "Which is easier, to heal or to forgive sins?"
 - a. What is the response of the complainers? The others? What do the responses tell us about their decisions?
- D. The other approach Jesus used to create moments of decision was to make statements that challenged people and ultimately revealed their faith or lack of it.
1. It is often in passages like this that modern, western people get confused because the method and the style are not familiar to us. So let's try to keep a "culturally" open mind.
 2. **Read or summarize Mt 15:21-28** (Canaanite woman)
 - a. The challenging statement from Jesus is in v. 26.
 - b. This is a verse that often shocks us, because we don't have the same cultural context.
 - c. Has anyone here read or seen movie "The Chosen" by Chaim Potok? (Scene in which rabbi makes false statement to see if his son catches the mistake. Delighted when son does.)
 - d. Just like Jesus is amazed and delighted when the woman gives her reply.
 3. Mark 10:17-22 (Rich young ruler)
 - a. Here we find both a question (v. 18) and a statement (21)
 - b. Apply our 4 questions again.
 - c. So we see this interaction is not so much about the need to get rid of everything we own as it is to put our commitment to Jesus ahead of even the things we love the most.

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- d. Just like that rich man we all have to make that kind of decision all the time---in one direction or the other.

VI. Summary

- A. Our goal today was to examine 3 of Jesus' methods of teaching and ministry: the telling of parables, preaching of sermons, and creating moments of decision.
 - 1. Have we done that?
 - 2. Have the 4 guide questions been helpful?
- B. How does what we have studied apply to each of us?
- C. What questions for next time?
- D. Any comments on our format or subject matter so far?
- E. Next meeting: Monday Oct. 24th, 7-8:30 p. m.
- F. Close in prayer
- G. **Archives of class notes can be found online at:**
www.fumcwa.org/classes/wdbsa

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Notes:

Styles

1. Prophetic: judgement, warning or reassurance about future
 2. Rabbinic: teaching by parables, discourse
 3. Priestly: sermons
 4. Messianic: Statements about himself such as “Before Abraham, “I am.” I am the light of the world. But also sub-text: Notice the authority that Jesus cites: scripture, and himself
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5. We are going to talk about 4 different styles and 4 of the different methods portrayed in the Gospels that can be seen in Jesus’s ministry.
 1. We will spend most of our time on these 4 methods that he used.
 2. And we will see that the various methods showed up in several or even all of his different styles.
 3. The 4 styles we will look for are Jesus’:
 - a. Rabbinic (teaching) style
 - b. Priestly (or a pastoral) style
 - c. Prophetic style
 - d. And, finally, his Messianic style
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- VII. First, a word about his styles.
- A. Much of what we read in the Gospels, while it may not seem normal in the modern, western sense, was very much in the tradition of rabbis and teachers throughout the middle east.
 1. Jesus used a very widely practiced **Rabbinic Style** in much of his ministry and teaching.
 2. Like other teachers/rabbis, he gathered around him a group of disciples to teach them and to prepare them to teach others.
 3. The methods Jesus used were not unusual.
 4. But the way that he used them, and the insight and skill he had did set him very much apart.
 5. Rabbis had several methods of teaching people
 - B. By Jesus’ **Priestly or Pastoral Style**,
 1. Speaking to public gatherings
 2. Addressing the spiritual and other needs of the people.
 - C. Prophetic Style
 1. Very much like the OT prophets

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2. Prophecy combines telling of what is to come and announcing God's judgement.
- D. Messianic Style

Jesus is also well known for his miracles.

- E. We will look at a few of them, categorized
- F. His miracles
 1. Semi-private healing (e.g., Peter's mother-in-law)
 2. Public healing (paralyzed man lowered through the roof)
 3. Semi-private non-healing miracle (calms the storm)
 4. Public non-healing miracle (feed 5,000 - all 4 gospels)

Jesus' Prophetic Style

- G. Prophecy combines telling of what is to come and announcing God's judgement.

VIII. Jesus' Messianic Style

- A. Statements about himself such as "Before Abraham, "I am." I am the light of the world. But also sub-text: Notice the authority that Jesus cites: scripture, and himself.
- B. Besides direct references to his messianic role, Jesus also has many one-on-one encounters in which he uses a Rabbinic technique to draw people out.
 1. This overlaps both Jesus' Messianic style and his Rabbinic style.
 2. It is often in these passages that modern, western people get confused because the method and the style are not familiar to us.
 3. There are two primary characteristics of this Messianic and Rabbinic style:
(1) There is the sort of Socratic method of asking penetrating questions,
and (2) deliberately making statements that force a response.