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Jesus' Teaching Methods



Survey of the Life of Christ - Steve Gregg

In "Jesus' Teaching Methods," Steve Gregg discusses the various communication devices that Jesus employed to make his teachings memorable and easily understood by different audiences. Gregg highlights Jesus' use of nature, metaphors, paradoxes, hyperbole, and even humor to convey his messages. He also notes that Jesus adapted his teachings to respond to specific questions and situations, and used rhetorical arguments to defend his positions. Overall, Gregg emphasizes the importance of studying Jesus' teachings as a model for effective discipleship.

Transcript

Before we actually survey the life of Christ and go through the four Gospels together, I want to talk about a major feature of the life of Christ, and that is the teaching of Christ. Many books have been written about Jesus, and many of them are called the Life and Teachings of Christ, because there are two things very essential for us to know about him. One is who he was, and connected with that, of course, what he did, what he demonstrated, what he modeled.

And the other is what he said. And Jesus laid tremendous emphasis on the need to follow what he said. He said that if you continue in his words, then you are his disciples.

And he said that disciples are made by teaching persons to fulfill all the things that Jesus commanded. So the teachings of Jesus are an essential part, maybe, I can't say more important, certainly not more important than his life. Perhaps the very most important thing that we can know about Jesus is who he is and what he did for us, especially in dying and rising again for our justification.

But his teachings, of course, provide the model for us of discipleship. And once we have been justified, once we are saved, there's very little that can be of greater use to us than to know that Jesus taught us to do certain things and that we can follow those. Of course, not only his teaching, but his life is a model for us.

But some of the Gospels, particularly Matthew and Luke and John, I guess all the Gospels except Mark, very heavy emphasis on the teachings of Jesus and recorded a good

sampling of it. Matt, we got a handout here for you if you want it. But Jesus was not a teacher of the sort that we have around today.

As a matter of fact, he wasn't really the type of teacher that they commonly had around back then. He taught with authority and that surprised people because most of their teaching that they were accustomed to of a religious sort came from the scribes who apparently differed from Jesus in this very respect that he, unlike them, taught with a kind of an authority. Well, I think we'll benefit if we can analyze a little bit the way that Jesus taught.

And there are two reasons for this. One is that I think we can better understand what he said if we understand the devices he used to communicate. And we may we may avoid making mistakes in an application or interpretation if we can understand his methods a little bit.

And of course, any anyone who ever teaches or will teach. Can gain from the model of Jesus as a teacher. There are some things that he did that we cannot model.

For example, he can make decrees just seemingly off the top of his head and then be authoritative. We cannot do that. We don't have the authority to write scripture, for example, or to give commands such as he had.

But we do have the commission to teach all nations. And since Jesus was a teacher, he provides a very excellent model, probably the prime model of teaching. So as we look at Jesus ministry as a teacher, we'll learn, first of all, about ways of better understanding what he taught.

And secondly, we'll see a model teacher for us, those of us who have opportunity and obligation to teach. Now, many people think of Jesus as nothing else but a teacher. Many people think of Jesus as a great teacher and nothing else.

So these, of course, are people who are not Christians. They would say that the Sermon on the Mount or the or the Golden Rule or the parables of Jesus were just simply brilliant. And then he was a teacher par excellence.

And that is what his significance is in history. Christians know that he not only taught wonderful things, but he taught wonderful things about himself. And the things he said about himself are the more significant things that he taught, because he claimed to be the son of God.

He claimed to be, in fact, equal with God. And if these statements are true, then he is certainly the most important person who ever lived on the planet Earth. If the statements are not true, then he's one of the greatest deceivers that ever lived on the planet Earth.

And we Christians accept the fact that he is more than just a teacher. But because he is the son of God, we look to his teaching with a greater reverence. And we attribute to them a greater authority because of the person from whom they come.

Jesus, however, in his own day was often mistaken for a merely another teacher. He was called rabbi, which was the typical word that the Jews used to speak of their religious teachers more than 50 times in the Gospels. He there are a couple of other words, Greek words for teacher that appear a few times in the Gospels with reference to Jesus.

Rabbi is an Aramaic word. It actually means my great one. But in usage, it tended simply mean to mean a teacher, a religious teacher.

And there were many rabbis. Most of them were trained under other rabbis. Jesus, however, to the marvel of his of his opponents, was as wise or wiser than any of the rabbis.

And yet they marveled that he had never learned. He had never studied. He was a layman, but he was a layman who taught with a compelling authority and attracted the masses.

Sometimes thousands of people would sit and listen to him as he preached in the open air. Sir Edward Arnold is one of the world's foremost scholars on Buddhism. And he made this comment comparing the teachings of Christ with the teachings of the Buddha.

He said, quote, one line or one sentence out of the Sermon on the Mount is worth more than everything Buddha ever said. Unquote. Which tends to highlight the fact that Jesus was an extraordinary teacher.

And we would expect that to be so if he was everything else that he claimed to be as well. Jesus never wrote anything down as far as we know. The only writing that Jesus did that is on record was on the dust of the temple floor in John eight.

And we don't even have record of what it was he wrote. We just read that he scribbled there and seemed to be doodling as if to ignore those who were interrogating him. And apart from that, we wouldn't even know whether Jesus knew how to write because he left nothing in writing.

Although there's an interesting story in Eusebius, which may be valid about a king of a place called Odessa, who sent a letter to Jesus inviting him to come and ask him to come to his country and heal him of a disease. The king and Jesus sent a letter back to him declining, saying, I can't come at this time. I have to fill my father's work here.

But when I'm gone, I'll send one of my disciples and he'll come and heal you and tell you everything I would have told you. And according to Eusebius and his ecclesiastical history written 325 A.D., he said that those letters were on record in the letter of the king

to Jesus and the letter back from Jesus to the king were on record in that land. Even if Odessa was the name of the place, I believe I could be getting that location wrong.

It's a country that's not familiar to us today. But you can find the actual letter of the king written to Jesus and the letter of Jesus written to the king in Eusebius's ecclesiastical history. Very fascinating.

Whether it's authentic or not, who can say? Obviously, those letters are not available today. If that letter did exist, it's the only known writing on paper, any correspondence or anything that Jesus wrote. Jesus was an oral teacher, not a writing.

He was not a literary teacher. And of course, the only reason we know what he taught is because his writings were later written down. But usually, as far as we can tell, a couple of decades after his death, the first written form of his teachings were given to us, which means that there are challenges to preserving the teachings of somebody who never wrote anything down.

And especially if their teachings are not written down for a couple of decades after they're gone. 20 years is a long time. And the Gospel of Mark and Matthew may have appeared around the early 50s A.D., which would be more than 20 years after Jesus spoke.

When you realize that today a teacher can disseminate his teachings through the printed page or through audio tape or whatever, and there be a permanent record of what he said, and people can read it again and again, and it can be kind of sink down into their minds and their hearts from having repetition and so forth. And yet Jesus lived at a time where teachers didn't have that luxury. Of course, he could write things down, but they couldn't be printed in the sense that we can mass produce writings today.

Jesus spoke and did all of his teaching before the printing press was available. And there is a conventional wisdom among scholars today, a saying in the universities, publish or perish, suggesting that a man may be a great professor and make a tremendous impact on his students. But if he leaves nothing published, if he leaves nothing in writing, his memory will be lost.

And he will have perished and left no trace of his influence. And this is not entirely true, of course. Jesus never wrote or published.

In fact, in one university on the bulletin board, a friend of mine saw a picture of Jesus on the cross and it said he was a great teacher. Too bad he never published. And obviously there's a picture of him perishing on the cross.

I think this is probably written by somebody intending to mock Jesus. But actually, the irony of it underscores the marvel of Jesus that, in fact, he didn't attempt to publish anything. And yet he did not perish.

His writings are far from perished. They are the most widely broadcast, the most widely published, the most widely read of all teachings of any person who's ever lived. And yet he never wrote anything down, which means that his teaching had to be extremely memorable.

And had to be able to be preserved by simply the memories of people for years until it was written down. Now, I say that sort of gratuitously because that's what scholars believe happened. There's really no reason to believe that the disciples didn't write down some of the things he said, even as he spoke them.

They may have. We just don't have any record of them doing so. And we don't have those writings if they did so.

It's also possible that rather comprehensive lists of Jesus sayings may have been written down shortly after his death. But again, we don't have those. As near as we can tell, his teaching was passed down orally until the earliest gospels were written.

