**More Like the Master**

In His Teaching: The Methods

Lesson 15

*“And he spake to them many things in parables…”*

*Matthew 13:3*

**Teaching God’s Word**

Teaching God’s word can be exciting and rewarding. A Bible class teacher has the wonderful opportunity to share the most important message on earth: *“the teaching of the Lord”* (Acts 13:12). A Bible class teacher also has the most important job of all: *“teaching the word of God”* (Acts 18:11). Finally, a Bible class teacher has the rewarding result of saving himself and those who hear (1 Timothy 4:16).

Much of Jesus’ ministry was filled with teaching and he made it his day-to-day business to teach the lost. However, Jesus never let his teaching become dry, boring, or mundane. Jesus always used a variety of teaching methods to keep his teaching interesting. Jesus knew 1) the who, 2) the what, and 3) the how of teaching. First, Jesus knew the who of teaching: he knew his students’ hearts and their needs (Matthew 9:4; Luke 6:8; John 2:24-25). Second, Jesus knew the what of teaching: he knew his subject matter and where to find it in the scriptures even though he had no formal education (Luke 2:47; John 7:15). Finally, Jesus knew the how of teaching: he knew how to use the right teaching method at the right time to get the point across so that the *“common people heard him gladly”* (Mark 12:37). Jesus knew how to make each lesson understandable, meaningful, and applicable. Bible class teaching does not have to be dry and boring. Like Jesus, we can use a great variety of teaching methods with our students. Let us examine how we can be “More Like the Master” in using different teaching methods.

**Jesus: The Method Behind the Teaching**

Jesus taught from different sources. Jesus would often appeal to scripture and other source materials when he taught his lessons. He would use these source materials to begin a point (Matthew 5:21-48), to clarify or shed light on a point already made (Matthew 12:4-5), or to strengthen and give emphasis to what he had said (Matthew 21:13; 22:41-45). Jesus used different sources to be authentic, authoritative, and relevant.

***He used the scriptures.*** Jesus appealed to scripture in his lessons. He came preaching *“the gospel of God”* (Mark 1:14) and his lessons were often filled with scripture references. Jesus *“spake the word of the Lord unto them”* (Mark 2:2). When Jesus first came into the synagogue at Nazareth, he read from Isaiah 61 and then spoke of its fulfillment to the audience present (Luke 4:16-21). Jesus quoted directly from the Old Testament in his teaching ministry (Matthew 4:15-16; 12:18-21; etc.) and indirectly alluded to many other Old Testament scriptures (Matthew 10:15; Luke 17:32; etc.). Jesus often taught the Jews using the Old Testament as an historical reference point (Matthew 12:41-42; John 8:56). There are over 150 references to the Old Testament in Jesus’ teaching ministry.

***He used the natural world.*** Sometimes Jesus would appeal to the natural world around him to illustrate a point he was making in his lesson. He talked about the sun, rain, wind, earth, birds, flowers, trees, wheat, tares, vipers, oxen, pigs, dogs, sheep, goats, leaven, storms, light, darkness, salt, etc. (Matthew 5:13-14,45; 6:19-29; 7:6-27; 13:3-52; etc.).

***He used current affairs.*** On occasion, Jesus would appeal to current events to illustrate his lessons. He was aware of and alert to the situations of life happening around him and used those events in his lessons. For example, Jesus was aware of the many contemporary traditions and burdens of the Pharisees (Matthew 15 and 23). He was also aware of Pilate killing some Galileans and the tower of Siloam falling on eighteen people (Luke 13:1-5).

Jesus taught with literary forms. Jesus used different types of words to convey his message. Sometimes Jesus spoke with concrete statements (Matthew 5:3-9) and at other times, Jesus used short, pithy sayings (Matthew 6:21). Jesus also taught with figures of speech like similes (Matthew 23:37), metaphors (Matthew 5:13-14), hyperbole (Matthew 19:24), proverbs (Matthew 6:21; 26:52), puns (Matthew 23:24), riddles (John 2:19; Luke 13:32-33), irony (Luke 7:35; Matthew 16:2-3), sarcasm (Matthew 23:24-28), contrasts (Matthew 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43; 6:19-20; 7:13-14), and paradox (Matthew 16:15; Mark 10:43-44). Jesus also used poetic forms where his words and phrases were parallel in meaning (Matthew 7:17-18; 10:39-40; 12:30; Mark 2:22,27; 8:35; 9:43,47; 10:31). Jesus used a variety of literary word forms to make his teaching vivid and memorable.

Jesus taught with parables. In addition to various literary word forms, Jesus also used a popular teaching method of his day known as the “parable”. The word “parable” comes from the Greek word *parabole*, meaning “to cast alongside”. A “parable”, then, is an earthly story that is told (cast alongside) to illustrate a heavenly principle. For example, Jesus entered into a boat on one occasion and taught many things to the people in parables (Matthew 13:1-3; Mark 4:1-2; Luke 8:4). He would often begin his parables with these words: “The kingdom of heaven is like…” Jesus’ central message to the people concerned the kingdom of heaven (kingdom of God) and he would use parables to illustrate various truths about this kingdom. When Jesus was teaching on this occasion, he taught the parable of the sower, the tares, the mustard seed, the leaven, the hidden treasure, the goodly pearl, the drag-net, and the household treasure (Matthew 13:1-52; Mark 4:1-34; Luke 8:4-18). Jesus’ use of parables in his teaching was a fulfillment the Old Testament prophecy of Psalm 78:2 which says, *“I will open my mouth in parables…”* (Matthew 13:35). There are over 30 parables recorded in the gospels. Jesus used parables as stories to illustrate what was familiar to his hearers.

