

## PARABLES - DEFINITION - Craddock

The word "parable," from the Greek word *parabole*, means literally, "that which is tossed alongside," implying a comparison, an analogy, an elaboration, or an illustration. Perhaps the best known and most helpful definition of a parable has been provided by C.H. Dodd: "At its simplest, the parable is a metaphor or simile (보기) drawn from nature or common life, arresting (마음을 붙들다, 끌다) the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease (괴롭히다, 놀리다) it into active thought" (The parable of the Kingdom, p. 16 of 1961 rev. ed.). This definition is most appropriate for the more extended or narrative parables (the sower, the widow and the judge, the Pharisees and the publican, etc.) rather than for the single sentence or single phrase comparisons which are also called parables (Luke 5:36; 6:39; Mark 7:17). In fact, in the Scriptures the word "parable" has a wide range of uses, referring to proverbs, bywords, allegories, riddles, figurative speech, and stories. However, since Luke contains so many narrative parables, Dodd's definition may prove illuminating. It reminds us that the resources for these stories are both nature (mustard seeds) and common experience (the prodigal son) and that their function may be as a simile (he is like a bulldog) or as a stronger, implied comparison called metaphor (he is a bulldog). Dodd also points to the attention-getting quality of the parable, joined to its refusal to make its meaning easily accessible to the hearer. In other words, parables are not simple little stories of Jesus told so that everyone, even the children, could understand everything he said. On one level, of course, these stories are intellectually within the reach of all. As we will observe shortly, the parable of the sower is so vividly the way life was known and observed that it would seem to carry in its bosom no mystery at all. Yet, if it is that obvious, why did Jesus tell it? <sup>1</sup>

The parable puts a burden on the listener that is not intellectual; rather, it teases the mind into active thought. The hearer has a feeling of strangeness in a very familiar narrative, and some interpretation is not only invited but urged. The hearer thus becomes an active participant in the communication and begins to offer interpretations. <sup>2</sup> Because the parable generates meaning for which the listener takes responsibility, it seems a particularly appropriate literary form for communicating the gospel, since each hearer must take responsibility for his or her own faith. <sup>3</sup>

Anyone who wishes to read further about parables will find helpful the article "parables" in *Harper's Bible Dictionary*: John D. Crossan, *In Parables*; Pheme Perkins, *Hearing the Parable of Jesus*; Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*; and John R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary on Luke* (Louisville, KY. John Knox Pres, 1990), 108.

<sup>2</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary on Luke* (Louisville, KY. John Knox Pres, 1990), 108.

<sup>3</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary on Luke* (Louisville, KY. John Knox Pres, 1990), 109.

<sup>4</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary on Luke* (Louisville, KY. John Knox Pres, 1990), 110.