

THE LATTER PARABLES OF JESUS

Message 4

Scripture: Revelation 13:11-18

INTRO: I had planned to be done with introductory messages but as I thought of our subject, and the fact that the parables we are going to be looking at are prophetic, and since there is no rush, I decided to do one more introductory message. I have introduced you to figures of speech, and to parables as a figure of speech, but there is one other matter that is important to understand. Many of the parables are prophetic and I want to give you some teaching regarding interpreting prophecy.

The Scripture that was read for us this morning was Revelation 13:11-18. It speaks of that most well known of all numbers mentioned in the Bible, the number 666. I will not be dealing with that, but giving you some principles to show you how you can deal with that.

Go with me to the first parable we will be looking at in another message, Matthew 20:1-15 (read). Now look at chapter 19:30, which is part of the setting of this parable (read). Now look at the last verse in the application of the parable, verse 16. It says, "So the last will be first and the first last. For many are called but few are chosen." So, on either end of this parable are the verbs, 'will be'. What tense is that verb? Future. And what kind of literature does that indicate that this parable is? It is prophecy.

Now language comes in various genres, like music. A genre is, according to an online dictionary, "a category of artistic composition, as in music or literature, characterized by similarities in form, style, or subject matter." Now prophecy is a very bold manner of speech. In Scripture, if a man claimed to be a prophet, and he prophesied something that did not come to pass, he was to lose his life. How many of us would dare to prophecy who our next prime minister will be, if we were to die if we were wrong? The polls would have to be very high before any of us would dare to do so.

Now, if you take Matthew 19:30 and 20:16, you will see that the parable is prophetic. Now, when we interpret the Bible, it is very important to seek as much as possible to determine what kind of literature it is that we are trying to interpret. Now let me say something that holds true especially for pastors.

When we make an interpretation, it is important that we be able to define the principles on which we base our interpretation.

Let me just briefly give you the general principles of Bible interpretation. When a pastor prepares to preach, he should gather, as much as possible, gather all pertinent historical, cultural, grammatical, lexical or dictionary, syntactical, contextual, and theological data. By the way, these rules hold true for all prose, even the newspaper.

Then there are a number of types of literature where one needs special tools, such as I mentioned with regard to parables, because they are a special genre, or type of literature. Let me give you those. There are figures of speech, of which parables are one type of over 200 other types. Then there is poetry. If you are reading the KJV, you will not have poetic sections indicated, but all newer versions, including the NKJV make note when Hebrew poetry is being used. You will notice that the lines are written differently. I would not doubt but that about 1/3 of the OT is poetry. Anyone who has written songs or poems knows that a new set of rules applies when you do that.

Now, special principles apply to figures of speech, poetry, types and prophecy. And just guesstimating, those kinds of speech would involve well over half of the Bible. And my point of all that is that the parables we will be looking at are figures of speech and they are prophetic. And since they are prophetic, there are a few things it would be helpful for us to know before we begin. Beyond that, if you spend a little time learning these principles, it will help you when you read through the Bible.

As I worked on this and I wondered what I should include and what not, I thought, why don't I just give in message form one part of the course that I have taught numerous times that has to do with interpreting the Bible. I know you are a Bible reading church, and though this kind of material would normally be taught to ministerial students, I thought you might appreciate learning the basic rules for interpreting the prophetic sections of the Bible. So, to the pastoral students I have taught this to, there is an outline with blank spaces. See how many of those you can fill before we get to them.

I. DEFINITION OF PROPHECY

Well, once more we are in class or school. Let me begin by taking a moment to define what is meant by the word *prophecy*. Our English word prophecy is the translation of the Greek word

propheteia. The original NT word is made up of two words. The first is *pro*, a preposition usually meaning *before*. The second word is *pheemi*, meaning to speak. So it means to speak before. In the meaning of the word, it means to speak events before they happen. Prophecy is to make events known before they happen.

Is there anyone here or listening to these messages now, or later, and you doubt the Bible is the Word of God? Put away all other subjects and study the prophecies of the Bible, and you will have the greatest proof that the Bible is the Word of God. And if you would like to listen to a message on that, let me recommend a sermon on sermon audio from Maranatha Evangelical Church called 'Ten Proofs That The Bible is the Word of God.'

Let me just add that there is another aspect to prophecy that is little understood. Turn to 1 Corinthians 14 (read verse 3). Vine's dictionary says the preposition *pro* in prophecy means *forth* here, thus prophecy is to speak forth. So, this word can be used to mean to foretell, which is how it is generally used. But it may be used to mean to 'forth-tell', and that is to speak to edification, exhortation or comfort.

