

An aerial photograph of a wide river at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, golden path of light that reflects off the water's surface, extending from the top center towards the middle of the frame. The water is dark blue and grey, with white foam from rapids or turbulence visible. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue.

The Parables
Of Jesus Christ

Compiled by Harold Bollinger

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JESUS TEACHES THROUGH PARABLES

A parable is a comparison between a familiar fact and a spiritual truth. As used in the Scripture, the parable involves the idea of comparison.

Jesus used simple word-pictures to help people understand who God is and what his kingdom or reign is like. Jesus used images and characters taken from everyday life to create a miniature play or drama to illustrate his message. This was Jesus most common way of teaching. His stories appealed to the young and old, poor and rich, and to the learned and unlearned as well. Over a third of the Gospels by Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain parables told by Jesus. Jesus loved to use illustrations to reach the heart of his listeners through their imagination. These word-pictures challenged the mind to discover anew what God is like and moved the heart to make a response to God's love and truth

Our Lord achieved lasting renown through the use of teaching through parables. History states that during the time of Jesus on earth, parables were often used to demonstrate a point. The parables of Jesus are superb in their aptness, conciseness, and appeal. Although He did not create this type of teaching, He endowed it with high originality and gave it a deeper spiritual import and dimension hither to unknown. Today, the story telling method of teaching is commonly practiced in many cultures. Let us be advised as to what Jesus is conveying to us through the use of parables.

Matthew 13:35

That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world. Jesus' parables have a double meaning. First, there is the literal meaning, apparent to anyone who has experience with the subject matter. But beyond the literal meaning lies a deeper meaning -- a beneath-the-surface lesson about God's truth and his kingdom. Jesus told his disciples that not everyone would understand his parables.

“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not hear.” (Luke 8:10).

Did Jesus mean to say that he was deliberately confusing his listeners? Very likely not. Jesus was speaking from experience. He was aware that some who heard his parables refused to understand them.

Jesus meant for his parables to provoke a response. If we listen with faith and humility then each will understand as he or she is able to receive what Jesus wishes to speak to each of our hearts.

Parables are a storage of truths waiting to ignite those who wish to know the truths of Jesus.

Parables of Jesus can be divided into five categories: “Nature”, “Work and Wages”, “Open and Closed Doors”, “Weddings and Feasts”, “Lost and Found, Father and Son”.

The Parables of Jesus

"I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world." (Matthew 13:35)

PARABLES FROM NATURE

Nature

By Harold Bollinger

**The sounding of the trumpet, the ringing of the bell
The pulsating heart resounding as sounds begin to swell
The nighttime cries alerting all those who long for rest
Within the forest curtain attuned to nature's best.**

**Where then can I find this peace if not the forest splendor?
Is peace and still the same, Or does sound allure the more?
The bird, the tree, the squirrel, they too look for peace.
Unshackled, the right to move, to live, to breath, to love.**

**I see the mountains tall, the oceans deep and wide.
The moving elk and goat, the porpoise, seal and fish
Oh where do I belong, and how then should I feel?
In God's likeness I'll reside, His nature to fulfill.**

The Sower and the Seeds

(Mark 4:3-9; Matt 13:3-9; Luke 8:5-8)

Matthew 13:3-9

And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; [4] And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: [5] Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: [6] And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. [7] And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: [8] But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold. [9] Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Jesus used many illustrations, or parables, when speaking to the crowds. A parable compares something familiar to something unfamiliar. It helps us understand spiritual truth by using everyday objects and relationships. Parables compel listeners to discover truth, while at the same time concealing the truth from those too lazy or too stubborn to see it. To those who are honestly searching, the truth becomes clear. We must be careful not to read too much into parables, forcing them to say what they don't mean. All parables have one meaning unless otherwise specified by Jesus.

This parable should encourage spiritual “sowers”—those who teach, preach, and lead others. The farmer sowed good seed, but not all the seed sprouted, and even the plants that grew had varying yields. Don't be discouraged if you do not always see results as you faithfully teach the Word. Belief cannot be forced to follow a mathematical formula (i.e., a Matthew 4:1 ratio of seeds planted to seeds sprouted). Rather, it is a miracle of God's Holy Spirit as he uses your words to lead others to him.

Why would a farmer allow precious seed to land on the path, on rocks, or among thorns? This is not an irresponsible farmer scattering seeds at random. He is using the acceptable method of hand-seeding a large field—tossing it by handfuls as he walks through the field. His goal is to get as much seed as possible to take root in good soil, but there is inevitable waste as some falls or is blown into less productive areas. That some of the seed produced no crop was not the fault of the faithful farmer or of the seed. The yield depended on the condition of the soil where the seed fell. It is our responsibility to spread the seed (God's message), but we should not give up when some of our efforts fail. Remember, not every seed falls on good soil.

Human ears hear many sounds, but there is a deeper kind of listening that results in spiritual understanding. If you honestly seek God's will, you have spiritual hearing, and these parables will give you new perspectives.

The Grain of Wheat

(John 12:23-25)

John 12:23-25

Jesus replied, "The time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. [24] The truth is, a kernel of wheat must be planted in the soil. Unless it dies it will be alone—a single seed. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives. [25] Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who despise their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

This is a beautiful picture of the necessary sacrifice of Jesus. Unless a kernel of wheat is buried in the ground, it will not become a blade of wheat producing many more seeds. Jesus had to die to pay the penalty for our sin, but also to show his power over death. His resurrection proves he has eternal life. Because Jesus is God, Jesus can give this same eternal life to all who believe in him.

12:25 We must be so committed to living for Christ that we “hate” our lives by comparison. This does not mean that we long to die or that we are careless or destructive with the life God has given, but that we are willing to die if doing so will glorify Christ. We must disown the tyrannical rule of our own self-centeredness. By laying aside our striving for advantage, security, and pleasure, we can serve God lovingly and freely. Releasing control of our lives and transferring control to Christ bring eternal life and genuine joy.

The Weeds in the Grain or the Tares

(Matt 13:24-30)

Matthew 13:24-30

Here is another story Jesus told: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. [25] But that night as everyone slept, his enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat. [26] When the crop began to grow and produce grain, the weeds also grew. [27] The farmer's servants came and told him, 'Sir, the field where you planted that good seed is full of weeds!'

[28] " 'An enemy has done it!' the farmer exclaimed. " 'Shall we pull out the weeds?' they asked.

[29] "He replied, 'No, you'll hurt the wheat if you do. [30] Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds and burn them and to put the wheat in the barn.' "

The young weeds and the young blades of wheat look the same and can't be distinguished until they are grown and ready for harvest. Weeds (unbelievers) and wheat (believers) must live side by side in this world. God allows unbelievers to remain for a while, just as a farmer allows weeds to remain in his field so the surrounding wheat isn't uprooted with them. At the harvest, however, the weeds will be uprooted and thrown away. God's harvest (judgment) of all people is coming. We are to make ourselves ready by making sure that our faith is sincere.