And yet there's reason to believe that they were passed down authentically and without change. Which means his teachings must have had a tremendous vitality and ability to stick in the mind and to command the attention even as passed down before written down. Jesus did all of his teaching orally in the synagogues and in the open air and sometimes in the temple.

And he had large audiences in many cases, which means that if his teachings, as we have them in the gospels, are not accurately represented, then there were large audiences who could bear witness to the fact that these records were not accurate because the gospels were in circulation, even in the region where Jesus had lived and taught well within the lifetime of many who would have heard him. And it would appear the gospels were never challenged in terms of their content. After all.

Someone has said, well, if Jesus didn't say all those things that the gospels record him as saying, then find the man who did not worship him. I mean, you have to admit that if the disciples, if the church made up these saints of Jesus, as they say, the Jesus seminar, people suggest, you know, Jesus didn't really say that 20 percent of that stuff, the other 80 percent was made up by the church. I say there must have been some of the greatest geniuses in the early church that ever lived, because the teachings of Jesus are just so profound, so ingenious that if they weren't from him, they must have come from someone who is about equal to what we believe he was.

And of course, it's much more reasonable to assume that they came from the son of God himself. Jesus' teaching also was of a short duration. He only taught for three years.

And since he never wrote anything down and just taught in public, oral situations, and only did so for three years, which of course limited the ability of reaching larger

audiences if he lived, say, twice as long or ten times as long and taught, or of course, being able to repeat himself more times. Three years is a short career of teaching. And yet we have his teachings preserved, despite the unlikelihood that such teachings in such a circumstance would have survived.

Now, in order to be preserved accurately, they have to be remembered by those who heard him. And therefore, the teachings of Jesus had to be very memorable. And they are.

They are the kinds of things that people would likely remember. In order to remember such teaching has to be, first of all, permanently memorable and uncorruptible. That is, they have to be in a form that would be retained without change.

You know, when you when you pass something down orally, when you say, well, he said this and then that person who hears that tells someone else and they tell someone else very many times the things that were allegedly said get changed quite a bit in the transmission from party to party. And in order for these teachings to remain uncorruptible, they have to be so dynamic in a sense that their actual wording would be remembered. Not just the thought behind them, because if the actual wording is lost, then they can be reworded in the retelling a number of times and the meaning can be entirely lost in a few generations of retelling.

His teaching had to be able to be he had to be capable of holding a crowd for a long period of time. He taught all day long, sometimes for three days to the same people, apparently sunup to sundown. And his teachings must have been very riveting.

We don't have record of the majority of the things he taught. I mean, we're told that he taught them all day long, but we don't have any record of the contents of what he taught. In many cases, we have only some things, a sampling.

But we have to assume that his teachings were very riveting, very commanding of the attention that people would stay and listen for as long as they did. Even with no doubt children in the audience who have a short attention span and would easily be distracted. Yet Jesus seemed to be able to hold his audiences for a lengthy period of time.

His teachings had to be adaptable to various kinds of audiences because he sometimes spoke to the religious authorities who are highly trained, who would try to engage him in theological controversy of the sort that they engaged in among themselves. The Sadducees and the Pharisees had their different theological outlooks and they debated among themselves. And both of those groups in the turn came to Jesus and tried to stump him with the very kinds of ethical dilemmas and so forth that they fought among themselves about.

And he was capable of dealing with people at that level. He was also capable of dealing

with a bereaved widow or the sisters of a man who had died and people who are in crisis and people who have no education. He could say things very tersely and understandably that a child could understand in many cases.

So he could adapt his teaching to various audiences. That is not the case with all teachers, by the way. Some teachers, they can impress intellectuals but they cannot speak any other way but such as an intellectual would appreciate.

And the average ordinary person cannot even understand them or is not interested in the things they say. Other people can speak to the common peasant perhaps more effectively but wouldn't be able to engage the intellectual community's interest at all. Jesus was able to adapt to any situation.

He was also the master of the occasional teaching. By occasional I don't mean once in a while as we sometimes use that term but occasional means based upon a certain occasion. Occasioned by something.

Instead of getting up with his sermon notes ready that he prepared the day before, his teaching often had to come off the cuff in response to a situation that presented itself. An unpredictable situation, an occasion, would bring forth the most brilliant comments and teachings from Jesus. He was able to seize the opportunity and exploit a given event, for example.

He was told once of an atrocity that Pilate had done in the temple to some Galileans there. And Jesus sees that as an opportunity to teach them that they need to be prepared because they're going to face the same kind of extermination if they do not repent. He could respond to news of various things.

They would come to him and they'd say, Herod intends to kill you. And he could give an answer back that would be essentially giving some information. On that particular occasion he mentioned to them that a prophet cannot perish outside of Jerusalem.

And so Jesus could, on an occasion where people are asking him questions, for example, or telling him a bit of news, or bringing to his attention a fig tree that is withered up that he had cursed the day before. He would have a teaching ready when people would call upon him or ask him a question like this. By the way, I have observed from the teaching of Jesus that teachings are more memorable if they are in response to an occasion, especially in response to a particular question.

If a person asks a question, they're already curious. There's already a void in their thinking waiting to be filled about the subject that they're asking. And therefore, if you tell them the answer, they're much more likely to retain and process that answer because they already had a curiosity about it, than if you gave them the same information without them having asked or been curious about it.

And that may be one of the reasons why Jesus' teachings were remembered so well. Very many times a teaching was given in response to a question that was asked. By the way, as a person who is not only a teacher by vocation, but also a homeschooler attempting to teach children, I've learned something from that, and that is that if people are curious about something, they will learn more readily the subject.

And if someone is not curious about it, you may lecture them all you want on the subject, and a lot of that will just go over their head or off them like water off a duck's back. It will simply not stick. People retain very small percentage of the things they hear taught, but a much larger percentage if it's something they had a lively curiosity about in the first place.

I myself have retained a great amount of knowledge from my study because I study only what interests me. I study only the things I'm curious about. I suppose it's been more beneficial not having been through Bible college or seminary where you learn what the professor decides it's time for you to learn about.

You know, you go through what the curriculum dictates that you should learn, rather than what you want to learn. In my own life, I didn't go through that procedure, but every time I had a curiosity, I would get books and read and research, and because it was always a subject I already had a thirst to know. And a curiosity already there, I tended probably, I imagine, to retain more of what I read than had somebody been trying to force the information on me, and I wasn't the least bit interested.

And so Jesus' teaching was often that way, that he would seize an opportunity where there was a curiosity caused by a bit of news, by a question asked or whatever, and he would use that as a teaching opportunity. And, of course, in a classroom setting like this, this is the very kind of setting I said I benefited from not being in, and here you are in that setting. My own, what I've learned from Jesus' methods about this is that if people have a question, they'll learn better the information if they already have a question about it.

Now, I can't wait for my students to ask me all the questions about everything I might say, so I anticipate questions and raise them myself. When I read a passage, I know what kind of questions I had about it. I assume that most people can get wondering about it if the question is raised.

If they don't raise the question, I will. And so my teaching often, especially teaching verse by verse through the Bible, is when I read a passage, I try to recall what questions have come to my mind and what issues I think are important, and I'll actually raise the question. I'll ask the question in the lecture, and then hopefully the students say, yeah, I wonder about that too.

Once they wonder, I hope they do, that's when I give the answer. In fact, I remember

many times before I had the school, when I was in home teaching situations and other places I was teaching frequently, people would come up to me and say, you know, when you were teaching, a question arose in my mind about the point you were making. And before I could ask it, you answered it.

And later another question came up in my mind, and before I could ask it, you answered it. And I noticed that myself in reading good books. I've told you before, one of my favorite books is Hannah Whitehall Smith's book, *The Christian Secret of a Happy Life*.

And I remember distinctly the first of the many times I've read that book. First time I read it, when it was new to me, the first chapter just raised certain questions. I mean, I liked what she was saying.

I thought, yeah, that sounds good, that sounds good, but what about this and what about that? And as I read the next chapter, she had anticipated those questions and objections, and she answered them. But new questions came to my mind, and the third chapter would answer those questions. I just noticed this happening as I read through the book.

That everything she said sounded good, but there was always this, but what about this little objection or question that would come to my mind. And the next chapter, new. You know, it's almost like she prophetically knew what I was going to wonder about that.

