

The Richness of the Didactic Language of Jesus in the Ethical Parables of the Gospel of St. Matthew

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a linguistic exploration in the language of didacticism employed by Jesus Christ in his teaching of ethics as contained in one of the synoptic gospels, St. Matthew. With the aid of eclectic linguistic analytical method, the paper looks at ethics as the focal theme of Jesus' teaching and establishes the fact that in the treatment of ethics, Jesus employed varied ornamental linguistic devices such as condensed language, exclamations, allusions, dramatic language, repetition, affirmative language, rhetorical questions, juxtaposition, similes and pragmatic use of the preposition 'but'. The usage of the features is found to be very effective, appropriate, down-to-earth, appealing and longer lasting in the hearts and memory of the audience as well as readers and scholars of the Bible over the ages. Each device matches the ethical point being taught by Jesus. The paper concludes that apart from being the saviour of the whole world, Jesus was and 'is still' essentially the teacher with the profoundly unequal power of didacticism that is rich and unsurpassable, with unprecedented infinite linguistic repertoire.

KEYWORDS: Language, Didacticism, Parables, Ethics

1. Introduction

Language is basic to human existence. Right from the time of creation, language has been a potent tool of creation and the continual creation of things. Right from the third verse of the Bible, the use of language of command has been playing a very significant role of creativity, cause and effect. Thus from the first recorded creatively instructive expression of God in the Bible (Genesis 1³) which is “וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי” and God said let there be...” to the ethical parables of Jesus in the New Testament and the present usage of language all over the world, one sees the indispensability of language in human existence. This implies that language is basic to life as breath is to it. There are various types of language based on several factors which include functions, domains and levels. One of such is what can be called 'didactic language' which is the language that is used for teaching, instruction, moulding and remoulding. It can also be called language of 'didacticism'. As an adjective, 'didactic' is described as “Speech or writing that is ... intended to teach people a moral lesson”(Bullon 2008:432). Thesaurus sees it as being rooted in education to imply counselling, moralising, guidance, admonitory, warning, prescription, command, precepts, and exhortation (Lloyd 1984: 534).

'Ethics' are “moral rules or principles of behaviour for deciding what is right and wrong”.(Bullon 2008:533) 'Ethical' relates 'to principles of what is right and wrong'(ibid) Features of ethics include morals, virtue, obligation, code of conduct, code of duty, observance of rules and regulations, obedience and obligatory actions.(Lloyd 1984: 111)

In teaching the people ethics, Jesus Christ made use of parables extensively in the four synoptic Gospels. The parables can be aptly called ethical parables due to the obvious fact they combine attributes of ethics and parables. Parables themselves are short simple stories that teach moral or religious lessons, especially those stories that were told by Jesus in the Bible (Bullon 2008:1192) There could be various reasons for using

parables, one of which is to hide the meaning and have it shrouded in mystery. It can also be a way of making the intelligent hearer to 'dig' out the meaning in relation to his level of faith. Consequently, there is the need to examine the richness of the language of didacticism used by Jesus Christ in His parables as contained in the gospel of Matthew. 'Richness' itself implies various interesting things and diversity (ibid, p.1414) of a thing such as a literary material. Out of the four Gospels, the gospel of Mathew is considered for this paper because it has a higher number of parables than the other three. Specifically, it has ten peculiar parables and five others. The ten peculiar parables are those of the weeds (Matt13²⁴⁻³⁰), the hidden treasure (Matt13⁴⁴) the pearl of great price (Matt13⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶), the draw-net (Matt13⁴⁷⁻⁵²), the unmerciful servant (Matt18²¹⁻³⁵), the workers in the vineyard (Matt20¹⁻¹⁶), the two sons (Matt21²⁸⁻³²), the ten virgins (Matt25¹⁻¹³) and the talents (Matt25¹⁴⁻³⁰). The five others are those of the lost sheep (Matt18¹⁰⁻¹⁴), wedding banquet (Matt22¹⁻¹³), the tenants (Matt21³³⁻⁴⁶), the mustard seed and the yeast (Matt13³¹⁻³⁵) and the sower (Matt13¹⁻²³).

