

The Lucan Parables.

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ALL the findings of our series of studies on the sequence and synthetic doctrine of Christ's parables have been based on the self-evident fact of Matthew giving in his Gospel the historical and logical order of those he records. But in addition to this, we have assumed that the parables recorded by Luke have been otherwise treated, and so are legitimately available for such an arrangement as serves to reveal the parallel they are capable of forming with the Matthean sequence.

It is desirable, however, in order to the establishment of our case in regard to the sequence and synthesis of Christ's parables, that we give some distinct consideration to this matter of the Lucan parables and their scriptural arrangement. Indeed, in order to vindicate our assumption, it will be necessary to show (1) that Luke's order of these parables is not that of their delivery, and (2) that there is nothing against, if not indeed something to encourage, that arrangement of them, which affords a striking parallel to the sequence of those recorded in Matthew's Gospel.

If, as is now generally conceded, we may regard our present Mark as the earliest of the three Synoptic Gospels, and as a main source of what is related in the other two, we have here a clue to guide us, in comparing the use made of one element in their material, respectively by Matthew and by Luke. But we may also regard it as the scaffolding, rough sketch, or guiding outline of the work which they took in hand. And as a matter of fact, it is from their adherence to, or deviation from, the narrative given in Mark's Gospel, that we are best able to appreciate the respective courses pursued in their Gospels by these two later Evangelists.

And here at the outset we note that while Matthew embodies in his Gospel about one hundred and fifty verses more of Mark's narrative than does Luke, this latter follows more closely the order of events as there recorded. Nor is this surprising, as the Jewish apostle had his own personal experience to aid him in this matter, while the Gentile evangelist, lacking this, would be the more dependent upon an earlier writer, dealing with his facts, if received from Peter, practically

at first hand. And, indeed, we might say that, apart from events the course of which is naturally determined, Luke seems wholly dependent upon Mark for such adherence to historical order as his Gospel affords. There is then on the very surface of his narrative a presumption against the strict adherence to factual sequence of the third evangelist, in his treatment of fresh matter.

But now when leaving this general consideration, we turn to see how Luke deals with incidents recorded by him in common with Matthew, in regard to which Mark's guidance is lacking, we find that Matthew has more probability on his side as regards their historical setting. Thus Christ's sermon at Nazareth offers such a case. Luke introduces this at the very outset of Christ's public ministry, while Matthew records this visit to the village of His upbringing as taking place after the delivery of Christ's first series of parables. All the probabilities are in favour of the latter of these two versions of this incident. Indeed, it is generally recognized that Luke's setting of the Nazareth sermon, as a frontispiece to his narrative of Christ's ministry, has its motive in artistic considerations.

As illustrative of the probabilities of the case where Matthew breaks away from the narrative of Mark, we may take the raising of Jairus' daughter, in his account of which Luke follows Mark. Matthew relates this as an after incident of the day upon which this apostle gave in his own house, according to Luke, a great feast in connexion with his acceptance of Christ's call. Now Matthew's full account of Christ's varied activities on that day strongly suggests that its events had that clear place in his mind, which the memorable character of the day for him might very well give them. Against this Luke's 'on one of these days' gives us no impression that his association of this event with the day of the voyage to Gadara, given at an earlier point in Matthew, is more worthy of acceptance.

It is a leading feature of the third Gospel, that the links which bind its successive items together are of a thoughtful and suggestive, rather than, like Matthew's, of an historical or logical, nature. Thus the paragraphs here as they follow one another,

often seem like comments on what has gone before, or as illustrative of that just previously recorded. Indeed, the chapters of this Gospel often look like sermons, with the various incidents related, or subjects dealt with, as so many heads of the discourse. It is undoubtedly the special talent of the literary artist which has most contributed to this result. But this faculty is not one which conduces so readily, as the more prosaic endowments of Matthew, to a close adherence to historic order.

But the great outstanding feature of this third Gospel is to be found in those nine chapters (10-18) of didactic discourse, largely in parabolic form, which intervene between a close following of Mark's narrative up to the departure from Galilee, and the resumption of this with the incident of the children brought to Jesus to be blest. In as far as the subject-matter or language of this part of Luke's Gospel is in common with anything to be found in the other Gospels, this is very scrappy and piecemeal, and drawn indiscriminately alike from earlier and later portions of these records. Indeed, in the main, this quarter of the Gospel firmament presents to our gaze something like a Milky Way, densely crowded with clustering gems, radiant with evangelic truth and grace, but marshalled withal in somewhat bewildering fashion. Nothing is more obvious here than the lack of all attempt at anything like historic sequence.