But it probably wasn't prophetic at all. It's probably rather that she just knew from talking to people and maybe from her own exploration and learning what kinds of objections and questions people have to this subject. And for a teacher to know that, to exploit the curiosity that's already there, is the best way to get the information through the obstacle of boredom, which many listeners have.

And so that's something Jesus managed to do quite a bit by giving occasional teachings frequently in response to questions asked. Jesus also taught effectively because he knew the principle of working from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from what is known to what is not known. That is to say, a teacher wants to communicate things to people that they don't already know.

If someone gets up to teach, it's because there is information they want to transfer to their students. And they assume, of course, that the students don't know the information already or else they wouldn't bother to teach it. That's what teachers are for, is to communicate things that aren't already there in your understanding and in your mind.

And so Jesus, like any other teacher, had things he wanted to communicate. But the way he did so was to start with something familiar. Start with the place where those people were.

They know this already and work from there to that. Jesus said the Pharisees, you need to go and learn what this means. I will have mercy and not sacrifice.

Now, they knew the scriptures. They knew what the scriptures said, but he was trying to teach them a new lesson. And that is not to criticize people for minor breaches of ceremonial law when there's actually a good reason for them to break it.

As in that particular case where Jesus was, his disciples were eating, picking grain on the Sabbath. It was a violation of ceremonial law, but it was something that was meeting an actual need. And he quoted that scripture.

And basically, starting with what they knew the Bible said, he applied it to the situation, which was what they didn't know. And that is what God's attitude was about this particular circumstance and their particular attitudes. And Jesus often worked from the scriptures.

Of course, the Old Testament scripture is the main familiar body of knowledge that the Jews had from which Jesus made his points. He'd say in the Sermon on the Mount, you have heard that it was said, thou shalt not murder and whosoever murders shall be in danger of the judgment. Now, they already knew that that was in their Bible.

They'd heard that taught. But he said, but I say to you, whoever is angry, his brother without a cause is in danger of the judgment. And he goes on from there.

He starts with what they've heard and what they know from the scriptures. And then he makes his application. His application is quite clearly a just and reasonable extension of what they already knew.

But they had never thought of that. There is something they don't know or they're not thinking of. And he starts with that which they already know and agree with and shows the new lesson as growing out of what they knew.

And this is a great teaching device. Jesus didn't only do that with use of the scriptures, which were familiar to him, but also the use of nature. He would talk about, you know, how how plants grow.

You talk about how crops grow first, the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. And he would use lessons from nature. He says, you know, at night, if the sun is red, that you're going to have good weather tomorrow.

But if the sun if the sky is red in the morning, then then, you know, it's going to be bad weather. This is now, you know how to discern the face of the sky, but you don't know how to discern the signs of the times. It's a learned lesson from the fig tree when its leaf is tender and it's putting forth its shoots.

You know that summer is near. So also when you see these things begin to come to pass, know that it is near even at the door. So he would take something from nature that they already knew.

This was an agrarian society. They knew about fig trees growing. They knew about crops growing.

They knew about these things. They knew. He said, consider the birds, the air.

They don't work. They don't start food and barns. But look, your father feeds them and then he makes the application.

And so what they knew from nature, as well as from Scripture, he would use to start with what was familiar to them and teach that which they were not already thinking or already familiar to them. He would do the same thing from familiar, mundane, daily household activities, like a woman sweeping the floor of her house to find a missing coin or a woman putting wood in her house. Putting a bit of yeast into three measures of meal or things like that.

Things that were very familiar household things that you do every day. Very familiar. People felt very comfortable hearing about these things because it was just already a part of their life.

And then for him to make a spiritual application from that was the next logical step. And of course, he also did this by making appeal to what they knew from human relationships. He said, if in the middle of the night you have a guest come and you go to your neighbor trying to get some bread, but he's already gone to bed, you pound on the door, he's going to say, well, it's already late, I'm in bed with my family, I don't want to get up.

He says, you keep pounding, he'll come. Now that, of course, we already know. If he knows he's not going to get any sleep until you go away, and the only way you're going to go away is by him giving you what you want, you know from human nature and human behavior that you're going to get what you want by persistence.

Or the story of the unjust judge. Similarly, the man didn't care about the woman's concerns, but she kept pestering him. So he said, well, I'll get her off my back.

I'll give her what she wants. And of course, Jesus turned those things into lessons about prayer. Or Jesus would say, you earthly fathers, even though you're evil, know how to give good gifts to your children.

How much more? Well, you're a heavenly father. Give good things to those who ask him. Again, starting with what we know.

We know about how fathers care for their children. We know how someone can be pestered into giving you what you want. This is human behavior, human relations 101.

We already know that stuff. And then from that to argue for a spiritual lesson that Jesus

wanted to get across to them. So there were many known and familiar things that the Jews of his time already knew, and which he would take and use as springboards into teaching what he wanted them to know.

That was not yet known to them. He worked from scriptures. He worked from things in nature, from ordinary household activities, and from human relationships.

We already are familiar with all these things. And from those he springboarded into the things that he wanted to teach that we didn't already know. I'd like to talk about some of the features of Jesus' teaching.

He was different from all other teachers in many ways, and he was the best of teachers. First of all, the observation that his first hearers made about his teaching, invariably, was that he spoke as one having authority and not as the scribes. What is authority? Authority means someone who has the last word, really.

Someone who has the right to decide the issue. Now, the scribes would get up and they would talk about Rabbi so-and-so's opinion on this, and Rabbi so-and-so too, you know, his opinion. And the third rabbi has a third opinion about this, and they'd talk about these things, but they wouldn't really have any authority to say, this is the truth.

Whereas Jesus would get up and he'd say, verily, verily, the King James says, in the Aramaic this would have been, Amen, Amen. Jesus prefaced his remarks many times with this comment, Amen, Amen, which was a very, it was a way of commanding attention, saying, what I'm about to say is absolutely true. It's sort of like saying, swear on a stack of Bibles, this is true.

Amen, Amen. And then he would give his comment. And it's like saying, this comment allows no reputation.

It allows no further discussion. This is the final word. And Jesus said that frequently.

And Jesus would say, you have heard that it was said, but I say to you, as if what he had to say was even more authoritative than what they'd heard before from Moses or from the rabbis or from whoever they heard it from. So Jesus spoke as if he had a unique authority that no other teacher even claimed to have. I think it's interesting in the Gospel of Mark in chapter one, verse 22, we read the first response of some people who heard him speak in the synagogue in Capernaum.

It says in verse 22, and as they they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. Now, notice he taught as one having authority. It doesn't say that they recognize that he had authority.

They just recognize he was talking as if he had authority. You know, authority is an ethereal, invisible kind of thing. Someone can say, well, science has proven that

evolution has occurred.

Well, they're speaking very authoritatively. They're speaking as one that has authority, but they might have no real authority at all. They might just be faking it.

They might be bluffing. A person can speak as one who has authority without really having any. And the first thing they noticed in the Capernaum synagogue there, when he taught there the first time, was he spoke as one having authority.

They thought that was outlandish. But the next thing that happened in that particular Sabbath service was a man with a demon jumped up and started screaming. And Jesus said in verse 25, be quiet and come out of him.

And verse 26 says, when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him. And look at verse 27. Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, what is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.

Now notice, initially they just noticed that he's talking as if he were one having authority. They may be as yet unconvinced whether he has such authority. But when he cast the demon out, they say, whoa, he does speak with authority.

With authority he commands the demons, and even they obey him. He demonstrated that he had the authority to say the things that he spoke as if he had authority to do. Remember when they lowered a paralyzed man through the roof and laid him before Jesus' feet in the house? And Jesus said, son, your sins are forgiven.

Now, a lot of his critics grumbled because they said, well, how can any man forgive anyone's sins? That's God's job. Is he claiming to be God? He's blaspheming. And in fact, of course, Jesus was making a statement as if he had authority to say, hey, I forgive your sins.

Your sins are forgiven. That is claiming to have authority to forgive sins. But how could anyone know whether that authority is really there or not or whether it's just a bluff? Well, Jesus said to them, well, that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on Earth to forgive sins.

He said to the woman, take up your bed and walk. And he was healed. And then they knew that he wasn't just claiming to have authority.