The Net

Matthew 13:47-50

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net that is thrown into the water and gathers fish of every kind. [48] When the net is full, they drag it up onto the shore, sit down, sort the good fish into crates, and throw the bad ones away. [49] That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the godly, [50] throwing the wicked into the fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The parable of the fishing net has the same meaning as the parable of the wheat and weeds. We are to obey God and tell others about his grace and goodness, but we cannot dictate who is part of the kingdom of heaven and who is not. This sorting will be done at the last judgment by those infinitely more qualified than we.

The Seed Growing Secretly

Mark 4:26-29

Jesus also said, "Here is another illustration of what the Kingdom of God is like: A farmer planted seeds in a field, [27] and then he went on with his other activities. As the days went by, the seeds sprouted and grew without the farmer's help, [28] because the earth produces crops on its own. First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens. [29] And as soon as the grain is ready, the farmer comes and harvests it with a sickle."

This parable about the kingdom of God, recorded only by Mark, reveals that spiritual growth is a continual, gradual process that is finally consummated in a harvest of spiritual maturity. We can understand the process of spiritual growth by comparing it to the slow but certain growth of a plant.

The Mustard Seed

Matt13:31 ; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18

Mark 4:30-32

Jesus asked, "How can I describe the Kingdom of God? What story should I use to illustrate it? [31] It is like a tiny mustard seed. Though this is one of the smallest of seeds, [32] it grows to become one of the largest of plants, with long branches where birds can come and find shelter."

Jesus used this parable to explain that although Christianity had very small beginnings, it would grow into a worldwide community of believers. When you feel alone in your stand for Christ, realize that God is building a worldwide kingdom. He has faithful followers in every part of the world, and your faith, no matter how small, can join with that of others to accomplish great things

The Leaven

Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20

Matthew 13:33

Jesus also used this illustration: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast used by a woman making bread. Even though she used a large amount of flour, the yeast permeated every part of the dough."

Jesus adapted his methods to his audience's ability and desire to understand. He didn't speak in parables to confuse people, but to challenge sincere seekers to discover the meaning of his words. Much of Jesus' teaching was against hypocrisy and impure motives—characteristics of the religious leaders. Had Jesus spoken against the leaders directly, his public ministry would have been hampered. Those who listened carefully to Jesus knew what he was talking about.

The general expectation among Jesus' hearers was that the Messiah would come as a great king and leader, freeing the nation from Rome and restoring Israel's former glory. But Jesus said his kingdom was beginning quietly. Like the tiny mustard seed that grows into an enormous tree, or the spoonful of yeast that makes the bread dough double in size, the kingdom of God would eventually push outward until the whole world was changed.

The Birds of Heaven

Luke 13:6-9

Then Jesus used this illustration: "A man planted a fig tree in his garden and came again and again to see if there was any fruit on it, but he was always disappointed. [7] Finally, he said to his gardener, 'I've waited three years, and there hasn't been a single fig! Cut it down. It's taking up space we can use for something else.' [8] "The gardener answered, 'Give it one more chance. Leave it another year, and I'll give it special attention and plenty of fertilizer. [9] If we get figs next year, fine. If not, you can cut it down.' "

In the Old Testament, a fruitful tree was often used as a symbol of godly living (see, for example, Psalm 1:3 and Jeremiah 17:7-8). Jesus pointed out what would happen to the other kind of tree—the kind that took valuable time and space and still produced nothing for the patient gardener. This was one way Jesus warned his listeners that God would not tolerate forever their lack of productivity. (Luke 3:9 records John the Baptist's version of the same message.) Have you been enjoying God's special treatment without giving anything in return? If so, respond to the Gardener's patient care, and begin to bear the fruit God has created you to produce.

The Budding Fig Tree

Matt 24:32 f.; Mark 13:28 f.; Luke 21:19-31

Luke 21:19-31

By standing firm, you will win your souls. [20] "And when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then you will know that the time of its destruction has arrived. [21] Then those in Judea must flee to the hills. Let those in Jerusalem escape, and those outside the city should not enter it for shelter. [22] For those will be days of God's vengeance, and the prophetic words of the Scriptures will be fulfilled. [23] How terrible it will be for pregnant women and for mothers nursing their babies. For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. [24] They will be brutally killed by the sword or sent away as captives to all the nations of the world. And Jerusalem will be conquered and trampled down by the Gentiles until the age of the Gentiles comes to an end. [25] "And there will be strange events in the skies—signs in the sun, moon, and stars. And down here on earth the nations will be in turmoil, perplexed by the roaring seas and strange tides. [26] The courage of many people will falter because of the fearful fate they see coming upon the earth, because the stability of the very heavens will be broken up. [27] Then everyone will see the Son of Man arrive on the clouds with power and great glory. [28] So when all these things begin to happen, stand straight and look up, for your salvation is near!" [29] Then he gave them this illustration: "Notice the fig tree, or any other tree. [30] When the leaves come out, you know without being told that summer is near. [31] Just so, when you see the events I've described taking place, you can be sure that the Kingdom of God is near.

The picture of the coming persecutions and natural disasters is gloomy, but ultimately it is a cause not for worry but for great joy. When believers see these events happening, they will know that the return of their Messiah is near, and they can look forward to his reign of justice and peace. Rather than being terrified by what is happening in our world, we should confidently await Christ's return to bring justice and restoration to his people.

The Flowers of the Field

Matt 6:28-30; Luke 12:27

Matthew 6:28-30

"And why worry about your clothes? Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, [29] yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. [30] And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't he more surely care for you? You have so little faith!

Planning for tomorrow is time well spent; worrying about tomorrow is time wasted. Sometimes it's difficult to tell the difference. Careful planning is thinking ahead about goals, steps, and schedules, and trusting in God's guidance. When done well, planning can help alleviate worry. Worriers, by contrast, are consumed by fear and find it difficult to trust God. They let their plans interfere with their relationship with God. Don't let worries about tomorrow affect your relationship with God today.

The Vultures & the Carcass

Matt 24:28; Luke 17:37

Matthew 24:28

Just as the gathering of vultures shows there is a carcass nearby, so these signs indicate that the end is near.

Luke 17:37

"Lord, where will this happen?" the disciples asked. Jesus replied, "Just as the gathering of vultures shows there is a carcass nearby, so these signs indicate that the end is near."

Jesus' warnings about false teachers still hold true. Upon close examination it becomes clear that many nice-sounding messages don't agree with God's message in the Bible. Only a solid foundation in God's Word can equip us to perceive the errors and distortions in false teaching.

In times of persecution even strong believers will find it difficult to be loyal. To keep from being deceived by false messiahs, we must understand that Jesus' return will be unmistakable (Mark 13:26); no one will doubt that it is he. If you have to be told that the Messiah has come, then he hasn't. Christ's coming will be obvious to everyone.

To answer the disciples' question, Jesus quoted a familiar proverb. One vulture circling overhead does not mean much, but a gathering of vultures means that a dead body is nearby. Likewise, one sign of the end may not be significant, but when many signs occur, the second coming is near.

The Tree and its Fruits

Matthew 7:16; Luke 6:43-49

Matthew 7:16 You can detect them by the way they act, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit. You don't pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles.

