

Hugo Bouter

The parables and mysteries of the New Testament

"Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"

Mark 4:13

The pictorial teaching Christ gave His disciples in the form of parables was, so to speak, the "new wine" He offered to His people, the wine that gladdened both the Bridegroom's heart and that of His friends. This new wine symbolized the abundance of joy in the Messianic age, which had arrived with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. On the basis of His finished work on the cross and through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we can already partake of the blessings of the coming age and the Kingdom of God, which is a kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).

Obviously, this teaching is comprehensive. We are not immediately accomplished disciples of the kingdom of heaven, who bring out of their treasures things new and old (Matt. 13:52). We need to grow in spiritual understanding of the images of Scripture. The parables show us how the Kingdom manifests itself in different phases. The coming of the King in humility, as a Savior, brought the Kingdom near. In the Person of the Christ it was already with them, it was among them (Luke 17:21). But the rejection of the Lord by the Jewish people meant that the Kingdom took on a hidden form.

The kingdom was still present, it would even expand wherever the rights of Christ were recognized, through the activity of His Word and Spirit. But this is primarily a spiritual reign (Matt. 28:18-20). The Lord Jesus Himself is absent, and seated at the right hand of God. He is "hidden in God" (Col. 3:3). This also means that intruding sin and iniquity will not be dealt with immediately. That will happen at the Second Coming. At His appearing, the Kingdom is revealed in power and majesty. Then the Kingdom of Peace begins in heaven and on earth, and it will last for a thousand years.

As the great Teacher, Christ initiated His disciples deeper into the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, by giving them a more detailed explanation of the parables. But to the unbelieving multitudes, those who stood outside, there was no such explanation. I would like to draw a parallel here with the understanding of the mysteries in Paul's letters. Just like the parables in the gospels, the mysteries of God can also only be understood by 'insiders', not by those who are outside. Not that these mysteries have been communicated in some 'secret language', for all the mysteries have been openly revealed in the writings of the New Testament. We have it all in black and white.

Yet they can only be understood by true believers, who possess the indwelling of God's Spirit and are introduced to the Scriptures by His teaching (cf. John 16:13-15). Through the anointing with the Spirit, God's Word lies before us as an open Book. "His anointing teaches us about all things" (1 John 2:27).

In fact, this is also the answer to the profound question the Lord asked His disciples, "Do you not understand this parable (namely, that of the sower)? How then will you understand all the parables?" (Mark. 4:13). How are they to be understood at all? How can we understand God's Word? The way, the method of gaining understanding, is spiritual in nature: born again people read the Bible with the help and in the light of the Spirit of God. Thus we accept and understand that which is of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:10f.). Thus we gain insight into the depths of God, into the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, and into all the mysteries concerning Christ and the Church. Thus we learn to understand and admire the wonderful wisdom of God. May God grant it to you and to me.