As we are looking at this word this morning, we are going to be looking at the foretelling aspect of prophecy. We are going to look at events that have been foretold in the Bible, but have not yet happened.

So, let me draw a picture in your mind of prophecy. The way God has made man, man has been made with the capacity to tell what is happening when it is happening. That is present tense things. Man can learn what has happened in the past by remembering or by reading or learning of things that happened in the past. But man has not been made with the capacity to tell what will come in the future. Man does not even know what will happen 5 minutes from now. Man cannot look into the future.

Now I understand there are demonic ways in which they claim to be able to look into the future and we won't go into that. But what is most interesting is that God wrote a book. And He chose, in that book, to reveal the future to man, and it is in this special method of speech we call prophesying.

Now let me show you something wonderful. You will remember the story of Abraham and his nephew Lot, and how Abraham gave Lot a choice of which land to take when their herds got too big to stay together any longer and Lot chose the area of Sodom. But it was a wicked place and the day came

when the Lord decided to end the existence of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sinfulness. But go now to Genesis 18 (read verses 16-18).

It has ever been the nature of God to reveal important things to His own people before they happen, and He does so through prophecy. And He uses His own people to warn others of what is going to happen through the means of prophecy.

Turn now to the prophetic book of Amos chapter 3 (read verse 7). Now listen to John 15:15, "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you." And in the parables Jesus revealed many things about the future to His friends, that is Christians.

Go now to the book of Revelation chapter 1 (read 1a). Why did God give us the book of Revelation? To show us things that must shortly take place.

Picture the Bible like a big ship. You can look out the side and out the back, but you cannot look out the front. And in the front are huge windows, and from here you can see what is ahead. That is life. But when you become a Christian, you now have the freedom to look out the side, the back, and the front. Here you can look into the future. And through all those windows, you and I, as Christians, are invited to look. And we do that by reading the Bible. And picture now, probably the majority of modern Christians, with the curtains drawn on almost every window to the future. That is our age.

II. KINDS OF PROPHECY

A. Predictive prophecy

I want to share with you now some very important kinds of prophecy. And so, in that great ship I mentioned, there are different kinds of windows to look through. In other words, in speech, there are different kinds of ways of communicating what will happen in the future. So let me explain some of those. Let me start with one I have called predictive prophecy. And you might well say, "Just a minute, all prophecy is predictive is it not?" Yes, that is what makes it prophecy! But what I mean by predictive prophecy is prophecy as we normally think of it. It is prophecy written in the future sense. Go to Matthew 24 (read 4-8). Now you can check through this passage and you

will find prophecy in the future tense over and over, and you will find many things that have not happened as yet.

B. Futuristic prophecy

I have called the next kind of prophecy futuristic prophecy. Let me explain, because you will say, "Hey, wait a minute. Isn't all prophecy futuristic?" In grammar, when a past tense or a present tense is used in a sense to speak of the future, it is called a futuristic past or a futuristic present.

So, let me explain. Look at Isaiah 53:4-5 (read). This verse is written in the past tense, but it is prophetic of the future. You might check Matthew 8:17 for the partial fulfillment of that prophecy.

Look at Isaiah 9:6, a prophecy written in the present tense (read). It says, "Unto us a child is born". This is written in the present tense, but it speaks of the birth of Christ, which was still many years in the future of when it was given.

C. Historical Prophecy

Then, there is a species of prophecy that I keep changing the name on to try to get more accurate with the name. I have called this type of prophecy as typological or significant and now historical prophecy. The next time you read through the Bible, when you come to the book of Jonah, underline all the prophetic passages. It won't be a big job. And then try to answer this question: Why is the book of Jonah among the prophets?

Well, I think it is because the whole book is a prophetic sign. Go to Luke 11 (read 29-30). Jesus makes other similar statements. Jesus said that as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so Jesus would be to the generation in which He lived. The historical event of being swallowed by a great fish, and being spit out upon the land three days and three nights later, is a prophecy of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection! This is what I call historical prophecy.

This form of prophecy, referred to frequently by Jesus and the apostles, gives us considerable difficulty. There are past events that seem to point, prophetically, to a similar future event.

Let me give you these examples to compare for yourself: Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15; Isaiah 29:13 and Matthew 15:7-9. It is my view, and not mine alone, that Revelation chapters 2-3, are prophetic in this sense of the whole Church age. These seven churches signify the church age in

seven time periods. If that is correct, we are now living in the age of the Laodicean Church, the lukewarm Church.