Luke 6:43-49 "A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. [44] A tree is identified by the kind of fruit it produces. Figs never grow on thorn bushes or grapes on bramble bushes. [45] A good person produces good deeds from a good heart, and an evil person produces evil deeds from an evil heart. Whatever is in your heart determines what you say.

Jesus reminds us that our speech and actions reveal the true underlying beliefs, attitudes, and motivations. The good impressions we try to make cannot last if our hearts are deceptive. What is in your heart will come out in your speech and behavior.

Obeying God is like building a house on a strong, solid foundation that stands firm when storms come. When life is calm, our foundations don't seem to matter. But when crises come, our foundations are tested. Be sure your life is built on the solid foundation of knowing and trusting Jesus Christ.

Why would people build a house without a foundation? Perhaps to save time and avoid the hard work of preparing a stone foundation. Possibly because the waterfront scenery is more attractive or because beach houses have higher social status than cliff houses. Perhaps because they want to join their friends who have already settled in sandy areas. Maybe because they haven't heard about the violent storms coming, or because they have discounted the reports, or for some reason they think disaster can't happen to them. Whatever their reason, those with no foundation are shortsighted, and they will be sorry. When you find yourself listening but not obeying, what are your reasons?

The Weather Signs

Luke 12:54-56;

Then Jesus turned to the crowd and said, "When you see clouds beginning to form in the west, you say, 'Here comes a shower.' And you are right. [55] When the south wind blows, you say, 'Today will be a scorcher.' And it is. [56] You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky, but you can't interpret these present times.

For most of recorded history, the world's principal occupation was farming. The farmer depended directly on the weather for his livelihood. He needed just the right amounts of sun and rain—not too much, not too little—to make his living, and he grew skilled at interpreting natural signs. Jesus was announcing an earthshaking event that would be much more important than the year's crops—the coming of God's kingdom. Like a rainstorm or a sunny day, there were signs that the kingdom would soon arrive. But Jesus' hearers, though skilled at interpreting weather signs, were intentionally ignoring the signs of the times.

PARABLES FOR OPEN AND CLOSED DOORS

Rev. 4:1

Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven, and the same voice I had heard before spoke to me with the sound of a mighty trumpet blast. The voice said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after these things."

Rev. 3:20

"Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends."

The Closed Door

Luke 13:24-30

"The door to heaven is narrow. Work hard to get in, because many will try to enter, [25] but when the head of the house has locked the door, it will be too late. Then you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Lord, open the door for us!' But he will reply, 'I do not know you.' [26] You will say, 'But we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' [27] And he will reply, 'I tell you, I don't know you. Go away, all you who do evil.' [28] 'And there will be great weeping and gnashing of teeth, for you will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets within the Kingdom of God, but you will be thrown out. [29] Then people will come from all over the world to take their places in the Kingdom of God. [30] And note this: Some who are despised now will be greatly honored then; and some who are greatly honored now will be despised then."

Finding salvation requires more concentrated effort than most people are willing to put forth. Obviously we cannot save ourselves—there is no way we can work ourselves into God's favor. The effort we must put out "to enter through the narrow door" is earnestly desiring to know Jesus and diligently striving to follow him whatever the cost. We dare not put off making this decision because the door will not stay open forever.

The kingdom of God will not necessarily be populated with the people we expect to find there. Some perfectly respectable religious leaders claiming allegiance to Jesus will not be there because secretly they were corrupt.

The people were eager to know who would be in God's kingdom. Jesus explained that although many people know something about God, only a few have acknowledged their sins and accepted his forgiveness. Just listening to Jesus' words or admiring his miracles is not enough—we must turn from sin and trust in God to save us.

God's kingdom will include people from every part of the world. Israel's rejection of Jesus as Messiah would not stop God's plan. True Israel includes all people who believe in God. This was an important fact for Luke to stress as he was directing his Gospel to a Gentile audience

There will be many surprises in God's kingdom. Some who are despised now will be greatly honored then; some influential people here will be left outside the gates. Many "great" people on this earth (in God's eyes) are virtually ignored by the rest of the world. What matters to God is not a person's earthly popularity, status, wealth, heritage, or power, but his or her commitment to Christ. How do your values match what the Bible tells you to value? Put God in first place, and you will join people from all over the world who will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of heaven

The door which Jesus had in mind was himself. I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved (John 10:9). Through the cross Jesus opens the way for us to enter into his kingdom. But we must follow Jesus in the way of the cross.

PARABLE OF THE DOORKEEPER

Mark 13:33-37, Matt. 24:42

And since you don't know when they will happen, stay alert and keep watch. [34] "The coming of the Son of Man can be compared with that of a man who left home to go on a trip. He gave each of his employees instructions about the work they were to do, and he told the gatekeeper to watch for his return. [35] So keep a sharp lookout! For you do not know when the homeowner will return—at evening, midnight, early dawn, or late daybreak. [36] Don't let him find you sleeping when he arrives without warning. [37] What I say to you I say to everyone: Watch for his return!"

Matthew 24:42

So be prepared, because you don't know what day your Lord is coming. Months of planning go into a wedding, the birth of a baby, a career change, a speaking engagement, the purchase of a home. Do you place the same importance on preparing for Christ's return, the most important event in your life? Its results will last for eternity. You dare not postpone your preparations because you do not know when his return will occur. The way to prepare is to study God's Word and live by its instructions each day. Only then will you be ready.

The entire thirteenth chapter of Mark tells us how to live while we wait for Christ's return: (1) We are not to be misled by confusing claims or speculative interpretations of what will happen (Mark 13:5-6). (2) We should not be afraid to tell people about Christ, despite what they might say or do to us (Mark 13:9-11). (3) We must stand firm by faith and not be surprised by persecutions (Mark 13:13). (4) We must be morally alert, obedient to the commands for living found in God's Word. This chapter was not given to promote discussions on prophetic timetables, but to stimulate right living for God in a world where he is largely ignored.

Faithful Servants

Matthew 24:42-51.; Luke 12:32-48

So be prepared, because you don't know what day your Lord is coming.

[43] "Know this: A homeowner who knew exactly when a burglar was coming would stay alert and not permit the house to be broken into. [44] You also must be ready all the time. For the Son of Man will come when least expected. [45] "Who is a faithful, sensible servant, to whom the master can give the responsibility of managing his household and feeding his family? [46] If the master returns and finds that the servant has done a good job, there will be a reward. [47] I assure you, the master will put that servant in charge of all he owns. [48] But if the servant is evil and thinks, 'My master won't be back for a while,' [49] and begins oppressing the other servants, partying, and getting drunk— [50] well, the master will return unannounced and unexpected. [51] He will tear the servant apart and banish him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Christ's second coming will be swift and sudden. There will be no opportunity for last-minute repentance or bargaining. The choice we have already made will determine our eternal destiny.

Jesus' purpose in telling about his return is not to stimulate predictions and calculations about the date, but to warn us to be prepared. Will you be ready? The only safe choice is to obey him today (Matthew 24:46).

Jesus asks us to spend the time of waiting taking care of his people and doing his work here on earth, both within the church and out.

