

## Session 6: The Little Stories

*Why did Jesus spend so much time telling confusing little stories? Why are they often so hard to understand? And what do they have to teach us about the main themes of Jesus' ministry?*

*This session will help us understand and apply the parables of Jesus.*

## The Little Stories: The Parables

What do you make of Augustine on the Good Samaritan? (Luke 10:29-37)

Item	Meaning
Man going down from Jericho	Adam
Jerusalem	Heavenly City
The Moon	Our mortality (Jericho and Moon sound similar)
Robbers	The Devil and his angels
Stripping him	Removing his immortality
Beating him	Persuading him to sin
Leaving him half dead	Spiritually dead because of sin, but half alive because of the knowledge of God
Priest	Law - the priesthood of the OT
Levite	Prophets - the ministry of the OT
Good Samaritan	Christ
Binding of wounds	Restraint of sin

Item	Meaning
Oil	Comfort of good hope
Wine	Exhortation to spirited work
Animal	Body of Christ
Inn	The Church
Two denarii	Two commandments to love
Inkeeper	Apostle Paul
Return of the Good Samaritan	The resurrection of Jesus

Question: What do you make of this? Do you find it convincing? If so, why? And if not, why not?

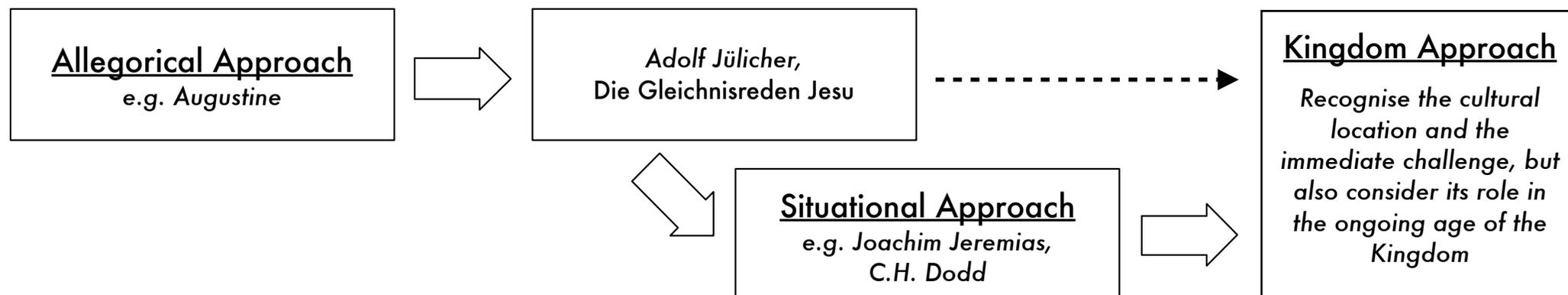
## The Little Stories: The Parables?

### What are parables?

Communicative	The parables are not simply entertaining stories (or preaching illustrations!) but tools of communication, so their themes are likely to correspond to the overall themes of Jesus' teaching
	The parables represent the interpretation which our Lord offered of His own ministry' (C. H. Dodd)
	'They made sense only within the whole context of Jesus' career. They echoed, reflected, interpreted and indeed defended the main thrusts of Jesus' work, and themselves set up other echoes in turn' (N.T. Wright)
	The story which can be evoked by the phrase 'kingdom of god' may well be present even though the phrase itself is absent' (Wright)
Cultural	'What seems to the western mind to be bad farming is simply customary usage in Palestinian conditions' (J. Jeremias)
Confrontational	'When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds' (Matt 21:45-46)
	'For the most part, though not exclusively, they are weapons of controversy. Every one of them calls for an answer on the spot ... All of the parables that deal with the gospel itself are a defence of the good news. The actual proclamation of the good news to sinners took a different form, in the offer of forgiveness, in Jesus' inviting the guilty to taste his hospitality, and in his calling them to follow him. It was not to sinners that he addressed the gospel parables, but to his critics, to those who rejected him because he gathered the despised around him' (J. Jeremias)
Cryptic	Matt 13:1-17, 34-35; Mark 4:11-12 – are these deliberately cryptic in order to confuse people? Compare Matt 13:14-15; Isa 6:9-10
	The parables not only conceal but also reveal and often they reveal that which was previously concealed' (Craig Blomberg)

## The Little Stories: How to interpret them?

A few principles for interpretation.



<p><u>Look for one main point</u></p> <p>'Often a parable will only have one basic truth in mind. We must not try to read more into a parable than we ought [...] we must never try to make a parable stand on all four legs! Not every detail of a parable has to have a meaning.' (R.T. Kendall)</p>	<p><u>Look at the wider setting</u></p> <p>Why did Jesus tell the parable? How did his hearers interpret it?</p> <p>What is around it? Other parables? Miracles?</p>	<p><u>Look at its place in Jesus' ministry</u></p> <p>How does it fit with the other main themes of Jesus' ministry? In particular the Kingdom?</p>	<p><u>Look at the use of imagery from the OT</u></p> <p>The parables may contain allegorical elements, but their meaning is most often derived from the OT.</p> <p>How were these symbols used previously? Does the story sound familiar?</p>
--	--	---	---

## The Little Stories: Group Work

What do these parables teach us about the Kingdom?

Matthew 13:31-32

Matthew 13:33

Matthew 13:44

Hint: Consider Ezekiel 31:1-14 and Daniel 4:10-23 and think about how Jesus may be adapting the imagery to make his point

Hint: Most leaven imagery is negative (Matt 16:6; 1 Cor 5:6; Gal 5:9). How should we understand Jesus' *positive* use?

Hint: What were people's expectations about the Kingdom and how would this parable challenge them?

## The Little Stories: The Wicked Tenants

Mark 12:1-12

'And he began to speak to them in parables. "A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country. When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, "they will respect my son." But those tenants said to one another, "This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this Scripture: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?" And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.'

Vineyard (Ps 80:8-13; Jer 2:21; Ezek 19:10-14; Hos 10:1)

### Unpacking the Story

- What is the vineyard?
- Who are the inhabitants?
- Who is the owner?
- What is the fruit?
- What is the crime?
- What is the consequence?

### Unpacking the Story

- What is the vineyard?
- Who are the tenants?
- Who is the owner?
- What is the fruit?
- What is the crime?
- What is the consequence?
- What is the hearer's response?

Isaiah 5:1-7

'Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved has a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briers and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry.'

- Ps 118:22-23; Is 8:14-15; Dan 2:34-45