

RESEARCH ESSAY: **The Teaching Style And Methodology of Jesus** by Tina A. Coddington

Jesus was the master communicator (Elwell 400). He used methods that were sufficiently familiar to His hearers to gain their attention (Elwell 400). In order to meet the spiritual requirements of His audience, Jesus' style and methodology of teaching included a variety of techniques in order to illustrate, animate, strengthen, arouse interest and curiosity, and face the opposition regarding His intended message.

The first aspect of Jesus' style and methodology of teaching is that His intended message had a clearly defined purpose. Jesus kept in focus what He wanted to accomplish in each teaching setting (Vick 88). When Jesus was teaching to individuals who did not believe in Him, His goal was to preach the Good News in order to provide salvation (Zuck 97; Jensen 5/8). However, after a person obtained salvation, Jesus changed His message to foster spiritual growth in a believer's life (Zuck 97). The ten points in Jesus' teaching that fostered spiritual growth are growing by: loving the Lord; loving others; obeying God's Word; doing good deeds; putting spiritual priorities first; fellowshiping with God in prayer; exercising faith in the Lord; resisting temptation; serving the Lord; and manifesting spiritual virtues (Zuck 99,101). Jesus' style and methodology of having a clearly-defined purpose in His teaching enhanced His teaching and is pertinent for all teachers to emulate.

The second aspect of Jesus' style and methodology of teaching is His use of stories to illustrate His intended message. One fourth of Jesus' recorded words are narratives or parables (Zuck 306). Jesus' stories were realistic because they made the point of His intended message - a strong, easy-to-grasp principle understandably relevant to His audience (Zuck 307). Jesus used stories to help people comprehend spiritual truth, to harden the hearts of unbelievers, and to disarm his opponents (Matthew 13:10,13; 21:23; Wilhoit 248; Zuck 312-314). The elements in Jesus' parables that made them so effective are that: they were concise; they dealt with common, everyday elements; they were suspenseful; they contained plot conflicts and the element of surprise; they sometimes departed from normal procedure; they contained direct conversations; they had resolution; they had appealing characterization; they contained contrasts; and they covered a wide variety of topics (Wilder 74,75; Zuck 315-320). Items that prompted Jesus to tell stories were questions, complaints, illustrations, and to apply the truth (Zuck 325,326). Jesus' stories illustrated His intended message and were rememberable to His audience during His time on earth and to individuals today.

The third aspect of Jesus' style and methodology of teaching is His use of picturesque expressions to animate His intended message. Jesus used picturesque expressions in His teaching to capture the hearers' attention, to encourage them to reflect on what He said, and to help them remember His words (Zuck 184). The figures of speech Jesus incorporated into His teaching were: simile, metaphor, hypocatastasis, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole, personification, apostrophe, euphemism, irony, paradox, and a pun (Henrichsen 144; Zuck 186).

A simile is used to compare two things that are normally not alike (Zuck 186). An example of a simile that Jesus used is found in Matthew 10:16, where Jesus states that he is sending out His disciples like sheep among wolves (Barbieri 42). The similes Jesus used reflected His familiarity with nature and occupations of his culture (Zuck 186). When Jesus compared the unusual or unknown things to the ordinary things of life, it would have piqued his listeners' thinking and thus made a lasting impression (Zuck 192).

A metaphor is a "comparison in which one thing is said to be, act like, or represents another in which the two are unlike". An example of a metaphor that Jesus used is found in Matthew 5:13, where Jesus tells believers that they are "the salt of the earth". A metaphor will shock or surprise the listeners due to the comparison (Zuck 192).

A hypocatastasis is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things by a direct naming (Zuck 193). Jesus often made comparisons by calling one thing something else. In Luke 13:32, Jesus refers to Herod using a hypocatastasis by saying, "Go tell that fox". Jesus directly calls and compares Herod to a fox (Zuck 193). The use of hypocatastasis startles the hearers into reflective thought (Zuck 194).

A metonymy is a "word or phrase that is substituted for another word or phrase associated with it (Zuck 195). An example of a metonymy that Jesus used is found in Matthew 10:34, where Jesus uses the word 'sword' to mean warfare.

A synecdoche is "similar to a simile except that a synecdoche substitutes a part for the whole, or a whole for the part". An example of where Jesus used a synecdoche is found in Luke 23:29, where Jesus spoke of "wombs that never bore" referring to barren women.

"A hyperbole is an intentional exaggeration, used to add shock and emphasis to what is said". Hyperboles are not to be taken literally but they convey truths by overstatement (Zuck 195). An example of Jesus' use of a hyperbole is found in Mark 10:24,25, where the picture is given of a 'camel going through the eye of a needle' (Zuck 196). The use of hyperboles deeply penetrates the consciences of the hearers (Zuck 196).