Knowing that Christ's return will be sudden and unexpected should motivate us always to be prepared. We are not to live irresponsibly—sitting and waiting, doing nothing; seeking self-serving pleasure; using his tarrying as an excuse not to do God's work of building his kingdom; developing a false security based on precise calculations of events; or letting our curiosity about the end times divert us from doing God's work. Weeping and gnashing of teeth" is a phrase used to describe despair. God's coming judgment is as certain as Jesus' return to earth.

The Strong Man Bound

Matthew 12:29; Mark 3:27; Luke 11:21

Let me illustrate this. You can't enter a strong man's house and rob him without first tying him up. Only then can his house be robbed!

Mark 3:27

Let me illustrate this. You can't enter a strong man's house and rob him without first tying him up. Only then can his house be robbed!

At Jesus' birth, Satan's power and control were disrupted. In the desert Jesus overcame the devil's temptations, and at the resurrection he defeated Satan's ultimate weapon, death. Eventually Satan will be constrained forever (Rev. 20:10), and evil will no longer pervade the earth. Jesus has complete power and authority over Satan and all his forces.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law could not deny the reality of Jesus' miracles and supernatural power. They refused to believe that his power was from God, however, because then they would have had to accept him as the Messiah. Their pride would not let them do that. So in an attempt to destroy Jesus' popularity among the people, the teachers of the law accused him of having power from Satan. Jesus' reply showed that their argument didn't make sense. (Beelzebub refers to Satan.)

Although God permits Satan to work in our world, God is still in control. Jesus, because he is God, has power over Satan; Jesus is able to drive out demons and end their terrible work in people's lives. One day Satan will be bound forever (Rev. 20:10).

The Divided Realm

Mark 3:24-26; Luke 11:17-20

Luke 11:17-20

He knew their thoughts, so he said, "Any kingdom at war with itself is doomed. A divided home is also doomed. [18] You say I am empowered by the prince of demons. But if Satan is fighting against himself by empowering me to cast out his demons, how can his kingdom survive? [19] And if I am empowered by the prince of demons, what about your own followers? They cast out demons, too, so they will judge you for what you have said. [20] But if I am casting out demons by the power of God, then the Kingdom of God has arrived among you.

Mark 3:24-26 A kingdom at war with itself will collapse. [25] A home divided against itself is doomed. [26] And if Satan is fighting against himself, how can he stand? He would never survive.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law could not deny the reality of Jesus' miracles and supernatural power. They refused to believe that his power was from God, however, because then they would have had to accept him as the Messiah. Their pride would not let them do that. So in an attempt to destroy Jesus' popularity among the people, the teachers of the law accused him of having power from Satan. Jesus' reply showed that their argument didn't make sense. (Beelzebub refers to Satan.)

Although God permits Satan to work in our world, God is still in control. Jesus, because he is God, has power over Satan; Jesus is able to drive out demons and end their terrible work in people's lives. One day Satan will be bound forever (Rev. 20:10)

Satan, who had controlled the kingdom of this world for thousands of years, was now being controlled and overpowered by Jesus and the kingdom of heaven. Jesus' kingdom began to come into power at Jesus' birth, grew as he resisted the desert temptations, established itself through his teachings and healings, blossomed in victory at his resurrection and at Pentecost, and will become permanent and universal at his second coming

The Demon's Invasion

Matthew 12:43-45

"When an evil spirit leaves a person, it goes into the desert, seeking rest but finding none. [44] Then it says, 'I will return to the person I came from.' So it returns and finds its former home empty, swept, and clean. [45] Then the spirit finds seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they all enter the person and live there. And so that person is worse off than before. That will be the experience of this evil generation."

Luke 11:24-26

"When an evil spirit leaves a person, it goes into the desert, searching for rest. But when it finds none, it says, 'I will return to the person I came from.' [25] So it returns and finds that its former home is all swept and clean. [26] Then the spirit finds seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they all enter the person and live there. And so that person is worse off than before."

Jesus was describing the attitude of the nation of Israel and the religious leaders in particular. Just cleaning up one's life without filling it with God leaves plenty of room for Satan to enter. The book of Ezra records how the people rid themselves of idolatry, but failed to replace it with love for God and obedience to him. Ridding our lives of sin is the first step. We must also take the second step: filling our lives with God's Word and the Holy Spirit. Unfilled and complacent people are easy targets for Satan.

Jesus was illustrating an unfortunate human tendency—our desire to reform often does not last long. In Israel's history, almost as soon as a good king would pull down idols, a bad king would set them up again. It is not enough to be emptied of evil; we must then be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish God's new purpose in our lives (see also Matthew 12:43-45; Galatians 5:22)

The Thief in the Night

Matthew 24:42-44

**So be prepared, because you don't know what day your Lord is coming. [43]
"Know this: A homeowner who knew exactly when a burglar was coming would stay alert and not permit the house to be broken into. [44] You also must be ready all the time. For the Son of Man will come when least expected.**

Jesus' purpose in telling about his return is not to stimulate predictions and calculations about the date, but to warn us to be prepared. Will you be ready? The only safe choice is to obey him today (Matthew 24:46).

The Importunate Neighbor

Luke 11:5-8

Then, teaching them more about prayer, he used this illustration: "Suppose you went to a friend's house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You would say to him, [6] 'A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat.' [7] He would call out from his bedroom, 'Don't bother me. The door is locked for the night, and we are all in bed. I can't help you this time.' [8] But I tell you this—though he won't do it as a friend, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you what you want so his reputation won't be damaged.

Persistence, or boldness, in prayer overcomes our insensitivity, not God's. To practice persistence does more to change our hearts and minds than his, and it helps us understand and express the intensity of our need. Persistence in prayer helps us recognize God's worry

The Son's Request

Matthew 7:9-11

You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? [10] Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! [11] If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.

- . The child in Jesus' example asked his father for bread and fish—good and necessary items. If the child had asked for a poisonous snake, would the wise father have granted his request? Sometimes God knows we are praying for “snakes” and does not give us what we ask for, even though we persist in our prayers. As we learn to know God better as a loving Father, we learn to ask for what is good for us, and then he grants it.**

The Unjust Judge

Luke 18:1-8

One day Jesus told his disciples a story to illustrate their need for constant prayer and to show them that they must never give up. [2] "There was a judge in a certain city," he said, "who was a godless man with great contempt for everyone. [3] A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, appealing for justice against someone who had harmed her. [4] The judge ignored her for a while, but eventually she wore him out. 'I fear neither God nor man,' he said to himself, [5] 'but this woman is driving me crazy. I'm going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!' "

[6] Then the Lord said, "Learn a lesson from this evil judge. [7] Even he rendered a just decision in the end, so don't you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who plead with him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? [8] I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when I, the Son of Man, return, how many will I find who have faith?"

To persist in prayer and not give up does not mean endless repetition or painfully long prayer sessions. Always praying means keeping our requests constantly before God as we live for him day by day, believing he will answer. When we live by faith, we are not to give up. God may delay answering, but his delays always have good reasons. As we persist in prayer we grow in character, faith, and hope.

Widows and orphans were among the most vulnerable of all God's people, and both Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles insisted that these needy people be properly cared for. See, for example, Exodus 22:22-24; Isaiah 1:17; 1 Tim. 5:3; James 1:27.