II. The Context of Biblical Parables

Defining a parable within the context of the first century Jewish culture is not as easy as one might suppose. From the Old Testament, it is the Hebrew word *mashal* that is translated today as parable. Yet it must be noted that the *mashal* can appear in many different forms with a wide range of applications. (See Crossan 1992) For example, not only will the Old Testament parable appear as a story, but it may appear in the form of a proverb, as found in Ezek 18:2-3. The parable may appear in the form of a taunt, as is found in Isa 14:3-4. The parable may appear as a riddle, as in Ps 49:4, or even in the form of an allegory, as found in Ezek 17:2-10. Jesus also used different forms of parables in his teaching. One form he used was the metaphor or figurative saying, such as can be found in Mark 7:14-17. He also used the form of a simile or similitude, as can be found in Mark 4:30-32. So also He made use of the story parable, such as the parable of the talents found in St. Matthew, chapter 25.

This is what the concept of a parable encompassed in the days of the original audience of Jesus. The term parable will now be more narrowly defined. Perhaps a useful definition, in an attempt to dispel confusion generated from its broad usage in Scripture, would be a "figure of speech in which there is a brief or extended comparison" (Stein 1981:22). Though certainly not covering all of the cultural usages of the term, this definition at least provides the reader with not only a definition but also a generalized purpose for the parable; it is used as a comparison. A more precise and technical definition for a parable would be "a figurative narrative that is true to life and is designed to convey through analogy some specific spiritual truth" (Bailey 1998:30). Parables make use of the commonplace settings and events of everyday life (in the case of Jesus' parables this would be the first century life in Palestine) to reveal abstract truth. Wenham correctly notes that parables are truly "down-to-earth, real-life stories" (Wenham 1989: 13). Perhaps a more common and popular definition for a parable would be simply an earthly story with a heavenly meaning (Barclay 1970:12). Though simplistic, this practical definition is highly effective for the churches of today in explaining and understanding what a parable is. As already implied, parables were well known to the first century Jewish culture. Rabbis of that period often used parables as a teaching tool. The thrust of rabbinic parables, however, was typically to clarify the law. The stories Jesus told, the comparisons he made, would be for many different purposes. For example, Jesus taught what God was like (Luke 15:11-32), what it means to forgive (Matt 18:21-35), what it means to be a neighbour (Luke 10:30-37) and even what hell is like (Luke 16:19-31). Not only did first century rabbis use parables, the original audience to whom Jesus taught would have been familiar with many of the more notable parables of the Scriptures.

Without question, many Old Testament writers made use of this practical, literary technique. One famous parable is found in Isa 5:1-7. In this story, God equates Israel and Judah with a vineyard and, through the power of story, pronounces judgment upon his people (Barnes 2006:11-23). Another famous Old Testament parable is found in 2 Sam 12:1-7. This is a simple story about a wealthy man with great herds who took his neighbour's pet lamb, just to satisfy a present need for hospitality. The significance of this story lies in the fact that Prophet Nathan told the parable to King David. The prophet, through the power of story, showed to the king his sinful and wicked actions that in turn facilitated his repentance. Parables were very well suited to the practicality of the Jewish mindset.

This mindset had a pronounced desire to reach conclusions, and these conclusions must in turn lead to practical actions. Parables have the power to take abstract ideas, or spiritual truths, and convert them into practical applications in life. The aspect of comparison will now be briefly explored. Parables in effect place two items or ideas beside each other. The first is a well-known, practical, everyday picture of life. The other is a spiritual truth that is being taught. The comparison of these two items or ideas comprise the spiritual lesson that the teacher, and in this case Jesus, teaches. The parables of Jesus also have a universal appeal in that they transcend the Jewish culture in which they were originally told. The capacity of the story to paint a picture within the mind of the audience lends itself as a powerful tool in communicating abstract and spiritual truths. Jesus used parables to make his teaching comprehensible for all ages. The audience was first persuaded to pass judgment on something with which they were well acquainted (such as King David did in 2 Sam 12), and then to transfer that judgment to something that they had not yet considered. In this manner, parables illumine spiritual truth (ibid: p.13).