D. Telescopic prophecy (mtn. peaks)

Then there is what has been called, telescopic prophecy. It is when a prophet sees one event that happens twice or when there are two closely related events that are distant from one another. I need to show you this on a slide (**Slide 1**).

Go to Isaiah 7 (read verse 14). Here is a case where the prophet sees one event that happens twice. In this prophecy you will see just what a special species of literature prophecy is. Here is a prophecy that was fulfilled in part in Isaiah's day. A woman, who was then a virgin, married and had a child and before that child was of any age, the prophet says, "the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings." That was fulfilled not long after the prophecy was given.

But go now to Matthew 1. Mary, Joseph's betrothed wife, was found with child before they were married. And Joseph decided he would divorce her rather than have her stoned but look at verses 20-23 (read).

The second type of this kind of prophecy is when the prophet sees two logically related things which may be far distant in time from each other (**Slide 2**). Turn to Isaiah 61 (read 1-2). Now go to Luke 4 (read 14-20). Now if you will study this, you will find that Jesus stopped reading before the sentence He was quoting from ended (**Slide 3**). He ended His quote here: "To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD..." But if He would have kept reading it would have said, "...And the day of vengeance of our God..." When Jesus closed the book and sat down He said, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." If He had read the very next words He could not have said that, for those next words have not yet been fulfilled.

The main reason why I am going through this is for this part that I have just shown you. If you forget most of this message, keep this in mind, as we will see this again.

II. THE TIME ELEMENT IN PROPHECY

A. Fulfilled Prophecy

Let us now look at the time element in prophecy. Before I asked you to picture the Bible like a big house. And it had windows directed to the future through which the Lord invites us to look. But picture this house now as moving along with time. And so once events were prophetic, but now they have past and they have become history. That is fulfilled prophecy.

About 712 years before the birth of Christ, in a time when Israel was prosperous and thought no harm could come, Isaiah prophesied that Israel would go into captivity and later be restored again. And Isaiah name the man who would be instrumental in that and that his name would be Cyrus. Well, 176 years later, Ezra, in the Biblical book of Ezra wrote these words, "...that the Word of the Lord...might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus...that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus...The Lord God of heaven hath...charged me to build an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah." (Ezra 1:1-2).

How long before it happened did Isaiah prophecy that? 176 years! Anybody know how old Canada is? Canada is now 147 years old. Isaiah prophesied 176 years before the event what would happen to Israel and who would do it.

Let me ask you this question. It is several months before the Canadian election. Already, for the first time in Canadian history I think, the NDP are ahead of all parties in the polls. Is there anyone here, with that bit of evidence willing to predict who will be the next prime minister, and you are willing to be put to death if you are wrong? When a prophet prophesied, he prophesied under the death threat if his prophecies were wrong.

Let me give you one more quote from that message I just mentioned. Before I do that, turn to Daniel 12:4 (read). How many of you have heard of Sir Isaac Newton? Who can tell me in approximately what years he lived? He lived from December 25, 1642, to March 20, 1726. That is a long time ago. Now let me read for you what he said about Daniel 12:4, "Sir Isaac Newton is said to have said of Daniel 12:4 'Personally I cannot help but believe that these words refer to the end of the times. Men will travel from country to country in an unprecedented manner. There may be some inventions which will enable people to travel much more quickly than they do now.' Newton went on to speculate that this speed might exceed 50 miles per hour. This was around 1680 A.D. Some 80 years later, the famous French atheist, Voltaire read Newton's words and retorted, 'See what a fool Christianity makes of an otherwise brilliant man! Here a scientist like Newton actually writes that men may travel at the rate of 30 or 40 m.p.h. Has he forgotten that if man would travel at this rate he would be suffocated? His heart would stand still!'"

Now let me ask you, who is the fool today, Newton or Voltaire? Now, if I gave you just the prophecies to Christ's death alone, you would have such abundant proof that the Bible is the Word of God, you should need no more! We are talking about fulfilled prophecy.

B. Partially fulfilled prophecy

But there is prophecy that is partially fulfilled. Go to Malachi (read 4:5-6). Here is a prophecy of the coming of Elijah. Even today, during the Jewish Passover meal, one cup is set out for Elijah. At a certain time of the celebration one of the boys is sent to go see if Elijah is coming already. They are looking for Elijah to return to indicate that Messiah will soon come.

