

Things that Jesus said

**Parables of the Kingdom
and Eternal Life**

Doug Rowston

GRACE & PEACE BOOKS 

Rowston, Doug
THINGS THAT JESUS SAID
Parables of the Kingdom & Eternal Life

Published by
Grace & Peace Books
4A Wurilba Ave Hawthorn SA 5062 Australia
djrowston@gmail.com

© Douglas James Rowston 2016

This work is copyright. Other than for the purposes and subject to the conditions prescribed under the Copyright Act, no part of it may in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, microcopying, photocopying, recording or otherwise) be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted without prior written permission from the publisher.

First published 2016 by Morning Star Publishing
This edition published in 2022

ISBN 978-0-6453288-5-1

This book is dedicated to Laurie

What is it like to be a citizen of the Kingdom of God? What is likely to happen on a given day? How are citizens expected to behave? How is the Kingdom of God different from other realms on our planet—past or present? And where do we find this kingdom in the context of our present world of complex and competing kingdoms?

I suggest you read Doug Rowston's new book, *Things that Jesus said*. Rowston analyses the parables of Jesus in the first three Gospels focusing on the key kingdom symbol of each parable, the background of that symbol and how that symbol may be relevant even today. For example, the parable of the labourers in the vineyard is about 'the grace of God's kingdom' and 'reveals the good news of Jesus in a nutshell'. Other parables will reveal that forgiveness is a way of life in the kingdom or that the kingdom is something really valuable, a hidden treasure to be discovered.

In Part B of his book, Rowston explores parables in John's Gospel which he describes as parables of eternal life. Many scholars have not identified these passages as parables, but Rowston demonstrates the connection with the parables in the first three gospels. In sum: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke tell Jesus' parables about God's kingdom. John's Gospel tells parables of Jesus, 'who is the king of God's kingdom and brings God's kind of life' (p. 94).

For example, The Parable of the Night Breeze is embodied in the 'wind blowing where it chooses' (John 3.8) and describes the coming of the life of God's new age. Rowston interprets the image of a woman in labour and in childbirth (John 16.21) as a parable relating to the crisis of the life of God's new age. The interpretation of these passages from John—and eleven more—as embodying parables is a rich, original and refreshing reading of the colourful imagery in the words of Jesus in John.

Rowston's readings of the explicit and implicit parables of the Gospel is a profound and readable analysis, appropriate for both meditation and serious group study.

Dr. Norman Habel *Professorial Fellow Flinders University,
Adelaide, South Australia*

An illuminating and distinctive introduction not only to the parables of Jesus in all four Gospels but to the gospel itself. Grounded in excellent scholarship and engagingly written, *Things that Jesus said* deserves wide usage in church and seeker study groups.

Dr. E. Glenn Hinson *Professor Emeritus of Spirituality and John Loftis Professor of Church History Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Virginia*

Doug Rowston has given us a “pearl of great price” – a brief but comprehensive book on the parables of Jesus filled with not so hidden treasures: the texts of the various forms of the parables for easy reference, a brief exposition of each parable, fresh insights into their message and relevance today, a prayer related to each one, and questions for discussion. Best of all he does not neglect the parables in the Gospel of John, as have most other books on the parables. It is an ideal book for Bible study groups.

Dr. R. Alan Culpepper *Dean Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of New Testament McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University, Atlanta, Georgia*

As an introduction to Jesus’ parables, the book *Things that Jesus said* is both scholarly and practical. It is also quite clear that the author, Dr. Doug Rowston, writes from a background of being a serious student/scholar ... and a competent and enthusiastic preacher, teacher and lecturer. (He tells us that he also enjoys sharing the stories of the parables with his grandchildren!) As well as some excellent quotations from great scholars, the book contains many relevant anecdotes and reflections. To quote the American writer Frederick Buechner, “a parable is a small story with a large point.” Doug Rowston takes those small stories, and helps his readers discover and explore the large point Jesus was making.

Rev. Barrie Hibbert *Former Pastor of Flinders Street Baptist Church, Adelaide and Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, London*

The parables of Jesus we receive through the gospel traditions have an enduring enigmatic quality that defy simple explanations. They provoke many questions and reflections on the part of the hearer, while providing windows into the kingdom of God. An understanding of the range of parabolic forms, together with significant background information deepens our engagement with the teachings of Jesus. Doug Rowston has provided a very accessible and well-informed “tour guide” to the parables of Jesus, striking a helpful balance in which commentary does not obscure the richness of the parables themselves. Highly recommended!

