

Parables of Jesus

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The **parables of Jesus** can be found in all the canonical gospels, and in some of the non-canonical gospels, but are located mainly within the three synoptic gospels. They represent a key part of the teachings of Jesus, forming approximately one third of his recorded teachings. Christians place high emphasis on these parables, since they are the words of Jesus, they are believed to be what the Father has taught, indicated by John 8:28 (<http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20John&verse=8:28&src=TIV>) and 14:10 (<http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20John&verse=14:10&src=TIV>).^{[1][2]}

Jesus' parables are seemingly simple and memorable stories, often with imagery, and all convey messages. Scholars have commented that although these parables seem simple, the messages they convey are deep, and central to the teachings of Jesus. Christian authors view them not as mere similitudes which serve the purpose of illustration, but as internal analogies where nature becomes a witness for the spiritual world.^{[3][4]}

Many of Jesus' parables refer to simple everyday things, such as a woman baking bread (parable of the Leaven), a man knocking on his neighbor's door at night (parable of the Friend at Night), or the aftermath of a roadside mugging (parable of the Good Samaritan); yet they deal with major religious themes, such as the growth of the Kingdom of God, the importance of prayer, and the meaning of love.

In Western civilization, these parables formed the prototype for the term *parable* and in the modern age, even among those who know little of the Bible, the parables of Jesus remain some of the best known stories in the world.^[5]



The Parable of the Prodigal Son by Guercino

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Roots and sources

As a translation of the Hebrew word מָשָׁל *mashal* the word parable can also refer to a riddle. In all times in their history the Jews were familiar with teaching by means of parables and a number of parables also exist in the Old Testament. The use of parables by Jesus was hence a natural teaching method that fit into the tradition of his time.^{[5][6]} The parables of Jesus have been quoted, taught, and discussed since the very beginnings of Christianity.

Canonical gospels

Main article: Canonical gospels

The three synoptic gospels contain the parables of Jesus. The Gospel of John contains only the stories of the Vine and Good Shepherd, which some consider to be parables.^[7] Otherwise, it includes allegories but no parables. Several authors such as Barbara Reid, Arland Hultgren or Donald Griggs comment that "parables are noticeably absent from the Gospel of John".^{[8][9][10][11]}

The Catholic Encyclopedia states: "There are no parables in St. John's Gospel. In the Synoptics ... we reckon thirty-three in all; but some have raised the number even to sixty, by including proverbial expressions."^[12] The Gospel of Luke contains both the largest total number of parables (24) and eighteen unique parables; the Gospel of Matthew contains 23 parables of which eleven are unique; and the Gospel of Mark contains eight parables of which two are unique.

In *Harmony of the Gospels*, Cox and Easley provide a Gospel harmony for the parables based on the following counts: Only in Matthew: 11, only in Mark: 2, only in Luke: 18, Matthew and Luke: 4, Matthew, Mark and Luke: 6. They list no parables for the Gospel of John.^[13]

Other documents

Parables attributed to Jesus are also found in other documents apart from the Bible. Some of these overlap those in the canonical gospels and some are not part of the Bible. The non-canonical Gospel of Thomas contains up to fifteen parables, eleven of which have parallels in the four canonical Gospels. The unknown author of the Gospel of Thomas did not have a special word for "parable," making it difficult to know what he considered a parable.^[14] Those unique to Thomas include the Parable of the Assassin and the Parable of the Empty Jar.

The noncanonical Apocryphon of James also contains three unique parables attributed to Jesus.^[15] They are known as "The Parable of the Ear of Grain", "The Parable of the Grain of Wheat", and "The Parable of the Date-Palm Shoot".^[16]

The hypothetical Q document is seen as a source for some of the parables in Matthew, Luke, and Thomas.^[17]

Purpose and motive

In the Gospel of Matthew (13:10–17) Jesus provides an answer when asked about his use of parables:^[18]

The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He replied,

"The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand."