He demonstrated that he had authority so that his teaching had, first of all, an authoritative air to it. He spoke as if he had authority to say things and decree things and decide things that no man had ever even dared to claim for himself. But then those who objected to him speaking as if he had such authority were usually silenced by the fact that he demonstrated that he did speak with real authority, that there was genuine

authority behind his words, not just a pretended authority behind his words.

After the Sermon on the Mount, it closes in Matthew 7, 28. Once again, we read that the people who heard him, which were mainly his disciples, marveled because he spoke as one having authority there. And so the authority of Jesus was demonstrated.

And it was it was it was evident in his speaking that he was not just claiming to give another opinion. He was given the answer. He was given the final word.

And his frequently repeated phrase, verily, verily, or I think the New King James is something like most assuredly I say unto you or something like that. But in his original language, Aramaic, he would have been saying amen, amen. And that is, of course, the way he prefaced many remarks, which very few people could do that if they're just giving their own opinion.

He was claiming that this is the last word. This is it. This is a word from God.

Well, addition in addition to being authoritative in its tone, Jesus teaching was very well put. His teachings were graphic. You know, you can tell true things in a way that bores people to tears or that is eminently forgettable, you know.

But Jesus put his teachings into a graphic form that held attention and stuck in the memory. I'd like to talk to you about some of the graphic devices that Jesus used. Many of them have been given names since his time.

I'm sure they didn't have these names back then. I'm sure he did all of these things without knowing the names for them. But we can say by analyzing his teaching that he made his teaching more graphic by the use of various figures of speech, one of which we call a metaphor.

When Jesus said, I am the light of the world, that's a metaphor because he's not a literal light. He was not glowing at that moment. He did on the Mount of Transfiguration, but that's not what he's referring to.

He was speaking of light in a metaphorical sense. He was not talking about natural light. He was talking about spiritual illumination.

And therefore, he was saying, I am, you know, if you're going to be literal and not use figures of speech, you say, I am a human being. If you say, I am the door to the sheepfold or I am the true vine or I am the good shepherd and you're not really you don't really have any sheep. You're using a metaphor.

A metaphor is when you equate something with something else that's not literally so. The metaphor is a figure of speech. It's symbolic.

And when someone uses a metaphor, it immediately makes the listener wonder, well, in

what sense is this true? I mean, when someone says, I am a true vine. If I said to you, I am the window of this room. I mean, say, wait a minute.

Steve's not literally the window of this room. What's he trying to get across here? Well, obviously, it wouldn't be a nonsensical statement unless I had some very profound meaning behind it, which I can't think of any at the moment. But but to say something so strange, something that is not literally true.

I am the door. I am the vine. I'm the good shepherd.

But there's no sheep. He's never had a sheep. He's a carpenter by trade.

What you know, what's he mean by that? It raises the question, first of all, why is he saying something that is not literally true? What is the message here? What is what is the sense in which he is metaphorically a vine or he is metaphorically a door or metaphorically something else? Bread of life. I am the bread of life. That's a metaphor.

And it's a device that catches the attention and stimulates thought. And often can illustrate something in a way that several sentences would not do as effectively. In addition to metaphors, Jesus is known to have used similes.

Now, a simile functions almost exactly like a metaphor. The difference between a metaphor and a simile is that a metaphor would say I am. The bread of life, a simile would be I am like bread.

When you have the word like or similar to or as when that word is in this in the figure of speech, then you have not a metaphor, but a simile. It's not saying that I am the shepherd, but I am like something. Jesus said, I send you forth as sheep among wolves.

He didn't say you are sheep among wolves. He could have said that. That would have been a metaphor.

We said, I'm sending you out as sheep. That is like sheep. It has the same function as a metaphor in terms of saying, well, what's OK, what's he trying to say here? Sheep among wolves.

I get that picture. You know, I guess I can understand what he's saying about about us in the world. Or when he says to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves.

These are similes. They're not being confused with metaphors because they happen to have the word as or like in them. So similes and metaphors are very similar to each other.

Metaphor is like a simile. That statement I just made is a simile. But a metaphor is not a simile.

They're just two different ways of making a point graphically and making a picture come to mind and saying something that is not literally true. But a simile can be literally true. A Christian in the world can literally be like a sheep among wolves.

But when Jesus said to the disciples, you are the salt of the earth, that's a metaphor. He didn't say you are like salt. That could be true in some sense.

Whatever salt is like, we could be like that. But say you are the salt of the earth. That's not literally true.

That's a metaphor. And so there's the difference between metaphors and similes. And Jesus used both.

A third way that Jesus made his teaching graphic and interesting is by the use of what we call a paradox. A paradox is what might be thought of at first glance as a self-contradictory statement.

A statement that sounds like it simply can't be true. But the fact that the person making the statement is sober and not insane. Means that it must be in some sense intended in a true way.

And of course, because it seems like it isn't true, it makes you wonder. It makes it create curiosity. It raises the questions of what is he getting at here? And that just gets that achieves its purpose.

Because the purpose is to get you thinking about what he's saying and get you to discover what he means. You know, again, you will retain much more. The things you learn by personal discovery than what someone shoves into your head secondhand.

If someone says, we'll go look this up and you tell me what it says and you go do so, you're going to remember what you said because you discover it for yourself. And paradox and metaphors and similes all kind of do that.

They tell you the truth in a non-literal way. Or a paradox, in this case, in a way that sounds like it simply can't be true. But you know it must be because he wouldn't have said it.

I mean, he would have recognized this as a contradictory statement. And he wouldn't have made that kind of mistake. That must mean something.

And it gets your mind working on it. It gets you rolling it over. Asking the questions about it to try to draw its meaning from it.

And then you discover the truth, largely for yourself. Of course, you can't take credit for it because if he hadn't given you that paradox, you'd never have thought about it in all likelihood. But it's an effective teaching device.

When Jesus said, the first shall be the last and the last shall be first. Which he said on a number of occasions, by the way. In what sense is that true? A person who's last is almost by definition not first.

Unless there's only one. Then he can be the first and the last, but that's not what Jesus was saying. Well, it sounds like that isn't true.

But it must be true in some sense. Jesus said so many times, it seems like if it was a slip of the tongue, if it was a mistake, he would have caught himself before he repeated it. But it obviously is true in some sense.

But in what sense? And so your mind goes to work on it. When Jesus said, he that would be chief among you must be the servant of all. In what sense is the person who's the chief in the role of the servant or the slave? How does that make? That's not true in the natural way of thinking about things usually.

But it must be true in some sense. Or when Jesus said, he that seeks to save his life will lose it, but he that will lose his life for my sake will find it. That's a paradox.

And Jesus stated a lot of his things in paradox form. And that is a teaching device. Another device that Jesus used is hyperbole.

Now you've heard me talk about hyperbole many times. When you go when you're teaching verse by verse through the Bible, you have to identify frequently hyperbole. Hyperbole, of course, is an exaggeration.

Now, when we use when we say that somebody is exaggerating, often what we're saying is their line. You know, the fish story, the classic fish story, the one that got away that, you know, it must have been, you know, had to be at least that big, you know. But, you know, that the story is if it's being exaggerated, it is deceiving.

The fisherman is deceiving you. And we teach children not to exaggerate because we tell them that's not honest. And then if someone comes along and say, well, Jesus exaggerated, it may stumble.

Oh, how could how could he? He tells the truth. Is that in all cultures, especially in the Middle Eastern, Asian and Asian cultures, hyperbole is a normal method of communicating and it is not deceptive. The mother who tells her children, I told you a million times not to come into the carpet with muddy boots on is using hyperbole because she has not really said that a million times.

She is not even trying to communicate that she has said it literally a million times. That's not what she's saying. And the child knows that's not what she's saying.

It is a figure of speech that the speaker and the listener both recognize as a figure of

speech. It is an exaggeration for the sake of making a point emphatically. That's what a hyperbole is.

Jesus used hyperbole frequently. Jesus indicated that it might be advantageous to pluck out your eye or to cut off your hand in order to enter into life. Well, this is not really this would never be literally the case.

I don't think anyone would ever get into heaven by plucking out their eye or cutting off their hand. Of course, what he's suggesting is that something as precious to you as your eye is or as your right hand is. You need your hand to make a living and no one needs to explain to you why your eyes are precious to you.