The Interpretation of Parables

As with many other biblical matters, the interpretation of the parables of Jesus has been an issue of debate within the church. Throughout most of church history, parables have been interpreted as allegories. Indeed, this was the dominant interpretation from the time of the church fathers to approximately the middle of the nineteenth century, with the notable exception of the reformers. In an allegory, characters and objects within the stories represented something other than themselves. After all these details were assembled and explained, then the “spiritual significance of the story was determined.” Serious problems arose from allegorizing the parables. Without question, allegorizing the stories of Jesus induces a great subjective element into their interpretation. Subjectivism, in effect, allows the interpreter to read into parables whatever brand of theology he may hold without concern for what Jesus may have intended. Allegorizing of parables not only ignores the original intent of the biblical writer but also the immediate context in which Jesus told the story (ibid: p.15).

For example, the story of the two sons (Luke 15:11–32) was specifically addressed to the Pharisees. This truth is revealed within the immediate context of the story, within the first two verses of Luke’s fifteenth chapter. The story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37) was told in response to a question concerning the law and who one’s neighbor is (Luke 10:29). Therefore, far from being intended to convey a hidden meaning in every detail, as in an allegory, parables were simply meant to illustrate and drive home particular points. Understanding this particular point mitigates against the tendency of the interpreter to allegorize the story. Moving away from the allegorizing of parables has been a long process for the church. As already stated, the most significant historical exception to this view prior to the nineteenth century came from the reformers, partly as a consequence of their reading of Scripture in the literal sense. Yet despite such efforts, especially on the part of Calvin, the church as a whole still clung to the allegorical method when interpreting parables.(ibid: p.19).

The late nineteenth century, due in part to the work of Jülicher, became the turning point for the interpretation of parables. Jülicher pointed out the difference between parables and allegories. Allegories contain a series of symbols that need to be interpreted. Parables, on the other hand, contain but a single point of comparison. In effect, each parable is a single picture which “sets to portray a single object or reality.” Jülicher proposed that the parables of Jesus were “simple and straightforward comparisons”(ibid: p.20). Thus academic scholarship began to move the church away from the viewpoint of allegorizing parables. Unfortunately, Jülicher not only threw out allegorizing as interpretation, but he also threw out allegory as a literary form in the understanding of parables. As will be noted later, parables clearly contain allegorical elements. However, Jülicher’s work has been extraordinarily influential in the understanding of parables today. Dodd and Jeremias built upon the work of Jülicher by dislodging the thinking of the interpreter from his own contemporary time to that of the original audience of first century Palestine (Blomberg 1990:16). They sought to understand the original setting in which Jesus taught. As a hermeneutical principle, the author’s intent must precede the reader’s application. Today, modern scholarship generally rejects the tendency to allegorize the parables of Jesus and instead focuses on their main points.

This is not to imply that parables do not contain allegorical elements. Clearly in the story of the two

sons (Luke 15:11–32), the father represents God, the older son represents the Pharisees, and the younger son represents tax collectors and sinners, as can be derived from the context of the first several verses of the chapter. Yet the story in itself is not an allegory, nor should allegorizing be used in its interpretation. However, in this vein it must be noted that some scholars such as Blomberg, who has been earlier referenced in this paper, believes in moving the interpretation of parables back towards the direction of the allegorical. His claim is that these stories probably make more than one main point (Barnes 2006: 19).

However, this opinion is in the minority. As a fundamental hermeneutical principle, if the biblical text is to be understood in its literal or normal sense, to interpret a parable the reader must first understand the historical and cultural context in which it was told. Second, the reader must understand the undergirding spiritual setting that prompted the telling. This involves understanding the specific question or incident that may have prompted the telling of the story, or the spiritual or teaching context in which it was told. This spiritual setting can usually be discerned from the textual context in which it appears. This procedure will clarify the original truth or message as it was first given to the original audience. The reader must remember the obvious fact that the parables of Jesus are contained within the pages of Scripture. Since all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16), it also goes without saying that parables are God-inspired. Yet what has often been overlooked is the crucial fact that parables, in their central and main point, are also profitable for doctrine. The main point of a parable, the point of comparison, must agree theologically with the rest of Scripture. Jesus used the technique of story, not primarily to entertain, but to communicate truth to his audience. The message of faith in the parable of the talents communicates a theologically accurate spiritual truth.