While Mark 4:33–34 (<http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Mark&verse=4:33%E2%80%9334&src=TNIV>) and Matthew 13:34–35 (<http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=13:34%E2%80%9335&src=TNIV>) may suggest that Jesus would only speak to the "crowds" in parables, while in private explaining everything to his disciples, modern scholars do not support the private explanations argument and surmise that Jesus used parables as a teaching method.^[19] Dwight Pentecost suggests that given that Jesus often preached to a mixed audience of believers and non-believers, he used parables to reveal the truth to some, but hide it from others.^[1]

Christian author Ashton Axenden suggests that Jesus constructed his parables based on his divine knowledge of how man can be taught.^[20]

This was a mode of teaching, which our blessed Lord seemed to take special delight in employing. And we may be quite sure, that as "He knew what was in man" better than we know, He would not have taught by Parables, if He had not felt that this was the kind of teaching best suited to our wants.

In the 19th century, Lisco and Fairbairn stated that in the parables of Jesus, "the image borrowed from the visible world is accompanied by a truth from the invisible (spiritual) world" and that the parables of Jesus are not "mere similitudes which serve the purpose of illustration, but are internal analogies where nature becomes a witness for the spiritual world".^[3]

Similarly, in the 20th century, calling a parable "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning",^[21] William Barclay states that the parables of Jesus use familiar examples to lead men's minds towards heavenly concepts. He suggests that Jesus did not form his parables merely as analogies but based on an "inward affinity between the natural and the spiritual order."^[21]

Themes

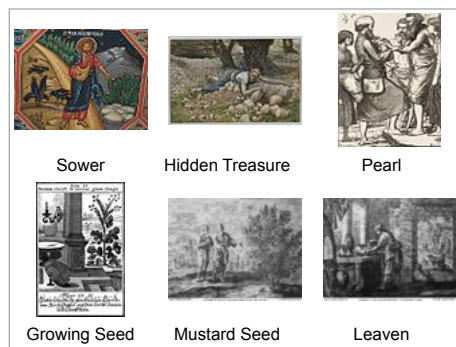
A number of parables which are adjacent in one or more gospels have similar themes. The parable of the Leaven follows the parable of the Mustard Seed in Matthew and Luke, and shares the theme of the Kingdom of Heaven growing from small beginnings.^[22] The parable of the Hidden Treasure and parable of the Pearl form a pair illustrating the great value of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the need for action in attaining it.^[23]

The parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and Lost (Prodigal) Son form a trio in Luke dealing with loss and redemption.^[24]

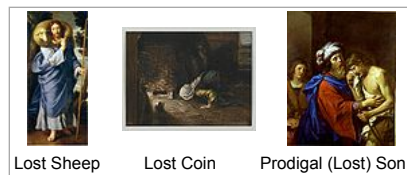
The parable of the Faithful Servant and parable of the Ten Virgins, adjacent in Matthew, involve waiting for a bridegroom, and have an eschatological theme: be prepared for the day of reckoning.^[25] The parable of the Tares^[26] the parable of the Rich Fool,^[27] the parable of the budding fig tree,^[28] and the parable of the barren fig tree^[29] also have eschatological themes.

Other parables stand alone, such as the parable of the unforgiving servant, dealing with forgiveness;^[30] the parable of the Good Samaritan, dealing with practical love;^[31] and the parable of the Friend at Night, dealing with persistence in prayer.^[32]

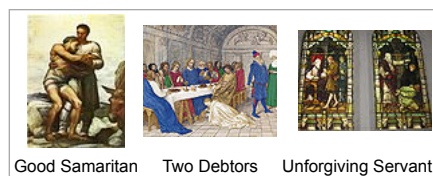
Parables of the Kingdom of Heaven: hearing, seeking and growing