No matter how precious a thing is to you, even if it's as precious as your eye or hand, you should be willing to cut it off to get it out of your life if it is hindering you from entering the kingdom of God. Nothing, in other words, even so precious as an eye or a hand should be permitted to interfere with your entrance into the kingdom of God. You should part with it violently or suddenly, abruptly, if it is doing so.

That is the use of a hyperbole. When Jesus said a man to follow me must hate his father and his mother, to hate his wife and his children. That is a hyperbole.

That is stating things a little more strongly than we would normally state them. But he's making a point. He doesn't mean that to be taken in the absolute literal sense.

There are things that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, which we will study separately in a later series, which I believe are hyperbole. I believe there are many hyperboles in the Sermon on the Mount and in Jesus' other teaching. It is easiest just to identify them when we come to them.

But how do you know if something is a hyperbole? I mean, it's easy to take any unsavory thing that Jesus said and say, well, I don't like that. So I'm going to say he was exaggerating. That was a hyperbole.

Well, first of all, we cannot appeal to this business of hyperbole in order to soften a statement. Because hyperbole, by definition, is made in order to be emphatic about a point. If Jesus said you have to hate your father and your mother, it may be that we realize from other things he said that he doesn't want us to literally hate them.

But that doesn't mean we can now just throw out the statement because after all, he didn't mean that literally. Let's ignore that as if he didn't say anything there. No, he said it by way of hyperbole in order to be emphatic on a point.

That your love for him must take precedence over all other loyalties and all over all other commitments and all other affections to the point that even your mother, your father, your wife, your children would be by comparison, they would appear to be hated by you.

By contrast to your total loyalty and affection and commitment to Jesus Christ. Now, you know, the fact that he used hyperbole doesn't give us the right to soften the statement.

If anything, we have to say hyperbole is used in order to give greater impact to the statement. Just as when we use it in our own language today, we can recognize hyperbole at times simply by. Well, the best way that I know to recognize hyperbole as opposed to literal saying is if taking it literally, either is absolutely nonsensical, as is sometimes the case.

Or if it is in contrast with some other clear teaching of Scripture or the general drift in teaching of Scripture in principle elsewhere. For example, how do we know Jesus doesn't want us literally to pluck out our eye or cut off our hand? Well, because he tells us, I mean, the statement is, if your right eye causes you to sin, if your hand caused you to sin, cut it out, pluck it off, get rid of it. But we know from the general teaching of Jesus and the rest of Scripture that your eye doesn't cause you to sin.

Your hand doesn't cause you to sin. The eye and the hand may be instruments of sin, but they're not the cause of sin. Your heart causes you to sin.

Jesus said, out of the heart come adulteries and murders and blasphemies and fornications and envies and covetousness. And these are the things that defile a man. And you obviously can't literally cut out your heart without committing suicide.

So he's not he's not saying literally that anyone should go around dismembering themselves. But literally he's making another point. But he's using a non-literal way of saying it called a hyperbole.

This is extremely common in the literature of Asia and of the Middle East. And Jesus and his listeners were very much products of their culture. This does not mean that their meaning is inaccessible to us, but we have to be aware that there will be times when Jesus will say something.

And it'll just seem so far fetched. And yet some people say, well, we need to take him literally because that's what he said. And yet we have to remember that his his listeners may have understood a bit differently.

One of the ways that hyperbole is used is when they use something that's called a limited negative. A limited negative is a kind of a hyperbole. And it takes the form of this statement, not X, but Y. Not this, but that.

But where the actual meaning is not only X, but also Y. The statement's actual statement is not this, but that, but literally means not only this, but also that. There are many examples of this in Jesus teaching. He says, for example, he says, do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth.

I came not to bring peace, but a sword. By the way, the word sword there is how Matthew renders it in Luke's version says division. I came not to bring peace, but division.

Now, if you take him just literally. He's saying I didn't come to bring peace. I came instead to bring division or a sword.

But actually, his meaning is I did not come only to bring peace, but also division. The disciples may have thought the Messiah was coming just to bring them peace and just to make everything rosy. Don't think that.

Don't think that I've come just to bring peace on earth. I didn't come just to bring peace, but also division and a sword. Of course he came to bring peace.

To take him literally that he didn't come to bring peace would be to miss his point and to actually make him contradict himself. Elsewhere, he made it very clear. My peace I give unto you.

These things I've spoken unto you that in me you might have peace. Of course he came to bring peace to his disciples, but not just peace. Peace in the midst of tribulation in the world.

You'll have tribulation. There will be a sword. There will be division.

But the form of the statement is not this, but that. But literally means not only this, but also that. This is not uncommon.

Also outside the Bible. But Jesus does this frequently. There's a possibility that Jesus might have been using such a form of speech when he said, Do not lay up treasures for yourself on earth, but lay up treasures for yourselves in heaven.

There is a possibility that he meant don't only lay up treasures for yourself on earth, but also lay up treasures in heaven. Which does not mean he authorized the laying up of treasures for yourself on earth, but he may not have outright forbidden it in every case. It's just that to do only that, which is what most rich people do and make no provision.

He says, remember the rich man who died this day, your soul be reprimed. And so is he who is rich in this world, but not rich toward God. This man had riches on earth, but he didn't have any in heaven.

It is possible that that statement may be a limited negative, as we call it. Another case where it clearly is, is where Jesus said, do not labor for the food that perishes, but labor for the food that endures to eternal life. Now, taken literally, that means it would be wrong to get a job in order to buy food.

Because he said, don't labor for the food that perishes. Well, the food you had this

morning, the food you eat tonight, that's food that perishes. If you work and earn money and use that money to buy food, you've just labored for the food that perishes.

And Jesus said, don't do that. And I've known some cults that have gone absolutely literal with that, and they've decided it's wrong to hold a job. Because Jesus said, don't labor for the food that perishes.

And yet Jesus made it very clear. His disciples, many of them labored. He himself labored in a job before he went in the ministry.

And many people are commanded in Scripture to work or else they can't eat. So what's he mean? Don't labor for the food that perishes, but labor for the food that endures to everlasting life. What he's saying is they already are laboring for the food that perishes.

They do that every day. But what they're neglecting is the more important thing. His statement essentially means don't only labor for the food that perishes.

You already do that, but that's all you do. Also, you need to labor for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, the bread of life. So this is a form of a hyperbole where something is stated as if absolute, but it's really more properly a limited negative.

You can often recognize it by its typical form. Not this, but that. But if you took the not this part absolutely literally, it would be ridiculous or contradictory to something else in the Scripture.

So you have to recognize in those cases this is a hyperbole. He means not only this, but also that. And that is not that's a recognizable figure of speech.

Another way that Jesus made his teachings graphic was with humor. Now, I don't believe Jesus went around telling jokes. Some modern preachers think humor is a tremendous device for preaching.

In fact, there's one school of thought, you know, that of the after-dinner speaker turned pastor who feels like he needs to warm up his audience with a few jokes. I suffered under a pastor like that for some years when we were abandoned. The reason I suffered under that pastor is because there were so many good people in the church that were my friends.

There wasn't a better pastor in town, so I suffered under this one instead of suffering under one of the other ones. But this gentleman seemed to think that, you know, the wise way, the way to a man's heart is through his funny bone or something. You know, because he he'd open every sermon with two or three jokes, which were so if there was any connection between the jokes and the subject of his sermon, it was so esoteric that no one in the audience could possibly have gotten it.

And he never made the connection in his preaching. He apparently just thought jokes for the sake of jokes is a good way to open your sermon. Get people on your side, get them laughing.

Everyone loves a clown. And he certainly was a clown and more of a clown than a preacher. But it was kind of disgusting in a way.

I mean, I don't mind somebody who can put a humorous spin on something that's true. I've heard many a preacher that keep me laughing. But they're not laughing.

They're not. I'm not laughing because they're telling jokes. I'm laughing because what they said just hits you.

So, you know, I think it'd be humorous for several reasons. One is because it's so true. Isn't that right? I mean, some things just make it up because someone says it's just so true.

And you've never heard anyone say it quite so bluntly before or say it quite or make that observation. And you've never thought of it quite that way. But when you think that is so true.

I just spent the evening last night at a birthday party for my daughter with a couple of families and one of the men, one of the fathers is a good friend of mine. Every time I'm around him, I'm just I'm just laughing most the whole time when he's talking and he's not telling jokes. He's just he's just making observations about life and about the church and about things like that.

