

21 - PARABLES THAT HIDE AND REVEAL

Luke 8:4-21

The two parables of this section have much the same meaning. Not everyone will hear Jesus' message as good news that the reign of God has begun with him and accept his way as their own lifestyle. Many scholars now agree that the interpretation of parable of the sower, seeds and soils (vss. 11-15) are not Jesus' words but from the early church of Luke's or a later generation as it experienced strong resistance to the gospel.

Behind the parable of a sower scattering his seeds hoping for an abundant harvest lies the homely scene of a Galilean rural community. Many of those who heard it would nod their heads in understanding, at least regarding the details of the story. Apparently the disciples did not understand its hidden meaning despite Jesus' challenge to pay attention and grasp the full meaning of what he said.

All three Synoptic Gospels citing this parable included a paraphrase from Isaiah 6:9-10 as Jesus' reason for teaching in parables. Sharon Ringe suggested that "some are not supposed to catch on. (Italics hers.) There is a hint of divine predestination that simply defies human understanding."

Many scholars deny the effectiveness of the quasi-allegorical interpretation of vss. 11-15. It is not a true allegory in the standard Greek form where each detail of the story stands for something else in the real world behind the story. This was an ancient method of teaching common in the Greek world centuries before Christ. Some modern preachers still believe that Jesus used this method of teaching and that this is an example of it, but stands alone in the four Gospels.

The point that Jesus was making is that his disciples ought to pay serious attention to the moral

character of their lives so that they may be more effective in their ministry. He also recognized that some who heard him and sought to follow him would not be as successful as they might have been.

The second parable again deals with the secrecy and hiddenness of Jesus' message, but in a different light. The purpose of his teaching, Jesus seemed to say, was not to hide the good news of God's kingdom, but to reveal it. The obvious implication was that the disciples, having received the good news themselves, now have a greater responsibility to share their God-given gift. That is what a lamp set on a lampstand does. It sheds light to all around it.

Jesus' final comment often cause people trouble because they interpret it in economic terms. Jesus clearly stated it in direct relation to the ministry to which he had called his disciples. Only a relative few would actually hear and know him, at least for now. Even fewer would really understand what his presence meant. Sharing the good news of God's reign of love would increase their commitment to make it more widely known.

The passage ends with Jesus' own family trying to reach him. When told about them, he includes everyone who does God's will in his family.