If unjust judges respond to constant pressure, how much more will a great and loving God respond to us. If we know he loves us, we can believe he will hear our cries for help.

The Pharisee and the Publican

Luke 18:9-14

Then Jesus told this story to some who had great self-confidence and scorned everyone else: [10] "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a dishonest tax collector. [11] The proud Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else, especially like that tax collector over there! For I never cheat, I don't sin, I don't commit adultery, [12] I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.' [13] "But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.' [14] I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For the proud will be humbled, but the humble will be honored."

The people who lived near Jerusalem often went to the temple to pray. The temple was the center of their worship.

The Pharisee did not go to the temple to pray to God but to announce to all within earshot how good he was. The tax collector went recognizing his sin and begging for mercy. Self-righteousness is dangerous. It leads to pride, causes a person to despise others, and prevents him or her from learning anything from God. The tax collector's prayer should be our prayer because we all need God's mercy every day. Don't let pride in your achievements cut you off from God.

PARABLES OF WORK AND WAGES

Master and Servant

Luke 17:7-10

"When a servant comes in from plowing or taking care of sheep, he doesn't just sit down and eat. [8] He must first prepare his master's meal and serve him his supper before eating his own. [9] And the servant is not even thanked, because he is merely doing what he is supposed to do. [10] In the same way, when you obey me you should say, 'We are not worthy of praise. We are servants who have simply done our duty.' "

If we have obeyed God, we have only done our duty and we should regard it as a privilege. Do you sometimes feel that you deserve extra credit for serving God? Remember, obedience is not something extra we do; it is our duty. Jesus is not rendering our service as meaningless or useless, nor is he doing away with rewards. He is attacking unwarranted self-esteem and spiritual pride.

The Servant Entrusted with Authority

Matthew 24:45-51

"Who is a faithful, sensible servant, to whom the master can give the responsibility of managing his household and feeding his family? [46] If the master returns and finds that the servant has done a good job, there will be a reward. [47] I assure you, the master will put that servant in charge of all he owns. [48] But if the servant is evil and thinks, 'My master won't be back for a while,' [49] and begins oppressing the other servants, partying, and getting drunk— [50] well, the master will return unannounced and unexpected. [51] He will tear the servant apart and banish him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus asks us to spend the time of waiting taking care of his people and doing his work here on earth, both within the church and outside it. This is the best way to prepare for Christ's return.

Knowing that Christ's return will be sudden and unexpected should motivate us always to be prepared. We are not to live irresponsibly—sitting and waiting, doing nothing; seeking self-serving pleasure; using his tarrying as an excuse not to do God's work of building his kingdom; developing a false security based on precise calculations of events; or letting our curiosity about the end times divert us from doing God's work.

"Weeping and gnashing of teeth" is a phrase used to describe despair. God's coming judgment is as certain as Jesus' return to earth.

The Waiting Servants

Luke 12:35-38

"Be dressed for service and well prepared, [36] as though you were waiting for your master to return from the wedding feast. Then you will be ready to open the door and let him in the moment he arrives and knocks. [37] There will be special favor for those who are ready and waiting for his return. I tell you, he himself will seat them, put on an apron, and serve them as they sit and eat! [38] He may come in the middle of the night or just before dawn. But whenever he comes, there will be special favor for his servants who are ready!

Jesus repeatedly said that he would leave this world but would return at some future time (see Matthew 24-25; John 14:1-3). He also said that a kingdom is being prepared for his followers. Many Greeks envisioned this as a heavenly, idealized, spiritual kingdom. Jews—like Isaiah and John, the writer of Revelation—saw it as a restored earthly kingdom.

The Laborers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

"For the Kingdom of Heaven is like the owner of an estate who went out early one morning to hire workers for his vineyard. [2] He agreed to pay the normal daily wage and sent them out to work.

[3] "At nine o'clock in the morning he was passing through the marketplace and saw some people standing around doing nothing. [4] So he hired them, telling them he would pay them whatever was right at the end of the day. [5] At noon and again around three o'clock he did the same thing. [6] At five o'clock that evening he was in town again and saw some more people standing around. He asked them, 'Why haven't you been working today?' [7] "They replied, 'Because no one hired us.' "The owner of the estate told them, 'Then go on out and join the others in my vineyard.' [8] "That evening he told the foreman to call the workers in and pay them, beginning with the last workers first. [9] When those hired at five o'clock were paid, each received a full day's wage. [10] When those hired earlier came to get their pay, they assumed they would receive more. But they, too, were paid a day's wage. [11] When they received their pay, they protested, [12] 'Those people worked only one hour, and yet you've paid them just as much as you paid us who worked all day in the scorching heat.' [13] "He answered one of them, 'Friend, I haven't been unfair! Didn't you agree to work all day for the usual wage? [14] Take it and go. I wanted to pay this last worker the same as you. [15] Is it against the law for me to do what I want with my money? Should you be angry because I am kind?' [16] "And so it is, that many who are first now will be last then; and those who are last now will be first then."

Jesus further clarified the membership rules of the kingdom of heaven—entrance is by God's grace alone. In this parable, God is the landowner, and believers are the workers. This parable speaks especially to those who feel superior because of heritage or favored position, to those who feel superior because they have spent so much time with Christ, and to new believers as reassurance of God's grace.

This parable is not about rewards but about salvation. It is a strong teaching about grace, God's generosity. We shouldn't begrudge those who turn to God in the last moments of life, because, in reality, no one deserves eternal life.

Many people we don't expect to see in the kingdom will be there. The criminal who repented as he was dying (Luke 23:40-43) will be there along with people who have believed and served God for many years. Do you resent God's gracious acceptance of the despised, the outcast, and the sinners who have turned to him for forgiveness? Are you ever jealous of what God has given to another person? Instead, focus on God's gracious benefits to you, and be thankful for what you have.

The Money in Trust or The Talents

Matthew 25:14-30

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a trip. He called together his servants and gave them money to invest for him while he was gone. [15] He gave five bags of gold to one, two bags of gold to another, and one bag of gold to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities—and then left on his trip. [16] The servant who received the five bags of gold began immediately to invest the money and soon doubled it. [17] The servant with two bags of gold also went right to work and doubled the money. [18] But the servant who received the one bag of gold dug a hole in the ground and hid the master's money for safekeeping.

[19] "After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. [20] The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of gold said, 'Sir, you gave me five bags of gold to invest, and I have doubled the amount.' [21] The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'

[22] "Next came the servant who had received the two bags of gold, with the report, 'Sir, you gave me two bags of gold to invest, and I have doubled the amount.' [23] The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'

[24] "Then the servant with the one bag of gold came and said, 'Sir, I know you are a hard man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. [25] I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth and here it is.'

