

the latecomers (30). It also appears in the elder son's objection to celebrating the prodigal's return (58) and in the bystanders' response to the servant with ten pounds being given another (64). Possibly this is one of the functions of the servants who desire to pull up the tares in (18) and of those who report their unforgiving fellow-servant in (29).

This very surprise also fixes the parable in our minds to be remembered long after we would have forgotten a blander story. What sticks in our memory from the Wicked Tenants (32) is: (a) the landowner sending his son after the way his slaves were treated; and (b) the tenants thinking that killing him will get them the property: i.e., the foolishness of sin and the great grace of God. "It is the improbable trait in the parable that drives the meaning home."<sup>19</sup>

## Mystery

Since the time of Jülicher it has been fashionable in critical circles to deny the presence of mystery in the authentic parables of Jesus, despite the explicit teaching of Mark 4:11-12 and its parallels.<sup>20</sup> Instead, Jülicher proposed that Jesus' parables were non-allegorical, made only one point, and were intended to be easily understood. From this it would follow that many of the Gospel parables have been reworked (if not invented altogether) since the time of Jesus; that allegorical interpretations like that supplied with the Sower (17) are not genuine; and that complex parables which make more than one point (such as the King's Wedding Feast [34] and the Prodigal Son [58]) are at best the fusion of two authentic parables.

None of this is necessary. It is clear from the LXX that in Jewish usage *parabole* is the equivalent of *mashal*, and that *mashal* includes the riddle or dark saying (Prov 1:6). The OT parables of the Ewe Lamb (2 Sam 12:14), the Widow's Sons (2 Sam 14:5-7) and the Escaped Prisoner (1 Kgs 20:39-40) depend upon a certain degree of mystification to succeed. Besides all this, both ancient Jewish and early Christian interpreters (including the Gospel writers) agreed that parables could be mysterious.<sup>21</sup>

Admittedly, Jesus' purpose for mystification in Mark 4 and parallels is a hard saying, though no more so than Isa 6:9-10 from which it is drawn. This writer suspects that the reason God hid the meaning of certain parables from the crowd involved a combination of at least two factors: (a) their judicial hardening as a punishment for resisting Jesus' earlier ministry; (b) the setting up of a situation in which Jesus would be rejected and crucified to provide our redemption. In any case, the presence of mystery in some of Jesus' parables is the clear teaching of Scripture, and (as Morton Smith<sup>22</sup> has pointed out) it is also a natural conclusion to be drawn from the wide divergence among modern interpreters over the meaning of some of the Gospel parables!

Yet mystery is not confined to the parables given from the Sower (17) onward, nor are all the later parables mysterious. There must be at least one other function of mystery in Jesus' parables besides that given in Mark 4.

Given the tradition of the three OT parables mentioned above, we