Common Parable Techniques

The power of the parable, or any story for that matter, resides more in what it shows the audience as opposed to what it tells. Showing, such as by contrasts or analogies, has a far greater impact upon the audience than a mere narration or itemization of facts. Telling merely delivers information to the intellect. Showing wraps a picture with emotion and delivers it, not only to the intellect, but also deep into the very soul of the audience. Barnes noted that Matthew makes use of both methods (*ibid*). In the gospel account, showing and telling are the two methods primarily used to bring life to the characters that appear in the gospel. Furthermore, Jesus used these methods in the parables that he told. Writing for today's publishing industry, editors Renni Browne and Dave King explain the difference between showing and telling. 'Telling' in a story is essentially a narrative summary. It imparts facts and information. In short, it tells the audience the story, sometimes even what to think. Showing on the other hand, describes an immediate scene that draws the audience into the story (Browne and King 1993: 3).

The story teller often uses action or dialogue to show pertinent information to the audience. In this manner, characters can speak and act for themselves and the audience can watch these characters react to one another. Showing never tells an audience what to think, but rather the technique leads the audience into the story where they are then allowed to draw their own conclusions. 'Showing' is far more powerful in imparting truth to an audience. For instance, to say a home is beautiful is an example of telling. To describe the home's waxed wooden floors, ornate banisters, wide bay windows, multiple stone fireplaces, and massive cedar beams shows the audience, all the while allowing them to reach their own conclusions, something of the home's beauty. 'Showing' in a story demonstrates respect for the audience, and makes it easier for the story teller to draw them into his story.

In the Old Testament, as already noted, Nathan made inspired use of this technique. Nathan told David a story about a rich man, a poor man, and a lamb. But Nathan showed David the heart of a sinful, covetous, and adulterous king. In the confrontation that followed, David made the correct connection that in turn led to his proper response. Jesus also used the technique of 'showing' to communicate his messages. For example, in the parable of the two sons (Luke 15:11–32), Jesus never used the words 'publican', 'Pharisee', or even 'God'. In fact, Jesus told his audience nothing about these groups of people. Yet using the powerful medium of story, and as already noted, Jesus clearly showed his audience something about all the three, especially the heart of the heavenly Father. Jesus used a story about workers in a vineyard to show his audience something about grace

(Matt 20:1–16). Jesus told a story about a despised Samaritan lending aid to a crime victim to show what it means to be a neighbour (Luke 10:30–37). These elements of showing and telling are also present in Matthew’s parable of the talents. Jesus tells his audience that a master distributed talents to his servants in the amounts of five talents, two, and finally one talent, and then departed on a journey. A clear itemization of facts has been related to the audience. However, later in the story when Jesus, through reciting dialogue, relates the master’s praise of the first servant, the audience is shown a great deal about the master, including his massive wealth (Barnes 2006: 21).

Jesus tells his audience the actions of the slothful, third servant, but he shows why this servant is wicked. The depth and power of a story, including the parables of Jesus, reside in what it shows the audience. Another common technique that Jesus used in his parables was the technique of contrast. Referring again to the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37), Jesus contrasted the despised, Samaritan hero with a respected priest and a Levite. This contrast showed the audience the proper course of action by defining a neighbor. Also, Jesus contrasted the poor Lazarus with the rich man in hades (Luke 16:19–31) not as a statement that one’s eternal destiny is based on one’s economic status. Instead, the story showed that not heeding Moses and the prophets was clearly why the rich man was in hades and therefore by contrast, heeding Moses and the prophets was why Lazarus was in Abraham’s bosom. The technique of contrast drove home the truth. Hence in the parable of the talents, two diligent workers were contrasted with the slothful servant. When the audience was shown why the wicked servant was wicked, they were able to infer, through the technique of contrast, what motivated the first two faithful servants.

