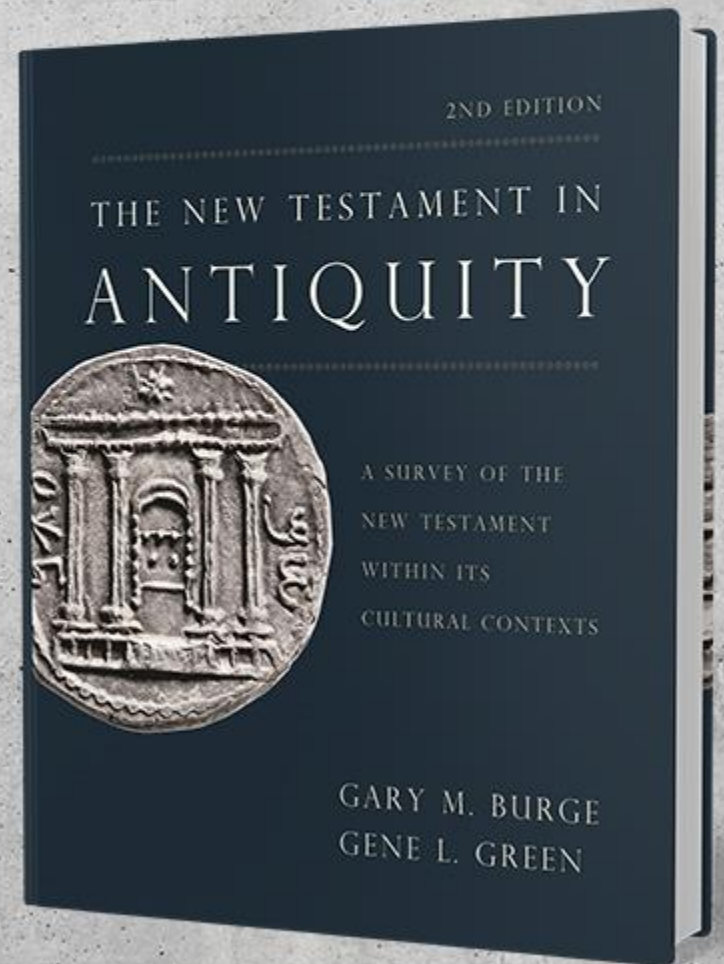


# Chapter 7

## The Teachings of Jesus



# JESUS'S AUTHORITY

- Jesus is known in the gospels as a great teacher.
- Jesus is often called *rabbi* and many are amazed at what he says (Mt 7:28–29).
- The evangelists often remark how he was one who spoke with “authority” (Heb. *reshuth*).
  - Teaching authority was conveyed through the rite of ordination called Semikah when a rabbi places his hands on his disciple.
  - The chain of *reshuth* is unbroken and traced back to Moses. Hadrian tried to defeat Judaism by forbidding Semikah.
- However, Jesus claimed an authority coming not from human hands but directly from God.

# JESUS'S TEACHING STYLE

- Overstatement and exaggeration
  - “If your hand causes to sin, cut it off ...” (Mk 9:43–47)
- Puns and wordplays
  - He called Peter (*Petros*) the rock (*petra*) on which the church would be built (Mt 16:18, *Kephas* in Aramaic cf. Jn 1:42; 1 Cor 3:22).
- Similes and metaphors
  - Prevalent especially in parables as when faith is like a mustard seed (Lk 17:6); the disciples are the salt of the earth and light of the world (Mt 5:13–16); Pharisees are whitewashed tombs (23:27)

- Proverbs and paradoxes

- “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Mt 6:21).
- “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it” (Lk 9:24).

- Parabolic acts

- Rather than merely lecturing about God’s love for the outcast, he ate meals with tax collectors and sinners (Lk 19:1–6).
- He underscored his criticism of Sabbath laws by breaking them (Mk 2:23–27).

- Miracles and exorcisms

- These demonstrated that God’s power was at work at him and his kingdom was entering the world.



# JESUS'S PARABLES

- Jesus's parables parallel the *mashal*, a Hebrew figurative speech.
  - Proverbs, riddles, allegorical stories
- His parables are brief, clear word pictures from everyday life.
  - While they are common images, they have an enigmatic meaning that make a listener wonder; they exclude and invite.
- Literary analysis of the parables is a recent development.
  - Their poetic form (often a simple reversal or *chiasma*) makes them poignant to hear and retain.
  - There is the allegorical element but also the element of *crisis*—in these parables a decision often must be faced.