[26] "But the master replied, 'You wicked and lazy servant! You think I'm a hard man, do you, harvesting crops I didn't plant and gathering crops I didn't cultivate? [27] Well, you should at least have put my money into the bank so I could have some interest. [28] Take the money from this servant and give it to the one with the ten bags of gold. [29] To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who are unfaithful, even what little they have will be taken away. [30] Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The master divided the money (talents) among his servants according to their abilities. No one received more or less than he could handle. If he failed in his assignment, his excuse could not be that he was overwhelmed. Failure could come only from laziness or hatred toward the master. The talents represent any kind of

resource we are given. God gives us time, gifts, and other resources according to our abilities, and he expects us to invest them wisely until he returns. We are responsible to use well what God has given us. The issue is not how much we have, but how well we use what we have.

Jesus is coming back—we know this is true. Does this mean we must quit our jobs in order to serve God? No, it means we are to use our time, talents, and treasures diligently in order to serve God completely in whatever we do. For a few people, this may mean changing professions. For most of us, it means doing our daily work out of love for God.

This last man was thinking only of himself. He hoped to play it safe and protect himself from his hard master, but he was judged for his self-centeredness. We must not make excuses to avoid doing what God calls us to do. If God truly is our Master, we must obey willingly. Our time, abilities, and money aren't ours in the first place—we are caretakers, not owners. When we ignore, squander, or abuse what we are given, we are rebellious and deserve to be punished.

This parable describes the consequences of two attitudes to Christ's return. The person who diligently prepares for it by investing his or her time and talent to serve God will be rewarded. The person who has no heart for the work of the kingdom will be punished. God rewards faithfulness. Those who bear no fruit for God's kingdom cannot expect to be treated the same as those who are faithful.

The Lamp and The City Set on a Hill

Matthew 5:14-16

You are the light of the world—like a city on a mountain, glowing in the night for all to see. [15] Don't hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all. [16] In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

Can you hide a city that is sitting on top of a hill? Its light at night can be seen for miles. If we live for Christ, we will glow like lights, showing others what Christ is like. We hide our light by (1) being quiet when we should speak, (2) going along with the crowd, (3) denying the light, (4) letting sin dim our light, (5) not explaining our light to others, or (6) ignoring the needs of others. Be a beacon of truth—don't shut your light off from the rest of the world.

The Body's Lamp

Luke 11:34-36

Your eye is a lamp for your body. A pure eye lets sunshine into your soul. But an evil eye shuts out the light and plunges you into darkness. [35] Make sure that the light you think you have is not really darkness. [36] If you are filled with light, with no dark corners, then your whole life will be radiant, as though a floodlight is shining on you."

The lamp is Christ; the eye represents spiritual understanding and insight. Evil desires make the eye less sensitive and blot out the light of Christ's presence. If you have a hard time seeing God at work in the world and in your life, check your vision. Are any sinful desires blinding you to Christ

The Discarded Salt

Matthew 5:13

"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it useful again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

If a seasoning has no flavor, it has no value. If Christians make no effort to affect the world around them, they are of little value to God. If we are too much like the world, we are worthless. Christians should not blend in with everyone else. Instead, we should affect others positively, just as seasoning brings out the best flavor in food.

The Patch and the Wineskins

Luke 5:36-39

Then Jesus gave them this illustration: "No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and uses it to patch an old garment. For then the new garment would be torn, and the patch wouldn't even match the old garment. [37] And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. The new wine would burst the old skins, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. [38] New wine must be put into new wineskins. [39] But no one who drinks the old wine seems to want the fresh and the new. 'The old is better,' they say."

"Wineskins" were goatskins sewed together at the edges to form watertight bags. Because new wine expands as it ages, it had to be put in new, pliable wineskins. A used skin, having become more rigid, would burst and spill the wine. Like old wineskins, the Pharisees were too rigid to accept Jesus, who could not be contained in their traditions or rules. Christianity required new approaches, new traditions, new structures. Our church programs and ministries should not be so structured that they have no room for a fresh touch of the Spirit, a new method, or a new idea. We, too, must be careful that our hearts do not become so rigid that they prevent us from accepting the new way of thinking that Christ brings. We need to keep our hearts pliable so we can accept Jesus' life-changing message.

The Householder's Treasure

Matthew 13:52

Then he added, "Every teacher of religious law who has become a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a person who brings out of the storehouse the new teachings as well as the old."

Anyone who understands God's real purpose in the law as revealed in the Old Testament has a real treasure. The Old Testament points the way to Jesus, the Messiah. Jesus always upheld its authority and relevance. But there is a double benefit to those who understand Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of heaven. This was a new treasure that Jesus was revealing. Both the old and new teaching give practical guidelines for faith and for living in the world. The religious leaders, however, were trapped in the old and blind to the new. They were looking for a future kingdom preceded by judgment. Jesus, however, taught that the kingdom was now and the judgment was future. The religious leaders were looking for a physical and temporal kingdom (via military rebellion and physical rule), but they were blind to the spiritual significance of the kingdom that Christ brought

The Dishonest Steward

Matthew 16:1-12

One day the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus' claims by asking him to show them a miraculous sign from heaven.

[2] He replied, "You know the saying, 'Red sky at night means fair weather tomorrow, [3] red sky in the morning means foul weather all day.' You are good at reading the weather signs in the sky, but you can't read the obvious signs of the times! [4] Only an evil, faithless generation would ask for a miraculous sign, but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah." Then Jesus left them and went away.

[5] Later, after they crossed to the other side of the lake, the disciples discovered they had forgotten to bring any food. [6] "Watch out!" Jesus warned them. "Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

[7] They decided he was saying this because they hadn't brought any bread. [8] Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he said, "You have so little faith! Why are you worried about having no food? [9] Won't you ever understand? Don't you remember the five thousand I fed with five loaves, and the baskets of food that were left over? [10] Don't you remember the four thousand I fed with seven loaves, with baskets of food left over? [11] How could you even think I was talking about food? So again I say, 'Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' "

[12] Then at last they understood that he wasn't speaking about yeast or bread but about the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Our use of money is a good test of the lordship of Christ. (1) Let us use our resources wisely because they belong to God, and not to us. (2) Money can be used for good or evil; let us use ours for good. (3) Money has a lot of power, so we must use it carefully and thoughtfully. (4) We must use our material goods in a way that will foster faith and obedience (see Luke 12:33-34).

We are to make wise use of the financial opportunities we have, not to earn heaven, but so that heaven ("eternal dwellings") will be a welcome experience for those we help. If we use our money to help those in need or to help others find Christ, our earthly investment will bring eternal benefit. When we obey God's will, the unselfish use of possessions will follow.

Our integrity often meets its match in money matters. God calls us to be honest even in small details we could easily rationalize away. Heaven's riches are far more valuable than earthly wealth. But if we are not trustworthy with our money here (no matter how much or little we have), we will be unfit to handle the vast riches of God's kingdom. Don't let your integrity slip in small matters, and it will not fail you in crucial decisions either

The Defendant

Luke 12:58

If you are on the way to court and you meet your accuser, try to settle the matter before it reaches the judge, or you may be sentenced and handed over to an officer and thrown in jail.

In Jesus' day, someone who couldn't pay a debt was thrown into prison until the debt was paid. Unless someone came to pay the debt for the prisoner, he or she would probably die there. It is practical advice to resolve our differences with our enemies before their anger causes more trouble (Proverbs 25:8-10). You may not get into a disagreement that takes you to court, but even small conflicts mend more easily if you try to make peace right away. In a broader sense, these verses advise us to get things right with our brothers and sisters before we have to stand before God.

