

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Emphasis on existing traditions in Matthew 13:10-15 to construct a narrative on the teachings of Jesus

James A. Schnell*†

Fulbright Scholar Association, Columbus, Ohio, United States

***Correspondence:**James A. Schnell,
james.schnell@fulbrightmail.org**†ORCID:**James A. Schnell,
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This report focuses on existing traditions manifested in Matthew 13:10-15 to construct a narrative about the teachings of Jesus. As such, it offers a redaction and narrative illustration regarding how Matthew's story of Jesus used existing traditions to weave his own distinct version of the life of Jesus. It exhibits analysis on how Matthew modified sources he drew from in ways that fit Mathew's broader theological aims. This, in turn, fit Matthew's macro-level depiction of Jesus and what he represented. The use of parables by Jesus is given particular attention.

Keywords: Mathew 13:10-15, tradition, narrative, Jesus Christ, theology

1. Introduction

The focus of this synoptic pericope study is on Matthew 13:10-15. It offers illustration as a redaction and narrative consideration regarding how Matthew's story of Jesus used existing traditions to weave his own distinct version of the life of Jesus. As such it will give attention to how Matthew modified sources he drew from in ways that fit Mathew's broader theological aims. This, in turn, fit Matthew's macro-level depiction of Jesus and what he represented.

1.1. Literature review

My study of Matthew 13:10-15 reveals that there is redaction in relation to existing traditions and a weaving of these extractions into a distinct characterization of Jesus. Most notable is Jesus' use of parables and his rationale for using them. Other areas of focus include redaction of Markan material (writings from the Book of Mark), the fulfillment of prophecy, distinction among those who understood and accepted Jesus' teachings and those who did not, and recognition of Jesus as a divine authority. Each of these

domains offers illustrative paths that collectively aid in a more comprehensive appreciation for how Mathew 13:10-15 exemplifies redaction processes that can be foundation for recognizing the relevance of redaction in other scriptures that are commonly referenced.

At the outset, it should be recognized that when human beings are involved in an interpretative enterprise, they are going to bring their perspectives and objectives into the process. This lays the groundwork for modification of the facts. At times such modification will be minor rearrangement of data, and at the other extreme, it can be large-scale reformulations of fact. Notions of truth can be set aside to address other goals. That the creation of Matthew 13:10-15 involved multiple inputs and occurred over such a period of years highlights a context that is ripe for manipulation.

Mathew 13:10-15 focuses most directly on usage of parables by Jesus. Attention is given to how the disciples directly asked Jesus about how and why he used parables in such a manner. "They want to know why Jesus speaks in parables. Why not instead teach in a straightforward manner. The passage is based upon Mark 4:10-12 but has been augmented by a saying from Q (vv. 16-17 = Lk 10.23f.)

and another from Mark (4:25; cf. Mt 13:12)” (1). This concurrently evidences the redaction of Markan material and material from Q.

2. Methodology

The sources used in Mathew in relation to such redaction are recognized in the analytical literature. Chrysostom, an early church father who was Archbishop of Constantinople (who lived 347-407 A.D.), posited that “all rational souls are given a chance to understand the difference between good and evil” (2). Anonymous stressed “It is not the fault of God who does not give but of persons who do not ask or work that they may be ready to receive the kingdom.”¹ Cyril of Alexander (Patriarch of Alexandria between 412 and 444 who wrote on Christological controversies) established that “In people who are teachable and well-disposed for receiving, the Holy Spirit will make his dwelling. But in those who have acquired only a tiny spark of light. The little that they formerly had is quenched and is taken from them.”²

That we are drawing from authors who are referenced as Q and Anonymous highlights how vague our understanding of the authorship of Matthew is. Within such a construct one can understand how the people representing Q and Anonymous could be functioning with far-reaching agendas that, in and of themselves, are difficult to grasp regarding intent, misunderstanding, and confusion. In turn, there can be unintended third- and fourth-order effects that have resonated over the centuries. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to try to harvest accurate information about authorship and context so as to better identify Biblical revelations and how they are relevant for us today.

3. Findings

A significant reason for Jesus to use parables was that it offered means to conceal and, at times, reveal information in unique ways and in accordance with unique circumstances having to do with audience. Theodore of Mopsuestia (a highly regarded Christian theologian who lived 350-428 A.D.) asserted that “Jesus spoke in parables to make invisible things seen and to avoid harsh language.”³ Anonymous elaborates by saying “It was not because Christ was speaking in parables that the seeing did not see.”⁴ Hilary (who was Bishop of Poitiers and Doctor of the Church who lived 315-367 A.D.) explained “Gospel faith receives a perfect gift. But once it is rejected, even the help of one’s former means of

support may be taken away.”⁵ The contributions of such sources in Matthew are exhaustive so I offer these examples as typical illustrations.