Jesus taught with object lessons. Jesus used object lessons as examples to make truth concrete, vivid, and attractive. He used a child to teach humility (Matthew 18:1-4) and he used a coin to teach responsibility (Matthew 22:15-22). Jesus used object lessons as visual aids for his material.

Jesus taught with symbolic actions. Jesus used actions as well as words in some of his lessons. For example, he drove the money-changers from the temple (John 2:13-22; Matthew 21:12-13), he wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44), and he girded himself with a towel and washed his disciples feet (John 13:4-15). Jesus used actions to give his lessons a personal touch.

Jesus taught with discourses. Jesus used formal discourse or lecture at times to teach his lessons. He spoke for awhile and his students listened like in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), his lesson on hypocrisy (Matthew 23) and judgment (Matthew 24-25), or his farewell discourse to the apostles (John 14-17). Jesus used discourses to teach a large body of material at one time.

Jesus taught with questions. Jesus used the Socratic question-and-answer method of teaching to get and hold attention. Jesus was used to asking and answering questions from an early age (Luke 2:46) and he used this method of teaching in his own ministry. Nearly 300 questions of Jesus can be found in the gospels. The following scriptures contain just a few of the many questions of Jesus: Matthew 6:30; 16:13-15; 21:25; 22:42-45; Mark 2:26; 3:4; 8:27-29; 10:18,36,38; Luke 6:9,46; 9:25; 10:26, 36; 11:11-13; 12:24-26; 13:14-16; 14:28; and John 8:46; 14:9-10; 21:15. (Note: There will be a separate lesson later in this series discussing in more detail Jesus’ use of questions.) Jesus asked thought-provoking questions to make people think.

Jesus taught with discussions. Jesus would often discuss his lesson with his students and allow them to respond to what he was saying. He did this with Nicodemus (John 3), with the woman at the well (John 4), with the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-22), and with his own apostles (Matthew 11:2-19). Jesus used one-on-one discussions in his lessons to get people to respond on their own and take a personal part in the learning process.

Jesus taught with logical arguments. Jesus used logical argumentation in his teaching. He argued from the lesser to the greater (Matthew 6:28-30). He argued using the tense of a verb (“I am”) (Matthew 22:32). He argued against logical inconsistencies (Luke 13:15; 14:5). Other forms of logical argumentation can be found here: Matthew 7:9-11; 10:28-31; 12:11-12; 22:43-45; Luke 18:1-8; and John 13:14. Jesus used logical arguments to prove the validity of his lessons.

**The Christian and Teaching Methods**

Christians who seek to teach like Jesus should know the who, the what, and the how of teaching. We can know who we are teaching by asking questions of our students like Paul did to the Ephesians (Acts 19:1-3). We can know what we are teaching by giving diligence to “rightly divide the word of God” (2 Timothy 2:15). And we can know how to teach effectively by following Jesus’ teaching methods described in this lesson.

Paul wrote to Timothy, *“Till I come, give heed to reading, to exhortation, to teaching”* (1 Timothy 4:13) and *“Take heed to yourself, and to your teaching. Continue in these things; for in doing this you shall save both yourself and them that hear thee”* (1 Timothy 4:16). Note what Paul wrote concerning teaching. He said, “give heed” and “take heed”. It is good to give heed and take heed to one’s teaching. A Christian can pay attention to teaching and focus on teaching the best way possible. It is good for a Christian to follow the example of Jesus and utilize the many teaching methods that he used. Start your class with scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and then use the many teaching methods of Jesus to explain, illustrate, and apply the scripture.

**More Like the Master in His Teaching Methods**

When we teach God’s word today, we need to teach like Jesus did so that the common, ordinary people can hear and understand. We need to use the successful teaching methods of Jesus if we hope to achieve the same successful results that he did. A Christian who decides to teach God’s word needs to give all to teaching and utilize whatever (scriptural) method it takes to achieve that goal. Paul wrote: *“And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us … let us give ourselves to our ministry; or he that teaches, to his teaching”* (Roman 12:6-7). Let us be “More Like the Master” in our teaching methods.

**Questions**

1. What is the who, the what, and the how of teaching as described in the introduction of this lesson?

2. What were some sources that Jesus used in his teaching?

3. What were some literary forms that Jesus used in his teaching?

4. What does the word “parable” mean and how did Jesus use parables in his teaching?

5. What were some object lessons and dramatic actions that Jesus used in his teaching?

6. How did Jesus use discourses and questions in his teaching?

7. How did Jesus use discussions and logical arguments in his teaching?

8. What are some things a Christian can do to “give heed” or “take heed” to teaching (1 Timothy 4:16)?