

Jesus Taught the People Decisively with Hyperboles

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ABSTRACT

Biblical language is of great interest. One aspect refers to hyperbole which deals with extravagant exaggerations. It is shown that Jesus used it in teaching the people decisively.

Keywords: Jesus, teaching, hyperbole, examples.

INTRODUCTION

An interesting story about language goes back to the Holy Bible. In Genesis, Chapter 11, verse 8, there is “Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth.”¹ Consequently, I propose to identify an aspect of language that needs to be taken into account in appreciating some of the stories told during the earthly Ministry of Christ.

Christ, be it noted, employed the hyperbole. What does this word mean? According to *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, it is “extravagant exaggeration.”² Moreover, an example is “Mile-high ice-cream cones.” Clearly, ice cream cannot be stacked up to the height of one mile! Accordingly, it is important to exemplify the scenarios which cropped up and were dressed up with definitely striking exaggeration in many a Gospel.

GOSPEL SCENARIOS

Gospel of John, as I found out, did not contain any typically worded story with a hyperbolic hue. Rather, oddly enough, his very last verse constitutes what may be called the hyperbole of hyperboles! It ran thus:³

And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.

Amen has been used here by John, no doubt in the sense of its being an expression of man’s faith. One such faithfully accepted fact is the peculiar position of Luke, the beloved physician of Paul.⁴ He is reputed to have to his credit the reportage of some peculiar events that occurred during Christ’s Ministry. Indeed, in my count of the occurrence of hyperbolic episodes in the

Synoptic Gospels, his figure topped the other two apostles. These scenarios deserve itemization in chronological order either verbatim or abridged as follows:

“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye?”⁵

“For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him.”⁶

“Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the Kingdom of God.”⁷

“But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city.”⁸

“If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?”⁹

“Woe to you also, you lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.”¹⁰

“Consider the lilies how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”¹¹

“Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them.”¹²

Concerning a certain man, who gave a great supper and invited many. When none of them attended, he angrily ordered the servant: “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city,

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and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.” As there was still room, the order was: “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.”¹³

“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”¹⁴

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!”¹⁵

“I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.”¹⁶

“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost?”¹⁷

The unforgettable prodigal son obtained his half of the family fortune and went, not to a near country, but to a far country. Thereafter, he squandered all and reached the very bottom of misery. Finally, he arose and returned to confess sinning “against heaven and before you (father).” Lo and behold! He had not even said a word “when he was still a great way off, (and) his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.”¹⁸

The story of a certain rich man and his steward who prepared for the future. Christ’s comments in part ran thus: “And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”¹⁹

“And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one title of the law to fail.”²⁰

The fantastic story of the “certain rich man” and “a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores.” The former, in due time, went to Hades and the latter to Heaven. Such was the horror of Hades that the man cried out and requested that Lazarus be sent “that he may dip the tip of his

finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.”²¹

“It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.”²²

“If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”²³

“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the Kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.”²⁴

“So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, ‘You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me?’”²⁵

“For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”²⁶

“I tell you that if these (disciples) should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.”²⁷

“The story of a woman whose husband died. Thereafter, as many as six brothers married her and each of them died before she herself died.”²⁸

“The certain poor widow who, while the rich put their gifts into the treasury, put in but two mites. On this account Jesus said, “Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty has put in all the livelihood that she had.”²⁹

Concerning the temple adorned with beautiful stones, Christ said, “As for these things which you see, the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down.”³⁰

DISCUSSION

Down to earth was the question that Peter put to Christ. It was not in Luke but in Mathew.³¹ It ran thus: “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Then Jesus said, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”³²

Seven times seventy must be a hyperbole. Another hyperbole noted only elsewhere concerned the scribes and the Pharisees thus:

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“Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!”³³

Camel example also appeared in respect of the eye of a needle. In it, Christ said, “And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.”³⁴

God was brought into the picture in Matthew Henry’s “Commentary on the Whole Bible Complete and Unabridged.” The commentator tackled this enigma hopefully in the following words:

This is a proverbial expression, denoting a difficulty altogether unconquerable by the art and power of man; nothing less than the almighty grace of God will enable a rich man to get over this difficulty.³⁵

CONCLUSION

Difficulty was clearly felt concerning how to explain this stubborn statement. Little wonder that it was felt to be explicable on the “grace of God.” However, this is arguable. Indeed, it is better replaced with the “hyperbole of God.” This is because the language of God includes this type of extravagant exaggeration.

Exaggeration of the extravagant type, to sum up, needs to be recognized and named as “hyperbole.” Hence, its role in the Holy Bible needs to be compared with an accepted dogma. In this context, since it is well known that “Gospel truth” is a truism, I have hypothesized that “Hyperbole truth” should be similarly accepted. If this particular word is accommodated, then the meaningfulness of the teachings hitherto poorly understood, because of how they stand in the Gospels, would crystallize clearly.

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