"A personification is a figure of speech in which a person ascribes human characteristics or actions to inanimate objects or ideas or to animals" (Zuck 197). An example of Jesus' use of personification is found in Luke 19:40, where Jesus states that the "rocks will cry out". The use of personification adds vividness to the remarks being made.

An apostrophe addresses an object directly as if it were an imaginary person (Zuck 197). An example of Jesus' use of an apostrophe is found in Matthew 11:21, where he addresses an entire city as if it were a person.

"A euphemism substitutes an inoffensive or mild expression for an offensive or bold expression". An example of a euphemism is found in John 11:11, where Jesus told His disciples that Lazarus was sleeping when he was actually dead.

"Irony is a form of ridicule expressed as a compliment" (Zuck 197). Jesus used an irony when He said that the Pharisees and Sadducees could predict the weather by the sky but in their area of supposed expertise, they could not see the significance of Jesus' ministry (Matthew 16:2,3; Zuck 198). Jesus' use of irony in His teaching intrigued and stunned His listeners (Zuck 199).

A paradox is a statement that is seemingly contradictory to normal opinion or common sense (Zuck 199). Jesus used a paradoxical statement in the 'Sermon On The Mount' when he described the poor in spirit, the mourners, and the meek as blessed

(Matthew 5:3-5; Zuck 200). In using a paradox, Jesus challenged his listeners to think through the point being made (Zuck 200).

In a pun, similar sounding words or the same words have different meaning (Zuck 201). Jesus used the word 'wind' to refer to the Holy Spirit and the wind of nature (John 3:8). Puns enhanced the listener's ability to retain Jesus' teaching (Zuck 201).

Jesus' use of picturesque expressions to animate His intended message imparted interest and gave life to His teaching. Teachers in today's society should follow Jesus' example and use picturesque expressions to enliven their teaching.

The fourth aspect of Jesus' style and methodology of teaching is His use of rhetorical devices to strengthen His intended message. The rhetorical devices that Jesus used in His teaching were: humor, enigma, maxim or aphorism, repetition, logical reasoning, contrasts, examples and explanations, and poetry.

Jesus' use of humor in His teaching helped His listeners digest His teaching, relaxed the listeners, and helped to make His message more palatable (Zuck 204). However, Jesus' humor was never for entertainment value alone. The humor or wit Jesus used always had a teaching purpose. An example of Jesus' teaching that probably brought smiles to His listeners is the thought of a camel going through the eye of a needle (Matthew 23:24; Zuck 204). With humor, Jesus convicted people of their sin and put the Pharisees in their place without vindictiveness (Zuck 205). Humor made Jesus' teaching more stabbing and unforgettable (Zuck 206).

When a teacher uses enigmas, he encourages students to think, reflect, and learn. Jesus used enigmas to foster learning. An example of where Jesus used enigmas is when Jesus said "I did not come to bring peace but a sword" (Matthew 10:34; Zuck 206).

Maxim or aphorisms are short brief statements that invite the hearers to think (Zuck 207). An example of where Jesus used maxims is when He said, "be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16; Zuck 208). These kinds of statements cause the listeners to stop and think about how it applies to them (Zuck 214).

Repetition, when used rightly, can be an effective tool to secure the truth of the teaching in the hearts and minds of the students (Zuck 214). Examples of phrases Jesus repeated are: 'blessed are' (Matthew 5:3-11); 'you have heard... but I tell you' (Matthew 5:21-44); 'do not worry' (Matthew 6:25,31,33); and 'lay down his life for his sheep' (John 10:11,15,17-18; Zuck 214,215).

Logical reasoning helps students to think logically and accurately (Zuck 215). Jesus used a number of different methods when he used logical reasoning in His teaching. The first was the argument from the lesser to the greater. Jesus used this kind of reasoning in Matthew 6:26, when he told his audience that the birds are fed by God even though they do not farm, and people are more valuable to God than birds (Zuck 215).

A second method of logical reasoning is an argument that reduces a person's view to its absurd logical outcome (Zuck 216). When the Pharisees accused Jesus of driving out demons by the power of Beelzebul, He showed the absurdity of that thinking (Mark 3:22-26; Zuck 216).

A third method of logical reasoning that Jesus used was in appealing to a person's feelings or prejudices, or attacking the person rather than his arguments as such (Zuck 217). Jesus used this type of reasoning with the Pharisees when He said to them "haven't you read...?" what the Old Testament said about David (Matthew 12:3; 19:4).

A fourth method of logical reasoning is when the debater shows that only two opposites exist in a given situation. No middle ground is possible, so one side of the debate is correct and one is wrong. Jesus used this kind of reasoning when he answered the Pharisees' question with the response of, "John's baptism, where did it come from? Was it from heaven or from men?" (Matthew 21:25).