The Unforgiving Official

Matthew 18:23-35

"For this reason, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. [24] In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. [25] He couldn't pay, so the king ordered that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt. [26] But the man fell down before the king and begged him, 'Oh, sir, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.' [27] Then the king was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.

[28] "But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. [29] His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient and I will pay it,' he pleaded. [30] But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and jailed until the debt could be paid in full.

[31] "When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him what had happened. [32] Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. [33] Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' [34] Then the angry king sent the man to prison until he had paid every penny.

[35] "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters in your heart."

In Bible times, serious consequences awaited those who could not pay their debts. A person lending money could seize the borrower who couldn't pay and force him or his family to work until the debt was paid. The debtor could also be thrown into prison, or his family could be sold into slavery to help pay off the debt. It was hoped that the debtor, while in prison, would sell off his landholdings or that relatives would pay the debt. If not, the debtor could remain in prison for life

Because God has forgiven all our sins, we should not withhold forgiveness from others. Realizing how completely Christ has forgiven us should produce a free and generous attitude of forgiveness toward others. When we don't forgive others, we are setting ourselves outside and above Christ's law of lov

The Rich Fool

Luke 12:16-21

And he gave an illustration: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. [17] In fact, his barns were full to overflowing. [18] So he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store everything. [19] And I'll sit back and say to myself, My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!'

[20] "But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get it all?'

[21] "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."

The rich man in Jesus' story died before he could begin to use what was stored in his big barns. Planning for retirement—preparing for life before death—is wise, but neglecting life after death is disastrous. If you accumulate wealth only to enrich yourself, with no concern for helping others, you will enter eternity empty-handed.

12:18-20 Why do you save money? To retire? To buy more expensive cars or toys? To be secure? Jesus challenges us to think beyond earthbound goals and to use what we have been given for God's kingdom. Faith, service, and obedience are the way to become rich toward God.

The Wicked Vinedressers

Matthew 21:33-41

"Now listen to this story. A certain landowner planted a vineyard, built a wall around it, dug a pit for pressing out the grape juice, and built a lookout tower. Then he leased the vineyard to tenant farmers and moved to another country. [34] At the time of the grape harvest he sent his servants to collect his share of the crop. [35] But the farmers grabbed his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. [36] So the landowner sent a larger group of his servants to collect for him, but the results were the same.

[37] "Finally, the owner sent his son, thinking, 'Surely they will respect my son.'

[38] "But when the farmers saw his son coming, they said to one another, 'Here comes the heir to this estate. Come on, let's kill him and get the estate for ourselves!' [39] So they grabbed him, took him out of the vineyard, and murdered him.

[40] "When the owner of the vineyard returns," Jesus asked, "what do you think he will do to those farmers?"

[41] The religious leaders replied, "He will put the wicked men to a horrible death and lease the vineyard to others who will give him his share of the crop after each harvest."

The main elements in this parable are (1) the landowner—God, (2) the vineyard— Israel, (3) the tenants—the Jewish religious leaders, (4) the landowner's servants—the prophets and priests who remained faithful to God and preached to Israel, (5) the son—Jesus (Matthew 21:38), and (6) the other tenants—the Gentiles. Jesus was exposing the religious leaders' murderous plot (Matthew 21:45).

In trying to reach us with his love, God finally sent his own Son. Jesus' perfect life, his words of truth, and his sacrifice of love are meant to cause us to listen to him and to follow him as Lord. If we ignore God's gracious gift of his Son, we reject God himself.

The Two Builders

Matthew 7:24-27

"Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys me is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. [25] Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse, because it is built on rock. [26] But anyone who hears my teaching and ignores it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. [27] When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will fall with a mighty crash."

To build "on the rock" means to be a hearing, responding disciple, not a phony, superficial one. Practicing obedience becomes the solid foundation to weather the storms of life. See James 1:22-27 for more on putting into practice what we hear.

Like a house of cards, the fool's life crumbles. Most people do not deliberately seek to build on a false or inferior foundation; instead, they just don't think about their life's purpose. Many people are headed for destruction, not out of stubbornness but out of thoughtlessness. Part of our responsibility as believers is to help others stop and think about where their lives are headed and to point out the consequences of ignoring Christ's message.

The Two Debtors

Luke 7:41-43

Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people—five hundred pieces of silver to one and fifty pieces to the other. [42] But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?"

[43] Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt." "That's right," Jesus said.

The Hidden Treasure

Matthew 13:44

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field—and to get the treasure, too!

The kingdom of heaven is more valuable than anything else we can have, and a person must be willing to give up everything to obtain it. The man who discovered the treasure in the field stumbled upon it by accident but knew its value when he found it. The merchant was earnestly searching for the pearl of great value, and, when he found it, he sold everything he had to purchase it.

The Pearl of Great Price

Matthew 13:45

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a pearl merchant on the lookout for choice pearls.

The kingdom of heaven is more valuable than anything else we can have, and a person must be willing to give up everything to obtain it. The man who discovered the treasure in the field stumbled upon it by accident but knew its value when he found it. The merchant was earnestly searching for the pearl of great value, and, when he found it, he sold everything he had to purchase it.

LOST AND FOUND

FATHER AND SON

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: "Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?"

[26] Jesus replied, "What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?"

[27] The man answered, " 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' "

[28] "Right!" Jesus told him. "Do this and you will live!"

[29] The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

[30] Jesus replied with an illustration: "A Jewish man was traveling on a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes and money, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road.

[31] "By chance a Jewish priest came along; but when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. [32] A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.

[33] "Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt deep pity. [34] Kneeling beside him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with medicine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. [35] The next day he handed the innkeeper two pieces of silver and told him to take care of the man. 'If his bill runs higher than that,' he said, 'I'll pay the difference the next time I am here.'

[36] "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked.

[37] The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy."

Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."

This expert in the law was quoting Deut. 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. He correctly understood that the law demanded total devotion to God and love for one's neighbor. Jesus talked more about these laws elsewhere (see Matthew 19:16-22 and Mark 10:17-22).

The law expert treated the wounded man as a topic for discussion; the robbers, as an object to exploit; the priest, as a problem to avoid; and the Levite, as an object of curiosity. Only the Samaritan treated him as a person to love.

From the parable we learn three principles about loving our neighbor: (1) lack of love is often easy to justify, even though it is never right; (2) our neighbor is anyone of any race, creed, or social background who is in need; and (3) love means acting to meet the

person's need. Wherever you live, there are needy people close by. There is no good reason for refusing to help.

There was deep hatred between Jews and Samaritans. The Jews saw themselves as pure descendants of Abraham, while the Samaritans were a mixed race produced when Jews from the northern kingdom intermarried with other peoples after Israel's exile. To this law expert, the person least likely to act correctly would be the Samaritan. In fact, he could not bear to say "Samaritan" in answer to Jesus' question. This "expert's" attitude betrayed his lack of the very thing that he had earlier said the law commanded—love.