Parables of loss and redemption



Parables about love and forgiveness



Parables about prayer

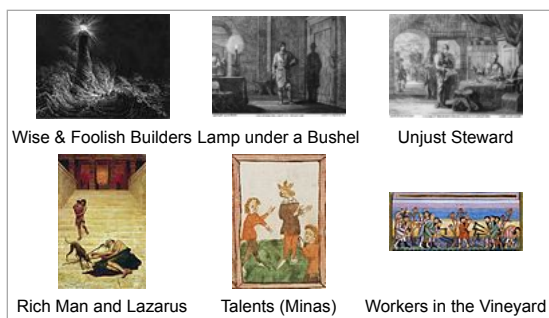


Eschatological parables





Other parables



Art

Of the thirty or so parables in the canonical Gospels, four were shown in medieval art almost to the exclusion of the others, but not mixed in with the narrative scenes of the *Life of Christ*. These were: the Ten Virgins, the Rich man and Lazarus, the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan.^[33] Artists famous for depicting parables include Martin Schongauer, Pieter the Elder Bruegel and Albrecht Dürer. The Workers in the Vineyard also appears in Early Medieval works. From the Renaissance the numbers shown widened slightly, and the various scenes of the Prodigal Son became the clear favorite, with the Good Samaritan also popular. Albrecht Dürer made a famous engraving of the *Prodigal Son* amongst the pigs (1496), a popular subject in the Northern Renaissance, and Rembrandt depicted the story several times, although at least one of his works, *The Prodigal Son in the Tavern*, a portrait of himself as the Son, revelling with his wife, is like many artists' depictions, a way of dignifying a genre tavern scene. His late *Return of the Prodigal Son* (Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg) is one of his most popular works.

Poetry and hymns

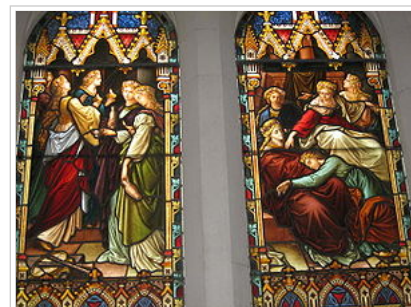
As well as being depicted in art and discussed in prose, a number of parables form the inspiration for religious poetry and hymns. For example, the hymn "The Ninety and Nine" by Elizabeth C. Clephane (1868) is inspired by the parable of the Lost Sheep:

There were ninety and nine that safely lay
 In the shelter of the fold.
 But one was out on the hills away,
 Far off from the gates of gold.
 Away on the mountains wild and bare.
 Away from the tender Shepherd's care.
 Away from the tender Shepherd's care.^[34]

Similarly, "My Hope Is Built" (Edward Mote, c. 1834) is inspired by the parable of the Wise and the Foolish Builders, and "How Kind the Good Samaritan" (John Newton, c. 1779) is inspired by the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Harmony of parables

A sample Gospel harmony for the parables based on the list of key episodes in the Canonical Gospels is presented in the table below. For the sake of consistency, this table is automatically sub-selected from the main harmony table in the Gospel harmony article, based on the list of key episodes in the Canonical Gospels. Usually, no parables are associated with the Gospel of John, just allegories.^[13]



A depiction of the Parable of the Ten Virgins on a stained glass window in Scots' Church, Melbourne