And I don't even know that he I sometimes wonder, does he know why I'm laughing? Even I don't even know if he knows he's funny. I tell him, I hope you don't think I'm, you know, I'm making fun of you. I just I just I'm just tickled by the way that you observe these things, you know.

And a lot of times the thing strikes you funny just because it is so plainly true. And it's put in such a rather unexpected way. There was one preacher I used to listen to years ago who is possibly the most profound preacher, spiritually speaking, in terms of the spiritual truth he taught that I've ever listened to on a regular basis.

I never knew him, but I listened to tapes of his for years. But he was hilarious, though he didn't crack jokes. He just had a winsome, you know, kind of humorous personality.

My father-in-law is like that. My father-in-law never tells jokes, but I'm laughing the whole time he's around because he's just he's witty. You know, he's witty.

And this preacher, you've probably heard this joke by now. I mean, it has become a joke when repeated by other people. But he just said off the top of his head as an

observation.

And it always made me laugh when I heard it. He was talking about Romans 12, one where it says to present your bodies as a living sacrifice. You may have heard this repeated because it's been often repeated since he made it up.

But he said, you know, there's a problem that exists with living sacrifices. In the Bible, in the Old Testament, they always offered, of course, animals that were killed and dead. But a living sacrifice has the disadvantage of always being able to crawl off of the altar.

And that has been repeated so many times, it's not funny anymore. You know, it's too common. But when this guy said it, just his personality and the way he observed it, and it seemed to be right off the top of his head, it just it always struck me funny.

And his audience were always laughing, too. Some people, of course, he has an accent, too. And some people laugh easier at a man with an accent than one without.

But the point is, humor is not always bad. It's not even always unintentional when it's good. It can be intentional, but.

But jokes for the sake of jokes, you don't find Jesus doing. I'm sure Paul never would do that. And I think that Jesus just often had a humorous way of putting something.

But the other way that things are made funny, I think, besides the fact that they're really true, some things are made funny by the incongruity of it, by painting an absurd or ludicrous picture. The humor that is found in Jesus teachings has eluded most of us because we have become so familiar with his teachings that we just take them in stone soberness. But if you would read them for the first time to a child or if you're there when his disciples first heard them, it's hard to imagine that they wouldn't laugh when Jesus talked about a person having a beam sticking out of his eye, trying to remove a speck from another person's eye.

The picture is a ludicrous picture. And you can hardly avoid laughing if you were trying to picture that situation for the first time. You know, you're trying to get a speck out of your brother's eye.

You've got a beam in your own eye. Well, of course, that's impossible even to picture. It's so comical.

When he talked about it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, although Jesus was not trying to make a funny point. Yet if someone would try to picture the thing he described, it would be so absurd, so incongruous as to elicit chuckling from his audience, I'm sure. When he talked about people who strain out a net and swallow a camel, similarly, those camel jokes came readily to his mind, I guess.

When he talked about people who clean the outside of the cup, but it's full of sewage, and they drink the cup, but it's clean on the outside, and they ignore the fact that they're drinking sewage from it or swill, that is a humorous picture. Now, it may be that very few people laughed when they heard this, because he often made these points in the most serious of circumstances, when he was rebuking somebody or whatever, or talking about how hard it was for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. But taken by themselves, these are humorous pictures.

Now, again, I don't think that Jesus told jokes for the sake of getting a reputation of being amusing or entertaining, but he did use images that came to his mind, which were funny, really. I mean, they were funny. It may be that the circumstances of the time you're speaking it may have sobered the audience to the point that they didn't outright laugh.

But these are incongruous, funny pictures that he brings up. He also used sarcasm on occasion, and sarcasm is a form of humor also. I mentioned this earlier, the Pharisees came to him when he was in Piraeus and said, Herod wants to kill you, and they were trying to imply that he should go to Jerusalem where he'd be safe, where Herod had no jurisdiction.

And Jesus knew their craftiness, knew that they just wanted him to go to Jerusalem so that they could get him, because they couldn't get him while he was in Herod's jurisdiction. And he said to them, don't worry, I'll be coming into Judea after a few days. He said, it can't be that a prophet would perish outside of Jerusalem.

Now, of course, that's not a literally true statement. There are many prophets who perished outside Jerusalem. But his comment is an overstatement, it's a hyperbole, but it's a sarcastic remark.

He's saying, God forbid that you, the Jews, would allow anyone who sent you to die by any hands other than your own. I mean, essentially, it's what he's saying. And that is the use of sarcasm, which is a form of humor also.

Now, of course, the most well-known graphic device that Jesus used in illustrating his sermons was the parable. A parable is different than, let's say, an allegory. And it's different than a fable.

A fable is a story that is not true to life. Aesop's fables are good examples of a fable where animals talk. And think and do things like people do.

A fable is a fantastic story. I mean, the facts in the story are unrealistic. They're fantasies.

There is an example of a fable in the Bible. Back in the book of Judges in chapter 9, a man tells a fable, a story about trees seeking a king for themselves and approaching

these different trees and bushes to see if they'll be their king. That is a fable.

It's not a parable because trees don't really talk. Trees don't communicate. That's a that's not a true to life story.

Parables are true to life. A parable is a true to life story. That makes a spiritual point.

So he talks about a sower sowing seeds and the seeds grow. He talks about a woman putting meal in a in a lump of dough and the dough rises. He talks about a man dragging a net into shore full of fishes and sorting out the fishes afterwards.

I mean, he talks about someone making a marriage, a king making a marriage for his son and sending out invitations and being offended when some people don't accept his invitation. All of his parables are stories that could be true. Of course, they're not true stories.

They're not actual true stories. The prodigal son, the good Samaritan, these famous parables of Jesus are not talking about actual cases. There might be thousands of cases just like them that have occurred in actual history.

But that's not his point. He's not talking about a particular case. He's making a story that is very much in all respects, a good fiction story of not science fiction, not fantasy.

It's a story that would be very true to life, could really happen. But making a spiritual lesson from it. That's what a parable is.

Now, parables differ from allegories in this respect. An allegory is like Pilgrim's Progress. You know, Christian falls into the slough of despond.

He goes to the house of the interpreter. You know, he meets people whose names tell us what they represent. And every action, every place he goes, every every place he spends the night, every person he meets, the name of that place and that person, it's clear that stands for something.

Each item in the story represents something. That's an allegory. That's not true in a parable.

Generally, a parable may have a great deal of storyline that doesn't that doesn't correspond to anything exactly. In what is in the point he's getting across, the story is just there to make a single point. There may be many details in the story that don't represent anything in particular.

They're just part of making it a story. You can't have a story without some kind of props, without some kind of storyline. And the story may have a single meaning.

Somebody asked me on the radio, I think yesterday, about the the parable of the unjust

steward. It was Monday, I guess, that I was asked this. And that's in Luke 16, where a steward has cheated his master.

His master has heard of it and says, listen, drop your books. I'm going to audit your books and then you're going to be fired. And the guy has a couple of days, perhaps before he's fired.

And so he goes out and uses the remaining days or moments of his authority to edit or to deal with these accounts. And he and he makes friends with his with his master's creditors. I should say debtors.

The master is the creditor. He makes friends with the debtors of his master. He lowers their their debt and lets them pay it off at a discount.

Now, this he does legally. He's still a steward. He hasn't been fired yet.

He's going to be, but he hasn't yet. So he's got the authority to do this kind of thing. He has not damaged his master too much because the discounts he gave were not deep discounts in most cases.

And he didn't do that with all his with all of his debtors. So the master still, you know, he's going to survive this. But the slave or the steward has gotten some new friends who owe him something.

And now when he loses his job, he'll have people who owe him a favor. Maybe they'll give him a job or take him into their home. Now, that's the parable.

What's the lesson? Well, that that parable bothers people a lot. We say, well, it seems like the guy who's firing the steward must be God. I mean, in that parable, the steward must be somebody, maybe the Christian, maybe the non-Christian.

Who's the steward represent? And then he goes out and he and he and he does this seemingly dishonest thing. People often mistakenly think that's a dishonest deed he did. He didn't do a dishonest deed.

He just did a clever deed, a shrewd deed. His master even commended him for his shrewdness in it. But the point is, we think, well, does that mean we're supposed to rip God off? Or how's this parable supposed to work? Well, the parable is just a story.

