

Pharisee answers Jesus' question in the Two Debtors (45), as does the lawyer in the Good Samaritan (46).

Other second person constructions. Jesus also uses the second person to refer to his audience in cases other than the question or command, apparently to encourage involvement. In the parable of the Tasteless Salt (3), Jesus speaks directly to his disciples: "you are the salt of the earth." In the parables of Weather Forecasting (28), Jesus involves his audience: "When you see. . ." and "When it is evening, you say. . ." The parable of the Fig Tree (36) is similar. Neglecting cases where Jesus merely says, "I say to you," the other examples are (6, 29, 51 and 52).

Surprise

Another device Jesus uses in his parables to attract and hold attention is surprise: a sudden twist in the plot, and improbable feature, an exaggeration. This is an extremely common feature, occurring in about half the parables. The absurdities catalogued previously under audience criticism belong to this category.

Yet not all the surprises involve the foolishness of characters representing sinners. Some of the surprises picture the amazing grace of God: a father runs to welcome his prodigal son (58), receiving him with splendor and feasting;¹⁷ a king forgives an enormous debt (29); a householder invites beggars to fill up his banquet hall (53). Others picture the severity of God's judgment: the king cancels his forgiveness when the forgiven servant shows himself unforgiving (29); the improperly-dressed wedding guest is bound hand and foot to be thrown out (34); the foolish virgins are excluded from the feast merely for being late (39). These surprises of foolishness, grace and severity seem rather improbable or exaggerated in the parable's story. Yet when we move from story to meaning, we find they are realistic.

Still other surprises are intended to shake the audience into reexamining themselves and their view of things. This is probably the purpose of having the Samaritan be the hero in (46) and the publican in (63). The surprise of the Axe at the Roots (1) and the Defendant (5) is to see oneself as lost, rather than the other fellow. One of the surprises of the Dishonest Steward (59) is Jesus' advice to imitate the crook! (presumably in taking appropriate action now in view of our brief tenure as stewards).

The surprise in the parable attracts our attention. It should not be surprising, then, that it is in the surprise itself that the main point of the parable often lies. As Jones says of the landowner's payment scheme in the Vineyard Workers (30): "It is natural to resent the apparently flagrant unfairness of the economic policy described; yet it is precisely here that the meaning of the parable is focused."¹⁸

It is noteworthy that Jesus himself occasionally draws attention to a surprising feature by having one of the parable's characters react to it. This is seen clearly when the all-day vineyard workers object to equal pay for