Now it is here that almost all the parables recorded by Luke are to be found, only two of the great Lucan parables being met with elsewhere in this Gospel. It is then apparent that these parables of Luke's Gospel are as much distinguished from those of Matthew's narration, in their lack of historical presentation, as they are in respect of their generally gracious character and evangelic tone. We may then safely aver that there is no reason to regard Luke's order of recording the parables which he has preserved for us, as that of their statement by Jesus.

In view of this our conclusion, and the considerations which have led us to it, we cannot expect much guidance from Luke's narrative in our efforts to discover some hints as to the real sequence of their delivery. We may indeed well regard the factual sequence of the Matthean parables, and the light this throws on the development and synthesis of the parabolic teaching, as the most helpful guidance we can have in the matter,

and so be content if we find encouragement in Luke's presentation of the parables he records, to confirm in any measure that arrangement of them which this demands.

The two specially Lucan parables, outside of the nine chapters in which all the others are to be found, are the first and the last, those of the Two Debtors, and of the Pounds, which latter, but for Luke's report, in common with Matthew, of the Parable of the Husbandmen, would be the last, as the Two Debtors is the first in his Gospel. The former of these two parables we have found good reason to regard as one dealing with the conditions of grace, and as such a fit parallel to that of the Unforgiving Debtor of Matthew's Gospel. This latter in the Matthean record is given as Christ's last parable in Galilee, coming thus somewhat after the Sower group of parables. Luke, on the other hand, sets the Two Debtors before the Parable of the Sower, which he also relates. Now, although regarding this parable as more likely to have been delivered at a later point than that which Luke gives it, we can see that in it which might affect this evangelist in giving it the foremost place it occupies in his Gospel. For, apart from the consideration that for this gracious gospeller it has special attraction, as setting forth the whole scope of grace, and so no less suitable a frontispiece to his record of the parables than is the Nazareth discourse to his narrative of Christ's life and work, it has its own distinct echo of that view of man's natural condition which we find in the Parable of the Sower. There, in the varied soils, we saw a moral differentiation of those outside Christ's kingdom, and here we are taught that while all men by nature are debtors to God, there are notable differences in their individual indebtedness. This parable then has an aspect which relates it very closely to the first parable alike of Mark and Matthew.

But we discover the most fitting parallel to that initial Good and Bad group of Matthean parables, setting forth Christ's teachings on the great distinction, in the Lost and Found parables of Luke. These we find quite in the heart of the nine chapters of this evangelist's special but desultorily arranged matter. The only clue afforded us here as to the time of their delivery is to be found in the introductory reference to the charge against Jesus which is mentioned as prompting their utterance, 'This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.'

This would seem to connect the delivery of these parables with the feast in Matthew's house, which is the occasion given in his Gospel for 'this remark. And in that case their delivery would be at a time very appropriate to their rudimentary teaching.

The Parable of the Midnight Borrower is the first recorded of Luke's three parables on prayer, appearing as it does in the eleventh chapter of his Gospel. It occurs there immediately after the account of Christ teaching His disciples the Lord's Prayer, in answer to their request for guidance in this matter. As the Lord's Prayer in Matthew's Gospel forms part of the Sermon on the Mount, we have this to encourage us in relegating the delivery of Christ's first parable on prayer to the days of His Galilean ministry, quite a suitable time and place for it as a parallel to the Matthean parables on growth.

The other two parables on prayer are found at the very end of the nine distinctively Lucan chapters, and immediately before that incident of the children being brought to Jesus, with which Luke again joins Mark and Matthew in their narratives of Christ's ministry. These parables are thus placed prior to those later teachings of Christ in this and other forms, associated with the experiences in Jerusalem which preceded His passion. Prayer as an essential element in the development of the spiritual life, alike in early and late stages, may well have had its inculcations in parabolic form, both in Galilee, and throughout the itinerant portion of our Lord's ministry, which began with His departure from it.

The parables of the Two Debtors and of the Good Samaritan, which, as treating of grace, we have paralleled with Matthew's finding group, although reported separately in the seventh and tenth chapters of Luke's Gospel, are both immediately preceded by references to incidents recorded in Matthew's eleventh chapter. The narrative of the Magdalene's appearance in Simon's house, with which the former parable is bound up, follows here Christ's allegory of the Market-children, which in Matthew's report of it, as in Luke's too, is wound up by a comparison of the Baptist's austerity with the geniality of Christ. Luke's artistic taste here leads him to illustrate and show the real character of this distinctive feature of our Lord, by setting before us the scene at Simon's feast, with the parable it gave occasion for. A paragraph, further on in Matthew's

eleventh chapter, reports Christ's exclamation, 'I thank Thee, Father, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes,' and this it is which immediately precedes the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke's tenth chapter. We may then regard the season of these Galilean utterances, as the most likely one for the delivery of the above two parables. And this well fits in with their logical position.