Often in his teaching, Jesus would greatly exaggerate a concrete example to his audience far beyond the everyday world in order to showcase a profound truth. For example, in John 10:11–15, Jesus identifies himself as a good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. In the commonplace world, no shepherd would die for any sheep. True, the owner of the flock would take greater personal risks for the flock than the hiring who flees, just as a business owner would defend his property against rioters during a time of civil unrest. Yet no business owner intends to die for his property, just as no shepherd intends to die for his flock. When David rescued lambs from the lion and bear, he was willing to take personal risk, but he certainly had no intention to die for the lambs (or in place of the lambs) (1 Sam 17:34–35). Therefore, when Jesus said that he will lay down his life for the sheep, he uses the technique of exaggeration to transcend the commonplace setting of the culture to emphasize a dramatic spiritual truth. (ibid, p. 22). This technique of exaggeration also appears in the parable of vineyard laborers (Matt 20:1–16). In this story, the landowner intentionally overpays his workers without regard to their length of labor, a horrid business practice both then and now. Yet this exaggeration shows the reader something about the grace of God. This exaggeration technique will also appear in the parable of the talents when Jesus uses the phrase, “the joy of your master.” Parables often contain a pivot point. This pivot might be an action or simply just a word. Typically, the pivot comes as a surprise in the story and it is used to change the meaning or point of the parable. For example, in the parable of the dishonest steward (Luke 16:1–9), the rich man commends dishonest actions, no doubt to the surprise of Jesus’ audience. Yet this pivot is another technique that moves the story from the commonplace world of commerce to the realm of spiritual truth.

The parable of the talents also contains a pivot point by Jesus’ use of the word, “wicked.” This term moves the story from one about actions to one about motivations with eternal consequences. When combined with other story techniques and literary brilliance, this pivot point also shows the true motivation of the first group of servants. It is essential to recognize these parable techniques that Jesus used in order to understand the message Jesus was teaching. Ignoring these story telling and literary tools will lead to a misreading of the parable. The correct recognition of these techniques will clearly reveal the truth that Jesus was communicating to his audience. It is this enterprise that this paper saddles itself with; to examine in particular the didactic nature of the literary strength of Jesus’ parables (ibid, p.23).

III. Didactic Language and Ethical Parables of Jesus

While on earth, Jesus Christ went out doing good, healing the sick and granting freedom to the oppressed and those in bondage. He also went about teaching people the proper way to live on earth to please

God and qualify for Heaven. This teaching complements the healings by Jesus to have what is often referred to as the healing and teaching ministry of Jesus. As earlier affirmed, the teaching ministry was accomplished essentially through the apt usage of ethical parables which, in the gospel of Matthew, are fifteen. Various linguistic devices which are discernible from the ethical parables and which cumulatively add beauty to the parable are codified, explained and illustrated below.

A major feature of the didactic language employed by Jesus Christ is the impressive use of (what can be called) condensed language. ‘Condense’ is admissible to linguistics as ‘making something that is spoken or written shorter, by not giving as much detail or using fewer words to give the same information’ (Bullon 2008: 201). This is an essential feature of parables which Jesus made use of, to the extent that the Bible records it in Matthew 13 that Jesus “told many things ... in parables” and His disciples had to ask Him in Matthew 13¹⁰ that “why do you speak to the people in parables?” to which He responded in verses 13 that “διὰ τοῦτο ἐν παραβολαῖς αὐτοῖς λαλῶ, ὅτι βλέποντες οὐ βλέπουσιν καὶ ἀκούοντες οὐκ ἀκούουσιν οὐδὲ συνίουσιν, ‘though seeing, they do not see, though hearing, they do not hear or understand’ ” so as to fulfil the earlier Old Testament prophecy of Prophet Isaiah that the people “ וְאֶל-תְּבִינֵי וְרָאִו וְלֹא-יָדְעוּ שְׂמוֹעַ הֲוָה לְעַם הַזֶּה וְאָמְרָתָ לְעַם הַזֶּה וְלֹא-תָדְעוּ: וְאֶל-תְּבִינֵי: ‘will be ever hearing but never understanding’ ” (Verse 14). Matthew 13³⁴ affirms that everything that Jesus said to the crowd was in parables so as to fulfil the earlier prophecy by the prophet that “I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world” (verse 35). It suffices therefore that Jesus was conscious that He was using condensed language which might be difficult for the listeners to understand as evident in Matthew 13⁵¹ when He asked them whether they understood all the things He uttered.

The second feature of the profound didactic language of Jesus that makes the ethical parables to be very rich is the dramatic nature of the parables. Two particular ethical parables that depict this feature are the parables of the ten virgins and that of the talents as contained in Matthew 25¹⁻³⁰. For the parable of the ten virgins which teaches punctuality, preparedness, readiness, good planning and sufficient provision, one finds actable didactic expressions like:

Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him” (v 6);

“Give us some of your oil, our lamps are going out” (v 7):

“No --- there may not be enough for both of us and you. Instead,

Go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves” (v 9);

”Sir! Sir! --- open the door for us! (v 11) and;

“I tell you the truth, I don’t know you” (v 12).