Number	Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke
1	The Growing Seed		Mark 4:26–29 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Mark&verse=4:26%E2%80%9329&src=TNIV)	
2	The Two Debtors			Luke 7:41–43 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=7:41%E2%80%9343&src=TNIV)
3	The Lamp under a Bushel	Matthew 5:14–15 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=5:14%E2%80%9315&src=TNIV)	Mark 4:21–25 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Mark&verse=4:21%E2%80%9325&src=TNIV)	Luke 8:16–18 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=8:16%E2%80%9318&src=TNIV)
4	Parable of the Good Samaritan			Luke 10:30–37 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=10:30%E2%80%9337&src=TNIV)
5	The Friend at Night			Luke 11:5–8 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=11:5%E2%80%938&src=TNIV)
6	The Rich Fool			Luke 12:16–21 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=12:16%E2%80%9321&src=TNIV)
7	The Wise and the Foolish Builders	Matthew 7:24–27 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=7:24%E2%80%9327&src=TNIV)		Luke 6:46–49 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=6:46%E2%80%9349&src=TNIV)
8	New Wine into Old Wineskins	Matthew 9:17–17 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=9:17%E2%80%9317&src=TNIV)	Mark 2:21–22 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Mark&verse=2:21%E2%80%9322&src=TNIV)	Luke 5:37–39 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=5:37%E2%80%9339&src=TNIV)
9	Parable of the strong man	Matthew 12:29–29 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=12:29%E2%80%9329&src=TNIV)	Mark 3:27–27 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Mark&verse=3:27%E2%80%9327&src=TNIV)	Luke 11:21–22 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=11:21%E2%80%9322&src=TNIV)
10	Parable of the Sower	Matthew 13:3–9 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=13:3%E2%80%939&src=TNIV)	Mark 4:3–9 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Mark&verse=4:3%E2%80%939&src=TNIV)	Luke 8:5–8 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=8:5%E2%80%938&src=TNIV)
11	The Tares	Matthew 13:24–30 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=13:24%E2%80%9330&src=TNIV)		
12	The Barren Fig Tree			Luke 13:6–9 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=13:6%E2%80%939&src=TNIV)
13	Parable of the Mustard Seed	Matthew 13:31–32 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=13:31%E2%80%9332&src=TNIV)	Mark 4:30–32 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Mark&verse=4:30%E2%80%9332&src=TNIV)	Luke 13:18–19 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=13:18%E2%80%9319&src=TNIV)
14	The Leaven	Matthew 13:33–33 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=13:33%E2%80%9333&src=TNIV)		Luke 13:20–21 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=13:20%E2%80%9321&src=TNIV)
15	Parable of the Pearl	Matthew 13:45–46 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=13:45%E2%80%9346&src=TNIV)		
16	Drawing in the Net	Matthew 13:47–50 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=13:47%E2%80%9350&src=TNIV)		
17	The Hidden Treasure	Matthew 13:44–44 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=13:44%E2%80%9344&src=TNIV)		
18	Counting the Cost			Luke 14:28–33 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=14:28%E2%80%9333&src=TNIV)
19	The Lost Sheep frequently called The Good Shepherd	Matthew 18:10–14 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=18:10%E2%80%9314&src=TNIV)		Luke 15:4–6 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=15:4%E2%80%936&src=TNIV)
20	The Unforgiving Servant	Matthew 18:23–35 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=18:23%E2%80%9335&src=TNIV)		
21	The Lost Coin			Luke 15:8–9 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=15:8%E2%80%939&src=TNIV)
22	Parable of the Prodigal Son			Luke 15:11–32 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=15:11%E2%80%9332&src=TNIV)
23	The Unjust Steward			Luke 16:1–13 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=16:1%E2%80%9313&src=TNIV)
24	Rich man and Lazarus			Luke 16:19–31 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=16:19%E2%80%9331&src=TNIV)
25	The Master and Servant			Luke 17:7–10 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=17:7%E2%80%9310&src=TNIV)
26	The Unjust Judge			Luke 18:1–9 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=18:1%E2%80%939&src=TNIV)

Number	Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke
27	Pharisees and the Publican			Luke 18:10–14 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=18:10%E2%80%93148)
28	The Workers in the Vineyard	Matthew 20:1–16 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=20:1%E2%80%9316&src=TNIV)		
29	The Two Sons	Matthew 21:28–32 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=21:28%E2%80%9332&src=TNIV)		
30	The Wicked Husbandmen	Matthew 21:33–41 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=21:33%E2%80%9341&src=TNIV)	Mark 12:1–9 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Mark&verse=12:1%E2%80%939&src=TNIV)	Luke 20:9–16 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=20:9%E2%80%9316&src=TNIV)
31	The Great Banquet	Matthew 22:1–14 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=22:1%E2%80%9314&src=TNIV)		Luke 14:15–24 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=14:15%E2%80%93248)
32	The Budding Fig Tree	Matthew 24:32–35 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=24:32%E2%80%9335&src=TNIV)	Mark 13:28–31 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Mark&verse=13:28%E2%80%9331&src=TNIV)	Luke 21:29–33 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=21:29%E2%80%93338)
33	The Faithful Servant	Matthew 24:42–51 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=24:42%E2%80%9351&src=TNIV)	Mark 13:34–37 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Mark&verse=13:34%E2%80%9337&src=TNIV)	Luke 12:35–48 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=12:35%E2%80%93488)
34	The Ten Virgins	Matthew 25:1–13 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=25:1%E2%80%9313&src=TNIV)		
35	The Talents or Minas	Matthew 25:14–30 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=25:14%E2%80%9330&src=TNIV)		Luke 19:12–27 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=19:12%E2%80%93278)
36	The Sheep and the Goats	Matthew 25:31–46 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=25:31%E2%80%9346&src=TNIV)		
37	Parable of the Wedding Feast			Luke 14:7–14 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=14:7%E2%80%9314&src=TNIV)

Parallels outside the canonical gospels

A number of parables have parallels in non-canonical gospels, the Didache, and the letters of Apostolic Fathers. However, given that the non-canonical gospels generally have no time sequence, this table is not a Gospel harmony.