# THEMES IN JESUS'S TEACHING

## The Kingdom of God

- There is a general sense in which God ruled and sustained the whole cosmos (cf. Genesis and Wisdom Literature).
- There is a specific sense, pronounced by the prophets, claiming God's kingdom would fully manifest.
  - Israel's enemies would be vanquished (Isa 34:12).
  - The exiles would come back home (Isa 52:7–12).
  - Jerusalem's everlasting kingdom would be established (Zech 14:9–17).

- This eschatological (“final” or “climactic”) coming was the subject of apocalyptic literature.
  - *Jubilees, Enoch, Psalms of Solomon*, and the Qumran community
  - Eschatological and messianic expectations ran high during the time of Jesus’s life and ministry.
- Jesus said something dramatic and epochal was happening *in the present*, the kingdom of God was now taking hold of the world.
  - “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Lk 17:20–21).
  - This kingdom is often seen in Jesus’s “parables of growth”: seed scattered on the ground unexpectedly growing (Mk 4:26–29), a small mustard seed becoming a giant bush (4:30–32), yeast that causes the dough to rise (Mt 13:33).

- Jesus teaches that every person must decide whether to belong to the kingdom of God.

- Weeds grow with the wheat and must be sorted out at harvest (Mt 13:24–30).
- Jesus is the sower and everyone must decide whether or not to be soil in which his word may grow (Mt 13:1–9).



- Jesus altered the basic framework of Jewish eschatology.

- Rather than the kingdom arising in a climactic, definitive event, Jesus spoke of an interim state—that of the church—when God’s power would come through the Spirit to transform the present.



## Discipleship in the Kingdom

- Jesus formed disciples around him to obey him and his words.
  - He did not *merely* call them to recall Jewish traditions or to revive wisdom and ethics, but to follow *him* (Mt 4:19).
  - People left their trades to follow him (Mk 1:16–20) and understood personal obedience to him to mean everything (Lk 6:46–49).
- Jesus formed this circle of followers from those who lived on the margins of society: pious, sinner, Jew, Samaritan, Gentile.
- Jesus’s unique compassion for humanity was shaped by his unique vision of God as Father of everyone.
  - His model for prayer was an intimate conversation with God, called *Abba* or “Father” (Mt 6:7–15; Lk 11:2–4).

## The Ethics of the Kingdom

- The Great Commandment contains Jesus's kingdom ethic.
  - “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:37–40; cf. Lk 10:27).
- The starting point for ethics is a righteous inner life, more precisely a “renewed heart” (cf. Ps 50), rather than merely performing external actions or rituals.
  - Conversion is essential to living an authentic and ethical life.
- Integrating religious experience into life rethinks life's major questions.
  - Who are my neighbors and what do I owe them? (Lk 10:30–35)
  - How many times should I forgive? (Mt 18:21–22)

## The Cross and the Kingdom

- The expectation of death appeared early in Jesus's ministry.
  - In the parable of the vineyard, Jesus taught how God sent prophets to call forth "fruit" from his people who worked the vineyard, but the vineyard workers killed them and the landowner's son rather than bring forth fruit (Mt 21:33–46; Mk 12:1–12; Lk 20:9–19).



- Jesus’s death was not an accident; he was accomplishing something for the kingdom.
  - “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a *ransom (lytron)* for many” (Mk 10:45; cf. Jn 6:51).
  - John the Baptist referred to him as “the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world” (Jn 1:29).
  - At the meal the evening before he died, he taught his disciples that his body and blood were offered up as a sacrifice.



# Christology

- The resurrection forced the early church to understand Christ's life and teaching through different categories due to his unique relationship with God.
- *Messiah*: Hebrew *mishiach* ("the anointed one") refers to kings and prophets and one who ushers in the eschatological kingdom
- *Son of God*: another Old Testament title for Israel's kings and heavenly beings, but unique due to Jesus's unparalleled intimacy with the Father
- *Son of Man*: Jesus's favorite self-designation (69x in Synoptics, 13x in John), meaning "man" but also an apocalyptic figure