

## 2. Discipling Through Metaphor (1Q 2014—Discipleship)

**Biblical material:** 2 Sam. 12:1–7, Isa. 28:24–28, Matt. 7:24–27, 13:1–30, 13:34, 35, Luke 20:9–19.

### Quotes

- Jesus does not call us to do what he did, but to be as he was, permeated with love. Then the doing of what he did and said becomes the natural expression of who we are in him. *Dallas Willard*
- Jesus taught in parables for a reason. *Stuart Connelly*
- He [Jesus] speaks in parables, and though we have approached these parables reverentially all these many years and have heard them expounded as grave and reverent vehicles of holy truth, I suspect that many if not all of them were originally not grave at all but were antic, comic, often more than just a little shocking. *Frederick Buechner*
- With Jesus, however, the device of parabolic utterance is used not to explain things to people’s satisfaction but to call attention to the unsatisfactoriness of all their previous explanations and understandings. *Robert Farrar Capon*
- A cherry pie is . . . ephemeral. From the moment it emerges from the oven it begins a steep decline: from too hot to edible to cold to stale to mouldy, and finally to a post-pie state where only history can tell you that it was once considered food. The pie is a parable of human life. *Nick Harkaway*
- Every happening, great and small, is a parable whereby God speaks to us, and the art of life is to get the message. *Malcolm Muggeridge*

### Questions

Why use metaphors or parables at all? Why not speak clearly and plainly? Why did the disciples have a hard time understanding parables? What are the parables we need to understand today? As Jesus’ disciples, what questions should we be asking? How is God explaining himself as the Great Controversy unfolds?

### Bible summary

In this week’s study we look at the use of story and imagery as ways of conveying truth. We are given examples from the Old Testament and from the New. 2 Sam. 12:1-7 relates the story Nathan told David—and David’s self-condemnation! Agricultural practices as illustrations are given in Isa. 28:24-28. Jesus’ parable of house-building is recorded in Matt. 7:24–27. He also gave the illustration of the sower and the seeds in 13:1–30, after which the disciples asked for an explanation. Matthew records Jesus’ practice: “Jesus explained all these things to the crowds using illustrated stories—in fact he didn’t speak to them without using stories.” (13:34 FBV). In Luke 20:9–19 tells a very blunt story to illustrate the reception he was being given by the religious leaders.

### Comment

Jesus taught through parables—extended metaphors. But even his closest disciples didn’t understand, and asked him for explanations! Yet we “catch” the sense of

deep truths better in stories and examples and illustrations than in essays and theses. God knows our minds, and seeks to help us gain understanding through helpful illustrations.

In simple language Jesus spoke of eternal truths. He used imagery and parables and simple ideas to express the vital elements of salvation. They were not hard and wordy sermons, and the common people heard him gladly—because he was relevant and his words were simple. His listeners had no need for dictionaries.

If we as Jesus' disciples are looking for understanding, then we must use language that is clear and readily understood. Jesus "reached the people where they were." He did not ask them to learn a new language or to study a new vocabulary. The greatest Teacher never needed an interpreter. He used stories and illustrations to make his points, and did so in ways that encouraged thought and understanding.

That should be our goal—to be as transparent and simple as Jesus, not thinking that hard words and great-sounding terms will make us appear wise and educated. Jesus is to be our example in this also. The spiritual realities we want to share may seem hard to explain in everyday terms, but our calling is to follow the example of Jesus in making the dark things plain. Our role in telling the truth about God is not to be academics using high-flown technical language, nor orators amazing audiences with our wide vocabulary, nor inward-looking elitists confusing others with our in-house jargon.

Our role is tell the story of the God who made us, who came to save us, and who is coming again to take us to be where he is and to invite as many who will respond to come to love and trust our God too.

### **Ellen White Comments**

Natural things were the medium for the spiritual; the things of nature and the life-experience of His hearers were connected with the truths of the written word. Leading thus from the natural to the spiritual kingdom, Christ's parables are links in the chain of truth that unites man with God, and earth with heaven. {COL 17-18}

Jesus taught by illustrations and parables drawn from nature and from the familiar events of everyday life. . . . In this way He associated natural things with spiritual, linking the things of nature and the life experience of His hearers with the sublime truths of the written word. And whenever afterward their eyes rested on the objects with which He has associated eternal truth, His lessons were repeated. {CT 140}

Jesus spoke before the Pharisees and Sadducees in parables, hiding the clearness of truth under symbols and figures, because they would make a wrong use of the truths he presented before them; but to his disciples he spoke plainly. We should learn from Christ's method of teaching, and be careful not to close the ears of the people by presenting truths which, not being fully explained, they are in no way prepared to receive. {GW92 191}

Christ's manner of teaching was beautiful and attractive, and it was ever characterized by simplicity. He unfolded the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven through the use of figures and symbols with which His hearers were familiar; and the common people heard Him gladly, for they could comprehend His words. There were no high-sounding words used, to understand which it was necessary to consult a dictionary. {CT 240}