Neither man represents anyone in particular in real life, doesn't represent God, doesn't represent anyone else. The story is illustrating a point. The point is this man foreseeing that his opportunities for employment were coming to a quick end and that he would need some long term security, used what little time he had to secure a long term, better situation for himself.

What is the lesson? The lesson is life is short. And whatever little time we have, we need

to use to secure for ourselves long term, that is eternal security for ourselves. We're not just going to go to heaven automatically.

We need to use the opportunities we have. We have to be wise like that guy was. He realized he was going to be fired.

Our lives are going to be over someday. We won't have any more chances to make provision for the long term beyond the grave. This man was wise enough to see that there was a need coming up and to use the opportunity he had.

And so should we. Now, it doesn't mean that that man represents you or me or that the king represents or the rich man who hired him represents anything. The story is just a story that makes an individual point.

It's not an allegory. And that's true of many of the parables. I think it can be a mistake to try to find some kind of allegorical meaning to each of the parables.

The Alexandrian school in the second or in the third or fourth centuries of the Christian school there in Alexandria typically gave allegorical meanings to everything in Scripture. And they try to find, you know, in the in the parable of the Good Samaritan. OK, the Samaritan represented someone, maybe Jesus.

I've heard people say, well, this represents Jesus and the man who fell among thieves. That is, he represents the sinner who's been beaten up by the devil. And the bad guys who represent the devil and the Levite and the priests who come by represent the law and Judaism, which was not able to help the sinner who's been beat up by the devil.

And then comes a Samaritan who represents Jesus. He pours oil and wine into his wounds, which represents the blood of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, the oil. And then he takes him to the inn and he and he pays two days fee for him and says, I'll come back and pay the rest.

And that two days fee would be like representing two days a day to the Lord's a thousand years. So two thousand years, Jesus is going to be gone. He's going to come back after that.

I mean, I've heard this whole allegorical thing made from the parable. The parable is not intended to be taken that way. The thieves don't represent the devil.

The priesthood I don't represent Judaism. The Good Samaritan doesn't represent Jesus. As a matter of fact, the Good Samaritan represents anyone represents every man how he should act toward his neighbor.

The story is given to show what it means to love your neighbors yourself. And what he's saying is here is a man who was not even of the same race as the man in need, but he

was a fellow human being. And because of his compassion, he helped him in a practical way.

The story about the beating up and the people who passed him and the innkeeper and all that stuff, that's all just stage props. That's just to make a point. The point is, if you're a Samaritan and he's a Jew, help him anyway.

He's still your brother. Or if you're anything else and he's anything else. Don't let any of these kind of barriers prevent you from loving your neighbors yourself.

That's the meaning of the story. That's what it specifically says. That's what Jesus intended to illustrate.

But to give an allegorical approach tries to make meaning out of everything in it. And that just gets tangled up. I mean, some stories like the one I just told, Good Samaritan, that one kind of works out in an impressive way to make it an allegory.

But it isn't an allegory. All of those, you know, identifications, this means this, this means this, this means this from a parable, are wrongheaded. And sometimes they work out nicely.

Other times they get you in big trouble. Like the story of the unjust judge and the woman who got what she wanted by pestering him. And Jesus makes a lesson on prayer about that.

Well, does that mean that God is really an unjust judge? He doesn't really care about us. So just give us what we want because we pester him and just get us off his back. Well, that's not the point Jesus is making.

He's just saying, here's here's a case of a woman in need and she gets what she wants because she doesn't give up. She keeps requesting in the circumstance of the story. The reason it takes so long is because the judge is not sympathetic toward her.

But that's not the case with God. The point he's making is we need to continue to pray until we get what we want or what we're asking for. And so the parables of Jesus are not allegories and they are not fables.

They are true to life stories which are there to illustrate a single point. Usually it's very unusual to find more than one point made in a parable. Now, parables are effective teaching devices because they exploit people's love for stories.

Everyone loves to hear stories. There's something of childhood in all of us, I guess. Children love stories and when we grow up we still love stories.

Good sermons usually have some stories in them because people like stories. And yet these are stories with a purpose. These are not just stories to entertain or to hold the

attention.

These are stories to illustrate the spiritual lesson. A story, of course, draws a mental picture. You much more readily remember things that you have a mental picture of than things you can't have a mental picture of.

If I tried to talk to you about some esoteric, non-physical, philosophical concept that you could not attach any kind of mental picture, just the words are ringing around in your head, you're going to have a much harder time remembering that than if I could paint a picture for you. There's a book called *The Memory Book* put out by a guy named Jerry Lucas. I think he was a basketball player but he turned memory book writer.

And another guy. It's sold many, many copies. It's been around since the early 70s.

And I read part of it once when I was younger and I thought it didn't work for me because my mind just didn't work the way your mind had to work to do it. But he basically said to memorize, he says you can memorize anything you want to. All you have to do is form a ridiculous picture in your mind that somehow associates with the thing you're trying to remember.

You're trying to remember someone's name. Well, when you hear what their name is, try to think of the sound of their name and how that sounds like maybe some other words which if you combine those words in a mental picture of some kind of ridiculous thing, you know, an elephant on a tightrope or something, something that's, you know, ludicrous, then it will stick in your mind. You'll never forget it because he's and he says the more ridiculous the mental picture, the better.

Because things are the most out of the ordinary, the things that stick in your mind more. I mean, things that are ordinary, you see them, you know, registers. And then you go on and think about something else, something that's bizarre.

You know, you remember that for a long time. And, of course, the parables were not in any sense bizarre, but they do have the advantage of presenting an image to the mind. And that helps you can picture the story happening.

And once you in your mind picture these events taking place as they're being described in story form, you're not as likely to forget the lesson. Of course, parables also exploit a little bit the element of mystery because they don't actually tell what their meaning is. They mean something.

But Jesus never told what the parables mean, except to his disciples. It says in Mark four thirty four that without a parable, he never spoke to the multitudes, but he expounded all things privately to his disciples when they were alone. So the crowds would hear the parables and they'd realize they'd heard a story that must mean something, because otherwise it's just not even worth telling.

What's the what's the what's the value telling a story about a farmer who planted seeds and the birds got some of them. Some of them got withered by the sun and some produced a crop and destroyed. What's the point? What's the punchline? You know, I mean, you just told the story of a farmer that doesn't even have a plot.

What's the point of telling it? Well, see, that raises the question. There must be more here than meets the eye. There must be something.

This is illusory. I don't know what it is. And it raises my curiosity.

And of course, this was a means by which I think Jesus induced people to come to him for more tasks. You know, what does this parable mean? Declare this parable to us, that people who were I think this was Jesus way of screening people for discipleship. Great multitudes followed him for a variety of motives and variety of reasons.

And he would give out this these bits of mysterious little stories about the kingdom of heaven. And people say, well, how does that relate to the kingdom? I don't get it. But if they if they were really hungry for the kingdom of God, they wouldn't just let it drop.

They'd come to him and say, how I want to know more about this. Explain this to me. And then they would become his disciples.

The people who thought, I don't understand it, but who cares? I've got work to do. You know, got something boiling at home on the stove. Got to go back to that.

And they didn't have any hunger to know. Those are the people Jesus didn't want to have following him. He wanted people who already had a hunger.

And this was his way of, I think, getting their attention and attracting them to him. Jesus also made his teaching graphic by use of the choice aphorism. Now, an aphorism is a terse or a brief saying that embodies a general truth, a big truth put into a few words.

One of the classic aphorisms of Jesus is what we call the golden rule. As you would that men would do to you, do to them likewise. All of ethics, all of the complex subject of ethics is all summarized in this short sentence.

What do you want people to do to you? Do that to them. That's an aphorism in trying to decide which things of Jesus are and which things are not authentic. The Jesus seminar assumed that Jesus was a teacher who used aphorisms almost exclusively.

And so they tended to rule out in their judgment of validity any statement of Jesus that was longish. Anything that was not terse and aphorismic. But of course, that's not fair.

Jesus was quite a versatile teacher and could teach many different ways. But he is known to have been able to put a huge idea into a few choice words. And that would be a very good example of it.

A brief summary of a great truth condensed into a sentence. He also used and teachers must, especially if they're not writing down what they say, repetition. If you don't repeat yourself, you won't be remembered.

I don't remember what the statistics are, but I'm sure everyone's read them before. That, you know, if you if you hear something, if you listen to this lecture and you hear it one time and that's it, you'll remember you'll forget about 95 percent of it or something like that. You might retain about 5 percent.