Each of the above expressions is dramatisable and actable. The conversational nature makes the expressions natural and easy to memorise and remember. They are not only hearer friendly but also reader-friendly. The dramatic nature of the didactic expressions makes the teaching to be easily understood by the hearers and readers which is a departure from the difficulty which could be encountered in the condensed nature of the parables. Any expression that is dramatisable has a higher propensity to be long remembered than if it were to be dry and drab.

The third feature that shows the richness of the didactic language of the ethical parables of Jesus is the repetition of words which can also be regarded as repetitive language. The main purpose of this linguistic device

is to aid understanding and the power of ‘recall’ of the listeners. For example, in the parable of the talents which is contained in Matthew 25, we find ‘to’ mentioned four times in a single sentence, “τάλαντον talent” was mentioned three times while “another” was used two times as evident in verse 15 which is quoted below:

καὶ ὁ μὲν ἔδωκε πέντε τάλαντα, ὁ δὲ δύο, ὁ δὲ ἓν, ἐκάστω κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν δύναμιν, καὶ ἀπεδήμησεν. εὐθέως

to one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to

another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

Closely related to dramatic language is the affirmative language used by our Lord Jesus Christ in the parables contained in the Gospel of St Matthew. The affirmative expressions are myriad and they lend credence to the authority of Jesus Christ. Examples are found in Chapter 25^{13, 26 and 28} as quoted below:

“γρηγορεῖτε οὖν, ὅτι οὐκοῦδα εἶτε τὴν ἡμέραν οὐδὲ τὴν ὥραν.

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or

the hour”. (verse¹³)

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You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with bankers, so that when I returned, I would have received it back with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more and he will have in abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (v. ²⁶⁻³⁰)

Of great importance is the use of rhetorical questions. A rhetorical question is the kind that requires no answer. Such questions are many. The purpose is to leave issues in the heart of the listeners for them to keep on ruminating in the course of their internalization of the teaching of Christ. In such a way, lasting impressions are kept with the hearers and the readers. One of such questions is found in the parable of the lost sheep when Jesus asked the question:

Τὴν μὴν δοκεῖ; ἐὰν γένῃται ἰνὴν ἀνθρώπῳ ἐκατὸν πρόβατα καὶ κληθῇ ἐν ἑνὲς αὐτῶν, οὐχὶ ἀφίσει τὰ ἑνενήκοντα ἐννέα ἐπιτὰ ἄρηκαὶ πορευθεὶς ζητεῖ τὸ πλανώμενον;

What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for one that wandered off? (Matt. 18¹²)

Similarly, three rhetorical questions are found in the parable of the workers in the vineyard as recorded in verses 13 and 15 of Matthew 20:

“ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς ἐνὶ αὐτῶν εἶπεν· ἑταῖρε, οὐκ ἀδικῶ σε· οὐχὶ διηναρίου συνεφώνησάμοι;

[ἦ] οὐκ ἔξεστιν μοι θέλω ποιῆσαι ἐν τοῖς ἐμοῖς; ἢ οὐ φθαλμὸς σου πονηρὸς ἐστὶν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἀγαθός εἰμι;

Friend, I am not being unfair to you .didn't you agree to work for a denarius?" (v13)

“Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money or are you envious because I am generous?"

In the discussion of the linguistic richness of ethical parables of Jesus, mention should be made of the frequent use of “ὁ δὲ but”. “But ὁ δὲ” in this usage, is a preposition which is used to connect two statements or phrases when the second one adds something different or seems surprising after the first one”¹⁰. Its use is evident in the parables of the unmerciful servant, the workers in the vineyard the sower and the weeds. In the parable of the sower, we have:

ὁ μὲν δὲ μακάριοι οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ ὅτι βλέπουσιν καὶ τὰ ἄωτα ὁ μὲν δὲ τὰ ἀκούουσιν.

ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι πολλοὶ προφῆται καὶ δίκαιοι ἐπεθύμησαν ἰδεῖν ἃ βλέπετε καὶ οὐκ εἶδαν, καὶ ἀκούσαι ἃ ἀκούετε καὶ οὐκ ἤκουσαν.

ὁ μὲν οὖν ἀκούσατε τὴν παραβολὴν τοῦ σπεύραντος.

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears

because they hear. For I tell the truth many prophets and righteous

men lodged to see what you see **but** did not see it and to

hear what you hear **but** did not hear it. (Matthew 13¹⁶⁻¹⁸).

Exclamation is a “sound, word or short sentence that you say suddenly and loudly because you are surprised, angry or excited”(ibid, p.541). When it is expressed, it is accompanied by the exclamation mark that is written “after a sentence or word that expresses surprise, anger or excitement”(ibid). This linguistic device was used by Jesus Christ in the parable of the talent where it featured twice both in verses 21 and 23 of Matthew 25 to show the joy, ecstasy and positive surprise of Jesus as evident below:

ἔφη αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ· εὖ, δοῦλός εἰμι ἀγαθὸς καὶ πιστός, ἐπιόλιγα ἤπιστός,

ἐπιπολλῶνσεκαταστήσω· εἴσελθειζτὴνχαρὰντοῦκυρίουσου.

ἔφηαὐτῷκύριοςαὐτοῦ· εὖ, δοῦλεἀγαθὸκαίπιστέ, ἐπιὸλίγαἤξιπιδόξως,
ἐπιπολλῶνσεκαταστήσω· εἴσελθειζτὴνχαρὰντοῦκυρίουσου.

His master replied, ‘well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master’s happiness! ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master’s happiness!

Conversely, the exclamation was used by Jesus Christ in verse 26 of the same scripture to show HIS anger and bitterness against the wicked, slothful servant when Jesus said “You wicked and lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not gathered seeds?” With the use of exclamatory expressions, Jesus Christ behaved and demonstrated how a human being would feel when he is happy and when he is disappointed with a servant who has come short of his expectations. In addition, the use of exclamations makes the teaching in parables a familiar thing to the audience so as to aid their understanding and make them feel very much at home with Jesus Christ who made himself low to be in the midst of human beings.

The parables of Jesus Christ are very rich in allusions. Allusions in speech are linguistic devices whereby references are made to something, a person, a situation or an event in order to substantiate and (or) validate an issue being discussed. This linguistic device is observed to have been used by Jesus in the parable of the sower when HE was responding to the question asked by the disciples as to why Jesus spoke in parables (Matt13¹⁰). Jesus said in verses 13-14 that:

This is why I speak to them in parables:

“Though seeing, they do not see;

Though hearing, they do not hear or understand

In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

“You will be ever hearing but never understanding

You will be ever seeing but never perceiving

For this people’s heart has become calloused;

they hardly hear with their ears and they have

closed their eyes otherwise they might see with

their eyes ear with their ears understand with their

hearts and turn and I will heal them.

The three verses above are from Isaiah 6⁹⁻¹⁰ which is reproduced below to establish the veracity of the claim that the utterance of Jesus being discussed is truly an allusion which is a prophetic one and which was fulfilled by Jesus in the use of parables to teach ethics:

He said, "Go and tell his people: Be ever hearing,

but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never

perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused;

make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise

they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears,

understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.

In adding to the wealth of the didactic language of Jesus Christ in his ethical teachings through parables, it is also evident that HE used another linguistic and communicative device which is a juxtaposition of two unlike terms with the sole purpose of amplifying their differences so that the hearers will obviously see the differences and be able to choose between the good and the bad. Juxtaposition is evident in most parables of Jesus. A good example is the parable of the banquet where one of the guests did not have a wedding garment which he/she should wear. Without the juxtaposition of "the wedding" and "the absence of wedding garment", the disqualification of the man without the wedding gown would not have been very evident. Jesus Christ affirms in Matt. 22¹² that "Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?"