In Matthew 11:7-14 Jesus said John the Baptist is Elijah. However in John 1:21 some asked John the Baptist if he was Elijah and he said, "No, I am not." Is this a contradiction? In Luke 1:16-17 the angel Gabriel quotes part of Malachi's prophecy and then says that John the Baptist, though not Elijah, will go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah. There is great similarity between John the Baptist's ministry and Elijah's ministry. Yet many prophecy students would say that the final fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy is yet future. This would appear to be one of those prophecies we have referred to as telescoping prophecy.

C. Unfulfilled prophecy

The last time element in prophecy is unfulfilled prophecy. Scripture prophecies many things that have not yet taken place. The great tribulation, the abomination which makes desolate, the number 666 etc.... These are all unfulfilled prophecy as yet.

III. GUIDELINES FOR PROPHECY

So, let me give you this morning some guidelines to use when you study prophecy.

A. Seek to interpret prophecy literally unless the nature of the material demands otherwise. For example, when we read in Matthew 24 earlier, and it said that there would be wars and rumors of wars, there is no reason to take that in any sense but the literal sense. It means exactly what it says. But go now to Revelation 12 (read 1-6). Now you can easily tell that this passage is not meant literally, and so it becomes important to know how to interpret such passages. We will see this in a moment.

A second principle is:

B. Study the NT treatment of prophecy.

Check to see how the NT writers and Jesus used prophecy and use them as a guideline for interpreting prophetic passages.

Third,

C. Look for figures of speech and interpret those first.

Take, for example, Revelation 12:1-6. John saw a great fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems on his heads. Now look at verses 7-9 (read). That begins to help us interpret this figurative language.

Fourth,

D. Do not let prophecy become your main diet of Bible study.

Now let me just say that in general. There may be ministries that do this, but as an individual, study more than just prophecy. LEM used to say, "The difference between a hobby horse and a real horse is, you can get off a real horse."

Fifth,

E. Test your prophetic views with this question: Does it make me desire to be more like Christ?

Here is a very important point. Our study of prophecy should produce godliness in us. And then, sixth,

F. Hold your prophetic views in an open hand until you are sure from Scripture on them. Be willing to consider opposing views, but do not lightly vacillate.

III. THE PURPOSE OF PROPHECY

Let me give one more brief point on prophecy and that is regarding the purpose of prophecy. I have never checked it myself, but I have been told that approximately 30% of Scripture was prophetic when it was written. Therefore it is an important study. There are approximately 300 specific references to the second coming of Christ. And so we ask, what then is the purpose for prophecy? God has chosen to show to His own what will happen before it happens. Why did He do that? Well, let me give you some possible reasons. First, it is...

A. To demonstrate the sovereignty and omniscience of God. He is in control!

May I ask you this morning, when you hear preachers talk about what is coming or you read in the Bible about it, do you become afraid? When you hear of the number 666, do you become afraid? May I gently recommend to you that it may be because you are lost and on the road to hell, or because you are saved but living in sin. When you are born again and assured of your destiny, and living for Christ, prophecy becomes a great demonstration to you that God is in control and He knows exactly where this boat is going.

Second, prophecy is given...

B To give us hope! Hope will keep you going in the most difficult of circumstances.

When you look at today's world, if one is not a Christian, it could be frightening. Most non-Christians do not wish to talk about death or look at what appears to be coming.

Look at what events in the future will do to unbelievers. Look at Luke 21 (22-26).

Then, no doubt, prophecy is given...

C. To prepare us for His coming.

Listen to 1 John 2:28, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." Only righteousness will give us this confidence. Live right!

And last,

D. Both kinds of prophetic prophecy (forth-telling and foretelling) have one thing in common; the effort is to call people to a closer walk with God.

Every one of us has need to be challenged again and again to a closer walk with God. Prophecy taught for what it was truly meant, will produce godliness!

CONCL: Well, let us conclude. There is too much in this message to get in one sitting, but it will be available to review on sermonaudio, for anyone who wishes to do so. We said that to prophecy is to speak things before they happen. Here is one of the greatest proofs that the Bible is the Word of God. We looked at various kinds of prophecy, and at the time element in prophecy. There is fulfilled prophecy, partially fulfilled prophecy and unfulfilled prophecy.

We looked at some guidelines for interpreting prophecy. Hold to a literal view of interpreting prophecy unless the material is clearly symbolic. Always watch for figures of speech. Do not study only prophecy. Study other subjects as well. Test your views with this question: Does it make me want to be more like Christ? And last, be ready to listen to other views, but do not lightly vacillate back and forth.

And finally, let me say this: Watch. For you know neither the day nor the hour in which Christ is coming. He could come at any time. But let me assure you of this, He is coming again! Let us

live in such a way as to not have to be ashamed of Him at His coming.