But if you heard the same lecture again on tape the second time, you'd remember incrementally a considerable larger percentage. And if you hear it three times or four times, you know, the percentage goes up and up and up. There have been studies done about this.

It's clear that hearing something again and again and again cements it in the memory. That's obvious enough, I think, just from common sense. And so we have certain sayings that Jesus said over and over.

You'll find them repeated in the in the Gospels more and more. Sometimes he'll make the same point with more than one parable. The point of persistence in prayer is made by telling the parable of the unjust judge, as well as telling the story of the man at night who needed help from his neighbor and kept knocking on the door to make the point that the kingdom of God starts out small and grows big.

He gives two parables, one of a mustard seed growing into a great tree and one of leaven in a lump spreading out. Jesus sometimes would say the same thing twice, two different ways or sometimes the same way. In Matthew 12, he says, I assume Matthew 19, he says, I tell you how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

Again, I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the avenue than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. He says the same thing twice. To say it twice is to make sure that the point is retained.

Every good teacher uses repetition. Sometimes repetition will take the form of symmetry in a set of sayings like like the Beatitudes. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the pure in heart and so forth. And blessed are the meek and blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Those those Beatitudes, eight of them in a row, have similar form.

There's a symmetry to them. It's not repeating the same idea, but the repetition of the paradigm of the form is that which makes them memorable or makes, you know, gets attention to the individual details of each one. It's also the case that poetry is generally easier to remember than prose.

And some have claimed that if you translate Jesus teachings back into the original Aramaic language that he spoke, it's possible to postulate that he actually spoke in poetry, actually was in many cases with rhyme and so forth. Now, this is a little speculative because when you translate back into Aramaic, there's not just one way that you can put things in the language. And some scholars have done some work on this and have affirmed that you can show that Jesus sayings may well have been poetic in their original form.

But even if this isn't the case in terms of rhyming and so forth in the Aramaic, yet we do know that the main form of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. And Jesus from time to time would use examples of parallelism. He'd say, do not give.

What is holy to dogs and do not cast your pearls before swine. Well, this is essentially like this kind of parallelism you find in the Psalms and the Proverbs. It's Hebrew poetry.

It's saying the same thing two ways in rapid succession. What he would say, what to what shall we like in the kingdom of heaven and what parable shall we use to illustrate it? I mean, to say that is to repeat himself in a poetic form. To what degree Jesus used poetry, we don't know because we don't have his actual words in Aramaic and we can't be sure.

But it's possible that Jesus even made his teaching more memorable by making it poetic. There are some evidences of that. We can't be sure.

Of course, the main way that Jesus made his teaching graphic is by example. He actually made his principles visible by doing it in front of their eyes. We have the example, of course, in John 13, 15, where Jesus put on a towel, went around, washed his disciples feet.

And and, you know, that was a lesson he was teaching them. And he said in John 13, 15, I have given you an example that you should do as I have done. And he told them about being the chief means being the servant.

Well, he said it in words, but he also said it in actions. His whole life, in fact, is an example of his teaching, because he's probably the first man who ever lived who actually practiced everything he preached. And in fact, we can often if we're trying to figure out the meaning of something he taught, we can often decide what it meant by looking at what he did in a similar situation that he was teaching about.

And his example was perhaps the most graphic aspect of his teaching. Now, I want to say this. I'm running out of time.

But I want to make the points that are here on the outline about how Jesus argued his points. His his his teaching was not only well put, it was well argued. It not only use graphic teaching device, but also graphic rhetorical forms, rhetorical meaning to make a

point against an opponent.

One rhetorical device is the dialogue method where you ask a question to elicit thought. For example, when he said to his opponents, what do you think of Christ? Whose son is he? Now, he already knew what he wanted to teach them, but he asked them a question first to get them thinking about it, to get them to come up with some kind of an answer. And then he could critique their answer and show what was wrong with it.

In fact, as a child, he did this or as a 12 year old in Luke 2, 46. It says that when Mary Joseph found Jesus in the temple, he was talking to the wise men there and the teachers. And do you remember what it says? It says.

In Luke 2. And verse 46 is. So it was after three days they found him in the temple sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were astonished at his understanding and his answers.

Now, it says he he listened to them and he asked them questions and they were astonished at his answers. Obviously, if he asked them questions, they must have given answers or else been at a loss to give an answer. And then he gave an answer.

And this is the dialogue method of teaching of arguing a point. Get someone thinking, ask them a hard question on the subject that you want to teach about. Get them to try to answer it and then critique their answer.

Jesus did that when he said, what do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he? Or when he asked Peter, you know, of whom do the kings of the world exact tribute from their own children or from foreigners? He got Peter thinking about that. Peter gave an answer and Jesus then made a lesson from it. That's dialogue method.

Ask a question of your of the person you're dealing with. Get their answer and then respond to their answer. Jesus sometimes would put his listeners into what we call a logical dilemma when his critics didn't want him to heal on the Sabbath.

On one occasion, Mark, Chapter three, he said to them, well, what is lawful to do on the Sabbath? Is it lawful to do good or to do evil on the Sabbath? He only gave him two choices. The answer is either it's lawful to do good on the Sabbath or it's lawful to do evil on the Sabbath. Obviously, they couldn't say it's lawful to do evil on the Sabbath.

But on the other hand, if they said it's lawful to do good on the Sabbath, then he'd obviously say, oh, OK, thank you. I'm going to do that then. Heal the man.

And they couldn't criticize him because they just told him it's lawful. So they told him nothing. They were silent.

They wouldn't answer because they were on the horns of a dilemma. This is a good way

to show your opponents to be wrong. Show them that it's either this or it's that.

And either one defeats your argument. You can't answer. You know, you're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't.

Really. Jesus did that when they came to him and said, by what authority do you do these things? He says, well, let me ask you a question. The baptism of John, was it from men or from heaven? Well, they went into a huddle and said, what should we say? If we say it's from men, the people will be angry at us because they think he's a prophet.

If we say it's from heaven, Jesus will just say, well, why didn't you answer? Why didn't you listen to him? So they came back and said, we won't answer you that. We can't answer that. He said, well, then I won't answer you either.

He put them on the horns of a question where either answer damns them, damns their argument. Where you basically you prove your point by showing that either alternative supports what you've got to say and defeat your opponent. He also used *reductio ad absurdum*, a Latin term for reducing your enemy's argument, your opponent's argument to the point of foolishness, showing that it's actually absurd.

When they said that he's casting out demons by Beelzebub, he said, well, then a house divided against itself can't stand. If Satan's casting out Satan, then his kingdom's collapsing. And he's basically saying what you're suggesting is absolutely absurd.

This is the essential thought behind what you're saying. And it's clearly absurd to take your opponent's argument to its logical conclusion and show the absurdity of it is one way of arguing against your opponent's argument. Jesus did that.

The *ad hominem* argument. There's different kinds of *ad hominem*. Some of them you've got the abuse of *ad hominem* where you just kind of rail on your opponent.

But there's also the *ad hominem* where you appeal to a person's own prejudices and special interests instead of their intellect. It's basically an argument on the basis of your own premises. If you allow that David can go and eat the showbread, then it must follow that my disciples can eat on the Sabbath like this, too.

And this kind of argument was something Jesus used. Of course, he is the a *fiority* argument also, which means if this, then how much more? If you earthly fathers give good gifts to children, how much more shall your heavenly father? If your father feeds the birds, how much more will he take care of you? This is another way of rhetorically argued point. If this is true, which everyone acknowledges, then how much more would this be true? That's a *fiority* or 40 or excuse me.

That's a hard thing for me to pronounce. It's Latin. Anyway, of course, Jesus teachings were also finally practical.

GK Chesterton said the teaching of Jesus has not been tried and found wanting. It's only been found difficult to not try. Jesus teachings are practical.

They can be lived, but only in the power of the same spirit that Jesus taught in and lived in the Holy Spirit. But when Jesus teachings are followed, they are found to be not only practical, but they are found to be the way that we were designed to live. And therefore, the teachings of Jesus should be studied with great interest and with great attention.

I hope these introductory remarks will make it easier for us to understand his teaching as we study it. We cannot go any further today in this lesson. But these are some things for you to sort out as you study the life and teachings of Jesus.

Hopefully it will give you some insight into his teachings.