Bishop Tim Harris *Research Fellow, St Barnabas College, Adelaide, South Australia*

In *Things that Jesus said: Parables of the Kingdom and Eternal Life* Doug Rowston takes his readers on a serious and challenging look at the gamut of stories that Jesus told as recorded in the New Testament. He is meticulous in his facilitation of our understanding of what these parables meant in Jesus’s own setting, and for how the early church used them. He ranges from the Synoptic versions of the story of the Sower to the Johannine story of the woman in childbirth.

From that foundation Doug challenges his readers to make the connection to themselves as followers of that same Jesus but within the complexities of modern life. Each story ends with a corporate prayer and a short series of questions well worth individual reflection but even better for group discussion.

This volume is a worthy successor to earlier publications such as *Pray and Sing: Prayers and Songs in the New Testament* and *Promises and Blessings in the Book of Revelation*. It will be a helpful source for those interested in their own growth of understanding commitment to following Jesus. It is also a tool for helping others to grow.

Dr. Rosalind Gooden *Former ABMS Missionary in Pakistan/Bangladesh and former Director of Personnel and Training at Moore Potter House.*

Acknowledgements

The front cover image *Head of Christ* was painted by Rembrandt van Rijn in 1648.

The ink sketches of the sower and the shepherd were drawn by Craig Bowyer during the author's time as teacher at Prince Alfred College in Adelaide. They are reproduced with his permission.

Bible quotations are from The New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U S A. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

CONTENTS

Introduction	11
Part A: Synoptic Parables	13
Parables of the Kingdom in the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark and Luke	14
1 The Sower	18
2 The Mustard Seed	27
3 The Hidden Treasure and the Costly Pearl	32
4 The Unforgiving Servant	37
5 The Labourers in the Vineyard	43
6 The Talents and the Pounds	49
7 The Sheep and the Goats	56
8 The Seed Growing Secretly	62
9 The Good Samaritan	68
10 The Rich Fool	75
11 The Prodigal Son	81
12 The Rich Man and Lazarus	89
13 The Pharisee and the Tax Collector	95

Part B: Johannine Parables	101
Parables of Eternal Life in the Gospel according to John	102
1 The Night Breeze	105
2 The Bridegroom and the Best Man	110
3 The Ripe Fields	115
4 The Apprentice Son	121
5 The Slave and the Son	127
6 The Shepherd and the Stranger	132
7 The Traveller in the Dark	138
8 The Grain of Wheat	143
9 The Walker at Sunset	148
10 The Bathtub and the Basin	153
11 The Father's House	158
12 The True Vine	163
13 The Woman in Childbirth	168
Conclusion	173
Select Bibliography	175

INTRODUCTION

Things that Jesus said is written against the background of a lifetime's interest in the stories of Jesus. At Sunday School and in church services I learnt what Jesus did and said according to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. I could identify with the words of Paul, When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child (1 Corinthians 13:11a). I basically heard and read the Gospels without analysing the content. At theological college and then in doctoral studies, things changed, as I asked questions and found answers by utilising the tools of biblical research. In other words, in the words of Paul, when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways (1 Corinthians 13:11b). All of this was the usual stage of human development which goes from concrete to abstract thinking.

Now while I read the stories of Jesus with grandchildren, I realise that they are in the stage of thinking concretely of the content of these stories. In time they will move to the process of thinking abstractly about the meaning of the stories. Obviously, this book about the parables of Jesus is not written for children. If one requires Bible stories written for young children, I recommend the likes of The Lost Sheep Series written by my friend Andrew McDonough. My grandchildren love his version of the parable of the good Samaritan! However, in this book for adults, we ask questions and find answers about parables of Jesus.

The parables of Jesus include figurative sayings, similitudes, and story-parables. *Things that Jesus said* treats parables of Jesus in all four Gospels. Usually, most scholars think of

parables restricted to the first three Gospels, the Synoptic Gospels. The first half of this book examines Synoptic parables about the coming and growth, grace and mercy, citizens and crisis of the kingdom of God. Unusually, a few scholars identify parables in the Fourth Gospel. This book is in the unusual category. In the second half there is an analysis of Johannine parables about the coming, enduring love, sharers and crisis of the life of the age that comes in Jesus.

Things that Jesus said is indebted to my experience as a theological lecturer at Burleigh College, a religious education teacher at Prince Alfred College, a pastor at Richmond Baptist Church, and an adjunct lecturer at St Barnabas College (Charles Sturt University). I have found inspiration for my approach from, among others, C.H. Dodd, Joachim Jeremias, A.M. Hunter, Peter Rhea Jones, Arland Hultgren, William Hull, Alan Culpepper, and Ben Witherington. I thank my wife Rosalie for her patience and love during the writing of this book. I am also extremely grateful to my brother Laurie for his meticulous checking of the completed draft of this work. I trust that my readers come to appreciate the Synoptic and Johannine parables as provocative, dynamic and creative.

Doug Rowston