Leander Keck expresses the relevance of Markan material in his reporting that “Matthew’s source had pictured Jesus as using parables in order to prevent ‘outsiders’ from understanding” (Mark 4:10-12). Here we seek him struggling to reinterpret a Markan hard saying within the framework of his own understanding of Jesus’ ministry (3). Keck goes on to highlight “His considerable redactional expansion and modification of this passage begins with a clarifying question. As they (the disciples) asked specifically ‘Why?’ Jesus responds with a specific ‘because.’”⁶ This enhances our ability to understand how these processes unfold and create their impact.

The ability for Jesus to conceal and reveal with his messages has relevance with this redaction-oriented functioning. That is, he sought to use parables as means to convey wisdom to those who were receptive to his message but he also sought to conceal more fundamental truths from people who were unfavorably predisposed to his message in the spiritual sense or even blatantly opposed to what he was sharing. “The parable as a mode of communication was in wide use among the rabbis of Jesus’ day, although it was not common in the Gentile world” (4). There were degrees of intentionality inherent in this dynamic.

4. Discussions

When doing this type of analysis, I am continually watching for connections with present-day phenomena. At times such linkages can be clearly evident and at other times they can be more abstract. Yet other times they can be without foundation and merely coincidental. Regarding such markers I notice from my study that there are significant sources associated with Matthew that are labeled Q and Anonymous and these sources focus on matters having to do with concealment and revelation. Hence I think of modern implications with “Q-Anon” that are generally tied to notions of concealment and revelation being generated within politically conservative circles in American politics. What goes around comes around in the most obscure kinds of ways at times.

Beyond what is described in the previous paragraphs there were scenarios whereby receivers of his message did not have the ability to comprehend what Jesus was conveying. “The result is to suggest that Jesus taught parables with the purpose that those on the outside of the circle of his following might not be able to discern his meaning.”⁷ There

¹ Ibid, 269.

² Ibid, 269.

³ Ibid, 269.

⁴ Ibid, 269.

⁵ Ibid, 269.

⁶ Ibid, 304.

⁷ Ibid, 625.

would be less intentionality to conceal in such a context but the aspect of blurred levels of understanding would be evident. Each situation would have unique variables to consider.

In general terms we can see how the concept of a parable is very much on a par with the telling of a story. In rhetorical terms, the telling of a story hinges very much on the listener and the frame of reference that person operates from. It is a very interpretative process that draws from intrapersonal, as well as interpersonal, constructions. The consumer of a story, in this case we are focusing on parabolic forms, is typically going to be seeking meanings that address her/his mindset, interests, and experiences. Hence the potential for significant variation regarding interpretation and subsequent understanding is very real.

5. Results

The use of parables provided means for Jesus to manifest fulfillment of prophecy. A consideration within this context involved his ability to reach a wide range of people with perspectives that were understandable and meaningful. “Parables opened up new and different potentialities for living, often in contrast with our conventional ways of behaving; they offer a chance to experience things in a new way” (5). A factor in this construct involved a dynamic whereby the receivers of his messages were able to interpret what was presented and assign meaning that fit their levels of understanding and interests. It makes for a shared experience but also a customized experience.

The distinction between those who understood and accepted Jesus’ teachings and those who did not is an implied variable at points throughout this discussion. At times this focus reveals shades of gray that seem to exist on a singular continuum and at other times the line between the righteous and the wicked is stressed more. Such delineations offer much room for interpretation and there is certainly room for misunderstanding both at the time of the original recording of such insights and, obviously, even more so in the present age. This kind of analysis necessitates allowance for context, audience, timing, intent, and interpretive motives that could evidence themselves.

Jesus being received as a teaching authority was often associated with his being recognized as an interpreter of divine phenomena. This enhanced his stature as a respected source of information and insights that one might consider regarding the living of life. A fundamental aspect of living life involves being in relationship with others. “All this is involved in Jesus’ ministry of healing as depicted in Matthew; the healing not only of disease but of relationships

with people, power over demons and power over the life-threatening storm” (6). His visionary insights were meaningful in that they evidenced his ability to make connections among a range of elements within the daily lives of those he spoke to.

6. Conclusion

Taken together, the domain of this assignment emphasizes how authors and editors sought to address their objectives—both concise, abstract, and in between—over a long period of years. My study of such matters typically leaves me watching for illustrations of such phenomena in the present period we live in. Such recognition helps to exemplify how these kind of phenomena are representative of the human condition. So much of the Bible reveals consistencies in the human condition so it only makes good sense that this type of analysis would reveal how individuals would use data in their midst to advance the causes they were seeking to promote under the guise of objective reporting. The parallels with the current state of affairs regarding mass media and social media are striking.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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