Number	Parable	Matthew	Mark	Luke
1	Parable of the Sower	Matthew 13:1–23 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=13:1%E2%80%9323&src=TNIV)	Mark 04:1–25 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Mark&verse=04:1%E2%80%9325&src=TNIV)	Luke 08:04–18 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=08:04%E2%80%9318)
2	Parable of the Tares	Matthew 13:24–53 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=13:24%E2%80%9353&src=TNIV)		
3	Parable of the Growing Seed		Mark 04:26–34 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Mark&verse=04:26%E2%80%9334&src=TNIV)	
4	Parable of the Hidden Treasure	Matthew 13:44 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=13:44&src=TNIV)		
5	Parable of the Pearl	Matthew 13:45 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=13:45&src=TNIV)		
6	Parable of Drawing in the Net	Matthew 13:47–53 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=13:47%E2%80%9353&src=TNIV)		
7	Parable of the Rich Fool			Luke 12:16–21 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=12:16%E2%80%9321)
8	Parable of the Faithful Servant	Matthew 24:42–51 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=24:42%E2%80%9351&src=%21)	Mark 13:33–37 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Mark&verse=13:33%E2%80%9337&src=%21)	Luke 12:35–48 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=12:35%E2%80%9348)
9	Parable of the Mustard Seed	Matthew 13:31–32 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=13:31%E2%80%9332&src=%21)	Mark 4:30–32 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Mark&verse=4:30%E2%80%9332&src=%21)	Luke 13:18–19 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=13:18%E2%80%9319)
10	Parable of the Leaven	Matthew 13:33 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=13:33&src=130)		Luke 13:20–21 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=13:20%E2%80%9321)
11	Parable of the Lost Sheep	Matthew 18:12–14 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=18:12%E2%80%9314&src=TNIV)		Luke 15:01–7 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=15:01%E2%80%937&src=TNIV)
12	Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen	Matthew 21:33–46 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=21:33%E2%80%9346&src=TNIV)	Mark 12:1–12 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Mark&verse=12:1%E2%80%9312&src=TNIV)	Luke 20:9–19 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=20:9%E2%80%9319&src=TNIV)
13	Parable of the talents or minas	Matthew 25:14–30 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=25:14%E2%80%9330&src=KJV)		Luke 19:13–24 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=19:13%E2%80%9324)
14	Parable of the great banquet	Matthew 22:1–14 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=22:1%E2%80%9314&src=TNIV)		Luke 14:15–24 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=14:15%E2%80%9324)
15	Parable of the strong man	Matthew 12:29–29 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Matthew&verse=12:29%E2%80%9329&src=TNIV)	Mark 3:27–27 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Mark&verse=3:27%E2%80%9327&src=TNIV)	Luke 11:21–22 (http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Luke&verse=11:21%E2%80%9322)

See also

- Chronology of Jesus
- Gospel harmony
- Jesus in Christianity
- Life of Jesus in the New Testament
- Ministry of Jesus
- Miracles of Jesus

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- ^a According to the Catholic Encyclopedia article on Parables (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11460a.htm>): "There are no parables in St. John's Gospel" and the Encyclopædia Britannica article on Gospel of St. John (http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Gospel_Of_St_John): "Here Jesus' teaching contains no parables and but three allegories, the Synoptists present it as parabolic through and through."
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External links

- List of biblical parables (<http://www.comportone.com/cpo/religion/christian/parables/list.htm>)
- Another list (<http://www.bcbsr.com/survey/jpl.html>), slightly different and only of the synoptic Gospels
- Jewish Encyclopedia: Parable (<http://jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=63&letter=P>)
- Catholic Encyclopedia: Parable (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11460a.htm>)
- PBS: Frontline: From Jesus to Christ: The Parables (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/parables.html>)

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