The other parable of this group, that of Dives and Lazarus, is found some chapters later on in Luke. Its immediately succeeding context, relating to occasions of stumbling, occurs in Matthew shortly before his mention of Christ's departure from Galilee, while his own last reported parable of the group we are dealing with, the Unforgiving Debtor, appears in his Gospel at the same point. It is distinctly interesting to notice that besides being both alike in their separation from the other parables of the group they belong to, these parables are also alike in having a notably judicial aspect, Dives and the Unforgiving Debtor being both pictured as incurring doom. Here again in this case we find a distinct fitness of their teachings for the time they seemingly belong to.

The Barren Fig-tree has its place in Luke's Gospel between two incidents, recorded like this parable only by the third Evangelist. These present to us our Lord's rebuke of sentiments excited by some recent calamities, and His cure of a bent woman in the synagogue. This special Lucan matter follows the contrast drawn by Christ between man's weather wisdom and his lack of spiritual foresight or concern, while it is followed by the parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven. These indications of its place in the Saviour's ministry would oblige us to regard it as spoken in Galilee, previous to the transfiguration, and so prior to those Matthean parables to which with others it offers a parallel. But against this there may be set the fact that, immediately after the paragraphs we have referred to, Luke speaks of Christ going on his way through cities and villages teaching, and journeying on to Jerusalem. It is just to this period of itinerant teaching that logical considerations would lead us to refer it, and with all the literary facts before us, we think that these considerations may well turn the scale in favour of the more suitable place and time for its delivery.

We are encouraged to regard this as the true view of the case by the like circumstances of the Farm Servant, another parable of the same group. Although found in a later chapter of Luke, its setting also connects it immediately with words of Jesus reported by Matthew as spoken in Galilee. But here again, on the other hand, we have a distinct statement of Christ being on the way to Jerusalem, in the verse which immediately succeeds this parable, and have little doubt that this is the correct guide to its true and suitable place in the Gospel narrative.

The Parable of the Pounds is, as has been mentioned, one of two introduced by Luke into those portions of his Gospel in which he clearly follows the course of the Marcan narrative. It is related here as spoken in Jericho in connexion with Christ's visit to Zaccheus. This incident, which Luke alone reports, immediately succeeds his account of Christ's granting restoration of sight to Bartimæus, recorded by Matthew as taking place after our Lord had left Jericho for Jerusalem. As it is just after His entry into the Holy City, that Matthew represents Christ delivering those parables on the divine claims, whose parallel we find in the three we have now been considering, we judge this Parable of the Pounds to be quite in its right place here.

In regard to the Parable of the Rich Fool, which, as depicting the doom of neglected duty, has clearly its logical place alongside our Lord's last parables, all we can say of its position in Luke is, that it appears among the most variously connected matter to be found in all this Gospel. For if we have here (in chap. 12) many echoes of the Sermon on the Mount, we have also those of the most solemn teachings of the passion week, in Christ's injunctions to vigilance and His parabolic contrast between the faithful and the unfaithful servants.

The Lucan Parable of the Great Supper has so much in common with that of the Wedding Feast of Matthew's record, that one may be pardoned for finding in that alone, enough to warrant our view of the two as parallel. At the

same time that notable presentation of the divine grace which it affords, may well have led Luke to give it the setting of Christ's popular days in Galilee which he has done. But here again we have not only that mention of the journey to Jerusalem before it, in these nine chaotic chapters, but also that of Christ's words of lament over Jerusalem at sight of the doomed city, to encourage our assignation of it to a later and more appropriate period.

The Parable of the Sagacious Steward immediately follows in Luke's Gospel the 'lost and found' triad, with its suggestiveness of the Galilean ministry and its surroundings. It is immediately followed by that of Dives and Lazarus, the few intervening verses being made up of some sentences from the Sermon on the Mount. While this Parable, by which it is followed, brings us in its sequence into the atmosphere of Christ's closing addresses, the immediate setting of the Sagacious Steward has clearly its nearer connexion here with His earlier teaching. But the arrangement in this case is one characteristic generally of the third Evangelist, who ever seeks to temper Christ's severe teachings by His gracious ones. Thus the Parable of the Rich Fool is succeeded by our Lord's comforting counsel against temporal anxiety, the solemn truths appended to that of the Great Supper are followed by the Lost and Found parables, and the grave lessons of the Sagacious Steward, Dives and Lazarus, and Christ's predictive warnings, precede the gracious parables of the Importunate Widow, and Penitent Publican.

We may then, while recognizing that the very nature of our present task renders definite results impossible, consider that such guiding hints as their settings afford, give us some fair encouragement to regard the Lucan parables as alike logically and historically furnishing us with a parallel to the Matthean sequence. And we may add that it is those parables in Luke, the logical position of which is most obvious, that give us least indication as to their real place in the story of Christ's evangelic and saving ministry.