Similarly in the parable of the unmerciful servant, the juxtaposition shows that the master of the servant was *Merciful* on the servant by cancelling **all** the servant's debt of "ten thousand talent" and immediately after the cancellation, the servant whose debt was completely cancelled was *Not Merciful* to the fellow who owed him just "a hundred denarii", despite all the appeals and entreaties by the lesser debtor. This juxtaposition can be schematized briefly below:

One thousand talents” cancelled by the master for the unmerciful servant.	One hundred Denarii” demanded by the unmerciful servant from his fellow servant.
The unmerciful servant received Mercy.	The unmerciful servant was merciless to his fellow servant.
The master took pity, cancelled the debt and let him go (V.27).	He grabbed him and began to choke him, ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, Be patient with me and I will pay you back. But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into the prison until he could pay the debt (v 28b-30).

The juxtaposition is fully captured in the diction of the parable’s summation as evident in Matthew 18³²⁻³⁴.

Another glowing example that beautifully exemplifies the use of juxtaposition is found in the parable of the weeds in Matthew 13²⁴⁻²⁷. In bringing out the opposition and the negation of the good action of planting of good seeds meant to bring positive results and yield by the farmer, Jesus Christ used the opposite of ‘seed’ which is ‘weed’ to illustrate how surreptitiously at night, enemies used to destroy the good plans and activities of human beings. Planting of ‘seeds’ is placed side-by-side with planting of ‘weeds’ which depicts in a very illuminating way, the contrast between the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’, as bad people in the world who are to keep on living together (side- by-side) until harvest time when the good will go to heaven (wheat in the barn) and the bad go to hell (weeds being burnt) (verse 30).

It should be noted that the pragmatic purpose of using juxtaposition of “seeds and weeds”, ‘good and bad’ and ‘heaven and hell’ is to make the listeners as well as the hearers of the parable to know that there exist two options, one leading to life forever and the other one leading to death perpetually in hell “where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”(v.42) and they are to make a choice out of the two.

The parable of the sower also exemplifies the richness of didactic language of Jesus Christ in HIS teaching of ethics through the use of juxtaposed diction like “rich soil” and “rocky places,” ”rich soil” and “shallow soil”; “rich soil” and “thorny ground”; “rich soil” and ‘road paths’; all showing in a captivating manner that anything that is planted outside the “rich soil” cannot grow, thrive and produce good results.

Before the curtain is drawn on juxtaposition, its usage in the parable of the lost sheep should also be looked at. The Lord Jesus used the juxtaposed expression of ‘One sheep’ and ‘ninety-nine sheep’ to show the importance of the salvation of a single soul out of all souls and to capture the fact that all souls are important to HIM with none to be missing or lost and if one soul is wandering away, the rest souls that are secured should be left and the wandering soul pursued to be brought back into the fold which is the ultimate wish of GOD that no soul should be lost. In effect, the placing side-by-side of ‘one sheep’ and ‘ninety-nine sheep’ makes the parable fascinatingly clearer and easily understandable by the hearers.

While there are other features of language like complex sentences, ellipsis and profound logical expressions which jointly contribute to the astonishing richness of the didactic language of Jesus Christ in His ethical parables as contained in the gospel of Matthew, there are figures of speech which feature in the parable.

Due to space constraint, one of them (simile) will be illustrated. Simile is “an expression that describes something by comparing it with something else, using the words” ‘as’ or ‘like’ (ibid,1538). The parables are replete with it. It is used to commence the teaching of Jesus Christ in parable as evident in the following extracts:

“Jesus told them another parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seeds”.

“He told them another parable; “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field”.

“He told them still another parable: ‘the kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough”.

“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father, ---”.

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field”.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls”.

“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish”.

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard”.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son”.

Each of the similes has incomparably great communicative values and effects on the audience as well as the readers.

IV. Conclusion

From the foregoing, we have seen the unprecedentedly impressive use of rich didactic language by Jesus Christ in HIS fifteen ethical parables that are in the Gospel according to St. Matthew. The linguistic devices employed by HIM include condensed language, exclamations, allusions, dramatic language, repetition, affirmative language, rhetorical questions, juxtaposition, similes and pragmatic use of the preposition ‘but’. The various linguistic devices are very appropriate and effective for the purposes for which they are deployed in that they are all deep-rooted, catchy, captivating, stimulating, memorable and very rich to the extent that one expectedly concludes that Jesus Christ Himself is the owner of Language Who is essentially the teacher with profoundly unequal didacticism that is undilutedly rich and unsurpassable.

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