A fifth method of logical reasoning is when "a person forces another to respond with a 'yes' or 'no' answer, thereby challenging the opponent to accept the person's view". Jesus used this method when he asked the question "can a blind man lead a blind man?" (Luke 6:39; Zuck 217). The obvious answer to Jesus' question was 'no'. The question helped the listeners see the dangers of unqualified teachers (Zuck 218).

When a person draws attention to an "object's opposite, it helps highlight the characteristics of both (Zuck 218). Contrasts have great appeal for the imagination and are very effective in teaching (Zuck 219). Jesus used many contrasts to describe His followers and the hypocritical religious leaders. Examples of the contrasts are: giving (Matthew 6:2,3); praying (Matthew 6:5,6); and fasting (Matthew 6:16,17; Zuck 219).

Jesus gave examples and explanations of His teaching in order to clarify His point and challenge His students (Zuck 221). The word 'because' often signals that what occurred is going to be clarified. An example is found in Mark 1:22, where the people were amazed at Jesus' teaching because He taught with authority (Zuck 221).

Jesus often used poetic sayings in His teaching (Zuck 222). One type of poetry that Jesus used possessed the form of parallelism. The second line of the poem repeats the thought of the first line with different words (Zuck 222). An example of this kind of teaching is found in Matthew 10:24 where Jesus says, "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master" (Zuck 223).

A second type of poetry that Jesus used was antithetical parallelism (Zuck 225). In this type of poetry, the second line contrasts the first line. An example of this type of teaching is found in Matthew 7:17, where Jesus says, "likewise every good tree bears good fruit, and a bad tree bears bad fruit" (Zuck 225).

A third type of poetry that Jesus used was synthetic parallelism (Zuck 229). The second line of the poem completes the thought developed in the first line. The second line of the poem often gives a reason, or states a consequence or result of the first line. An example of this type of poetry is found in John 7:21, where Jesus says, "I did one miracle, and you are all astonished" (Zuck 229).

A fourth type of poetry that Jesus used was "stair-step parallelism, in which the second line repeats a part of the first line in exact wording and then advances the thought (Zuck 230). An example of this kind of poetry can be found in John 10:11. Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11; Tenney 331; Zuck 230). When Jesus used poetic form, it showed His listeners that they were suppose to preserve and retain the teaching in their hearts and minds (Zuck 233).

Jesus' use of rhetorical devices to strengthen His intended message helped individuals to reflect and internalize the message in order to change his/her life. When teachers today want students to remember lessons from week to week, adding rhetorical devices to their teaching would strengthen their message.

The fifth aspect of Jesus' style and methodology of teaching is His use of questions to arouse interest and curiosity for His intended message. Questions can lead students to think more clearly about a subject, stimulate discussion, help teachers ascertain what students know, obtain students' opinions, guide learners to new faces or ideas, encourage students to express themselves, correct students' misconceptions, clarify issues, present proof for arguments, and exhort students into action (Delany 41; Zuck 235). According to author Zuck, Jesus possibly asked 304 questions that are recorded in the gospels (Zuck 238). The questions were addressed to individuals, groups, His followers and His adversaries (Zuck 239). Jesus questions were a very powerful teaching tool (Zuck 240). Jesus' use of rhetorical devices strengthened his teaching, confronted people, and forced them to face their spiritual deficiencies (Zuck 240). In today's society, when sin is promoted as an acceptable life choice, teachers need to use questions in their teaching to change the lives of their students.

The sixth aspect of Jesus' style and methodology of teaching is how He faced those in opposition to His teaching. Jesus faced opposition from several religious and political groups (Zuck 129). There are six observations that can be made in regard to how Jesus dealt with those who opposed Him (Zuck 154). First, Jesus did not hesitate to differ with his opponents (Zuck 154). He pointed out their wrong views and practices (Lindsay 19; Zuck 155). Second, Jesus challenged those who opposed him with questions that made the opposition think and reflect on their position. Third, Jesus attempted to change the views of His opposition to the correct view. Fourth, Jesus reproached His foes even though they were entrenched in their views. Fifth, Jesus never wavered from the correct view of doctrine even though it cost Him His life. Sixth, the questions or challenges that Jesus' foes presented Him with were used as teaching circumstances (Zuck 155). Teachers today will face opposition just like Jesus did. It is important for teachers to follow Jesus' example in facing opposition.

Jesus knew exactly what style and methodology to use to impact His audience for the Kingdom of God. The variety of techniques that Jesus used illustrated, animated, strengthened, and aroused interest and curiosity in His listeners. Even when Jesus faced confrontation and opposition to His teaching, He maintained His purpose and stood firm in doing what was right. Teachers today need to learn the style and methodology of Jesus overflowing with knowledge in order to instruct like their teacher (Adams 89; Hendricks 27). Embracing and emulating the style and methodology of Christ's teaching is the best option for teachers to be effective.

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