The Prodigal Son or The Loving Father

Luke 5:11-32

And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus.

[12] In one of the villages, Jesus met a man with an advanced case of leprosy. When the man saw Jesus, he fell to the ground, face down in the dust, begging to be healed. "Lord," he said, "if you want to, you can make me well again."

[13] Jesus reached out and touched the man. "I want to," he said. "Be healed!" And instantly the leprosy disappeared. [14] Then Jesus instructed him not to tell anyone what had happened. He said, "Go right to the priest and let him examine you. Take along the offering required in the law of Moses for those who have been healed of leprosy, so everyone will have proof of your healing." [15] Yet despite Jesus' instructions, the report of his power spread even faster, and vast crowds came to hear him preach and to be healed of their diseases. [16] But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.

[17] One day while Jesus was teaching, some Pharisees and teachers of religious law were sitting nearby. (It seemed that these men showed up from every village in all Galilee and Judea, as well as from Jerusalem.) And the Lord's healing power was strongly with Jesus. [18] Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a sleeping mat. They tried to push through the crowd to Jesus, [19] but they couldn't reach him. So they went up to the roof, took off some tiles, and lowered the sick man down into the crowd, still on his mat, right in front of Jesus. [20] Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

[21] "Who does this man think he is?" the Pharisees and teachers of religious law said to each other. "This is blasphemy! Who but God can forgive sins?"

[22] Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he asked them, "Why do you think this is blasphemy? [23] Is it easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Get up and walk'? [24] I will prove that I, the Son of Man, have the authority on earth to forgive sins." Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, "Stand up, take your mat, and go on home, because you are healed!"

[25] And immediately, as everyone watched, the man jumped to his feet, picked up his mat, and went home praising God. [26] Everyone was gripped with great wonder and awe. And they praised God, saying over and over again, "We have seen amazing things today."

[27] Later, as Jesus left the town, he saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at his tax-collection booth. "Come, be my disciple!" Jesus said to him. [28] So Levi got up, left everything, and followed him.

[29] Soon Levi held a banquet in his home with Jesus as the guest of honor. Many of Levi's fellow tax collectors and other guests were there. [30] But the Pharisees and their teachers of religious law complained bitterly to Jesus' disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with such scum?"

[31] Jesus answered them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do.

[32] I have come to call sinners to turn from their sins, not to spend my time with

those who think they are already good enough."

The younger son's share of the estate would have been one-third, with the older son receiving two-thirds (Deut. 21:17). In most cases he would have received this at his father's death, although fathers sometimes chose to divide up their inheritance early and retire from managing their estates. What is unusual here is that the younger one initiated the division of the estate. This showed arrogant disregard for his father's authority as head of the family.

According to Moses' law, pigs were unclean animals (Leviticus 11:2-8; Deut. 14:8). This meant that pigs could not be eaten or used for sacrifices. To protect themselves from defilement, Jews would not even touch pigs. For a Jew to stoop to feeding pigs was a great humiliation, and for this young man to eat food that the pigs had touched was to be degraded beyond belief. The younger son had truly sunk to the depths

The younger son, like many who are rebellious and immature, wanted to be free to live as he pleased, and he had to hit bottom before he came to his senses. It often takes great sorrow and tragedy to cause people to look to the only One who can help them. Are you trying to live life your own way, selfishly pushing aside any responsibility or commitment that gets in your way? Stop and look before you hit bottom. You will save yourself and your family much grief.

In the two preceding stories, the seeker actively looked for the coin and the sheep, which could not return by themselves. In this story, the father watched and waited. He was dealing with a human being with a will of his own, but he was ready to greet his son if he returned. In the same way, God's love is constant and patient and welcoming. He will search for us and give us opportunities to respond, but he will not force us to come to him. Like the father in this story, God waits patiently for us to come to our senses

The sheep was lost because it may have foolishly wandered away (Luke 15:4); the coin was lost through no fault of its own (Luke 15:8); and the son left out of selfishness (Luke 15:12). God's great love reaches out and finds sinners no matter why or how they got lost

It was hard for the older brother to accept his younger brother when he returned, and it is just as difficult to accept "younger brothers" today. People who repent after leading notoriously sinful lives are often held in suspicion; churches are sometimes unwilling to admit them to membership. Instead, we should rejoice like the angels in heaven when an unbeliever repents and turns to God. Like the father, accept repentant sinners wholeheartedly and give them the support and encouragement that they need to grow in Christ.

In the story of the lost son, the father's response is contrasted with the older brother's. The father forgave because he was filled with love. The son refused to forgive because he was bitter about the injustice of it all. His resentment rendered him just as lost to the father's love as his younger brother had been. Don't let anything keep you from forgiving others. If you are refusing to forgive people, you are missing a wonderful opportunity to experience joy and share it with others. Make your joy grow: forgive somebody who has hurt you.

The Two Sons The Apprentice Son and The Slave and Son

Matthew 21:28-32

"But what do you think about this? A man with two sons told the older boy, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' [29] The son answered, 'No, I won't go,' but later he changed his mind and went anyway. [30] Then the father told the other son, 'You go,' and he said, 'Yes, sir, I will.' But he didn't go. [31] Which of the two was obeying his father?"

They replied, "The first, of course."

Then Jesus explained his meaning: "I assure you, corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do. [32] For John the Baptist came and showed you the way to life, and you didn't believe him, while tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even when you saw this happening, you refused to turn from your sins and believe him."

The son who said he would obey and then didn't represented the nation of Israel in Jesus' day. They said they wanted to do God's will, but they constantly disobeyed. They were phony, just going through the motions. It is dangerous to pretend to obey God when our hearts are far from him because God knows our true intentions. Our actions must match our words.

The Lost Coin

Luke 15:8-10

"Or suppose a woman has ten valuable silver coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and look in every corner of the house and sweep every nook and cranny until she finds it? [9] And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her because she has found her lost coin. [10] In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents."

Palestinian women received ten silver coins as a wedding gift. Besides their monetary value, these coins held sentimental value like that of a wedding ring, and to lose one would be extremely distressing. Just as a woman would rejoice at finding her lost coin or ring, so the angels would rejoice over a repentant sinner. Each individual is precious to God. He grieves over every loss and rejoices whenever one of his children is found and brought into the kingdom. Perhaps we would have more joy in our churches if we shared Jesus' love and concern for the lost.

The Lost Sheep

Luke 15:4-7

"If you had one hundred sheep, and one of them strayed away and was lost in the wilderness, wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine others to go and search for the lost one until you found it? [5] And then you would joyfully carry it home on your shoulders. [6] When you arrived, you would call together your friends and neighbors to rejoice with you because your lost sheep was found. [7] In the same way, heaven will be happier over one lost sinner who returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!

It may seem foolish for the shepherd to leave 99 sheep to go search for just one. But the shepherd knew that the 99 would be safe in the sheepfold, whereas the lost sheep was in danger. Because each sheep was of high value, the shepherd knew that it was worthwhile to search diligently for the lost one. God's love for each individual is so great that he seeks each one out and rejoices when he or she is "found." Jesus associated with sinners because he wanted to bring the lost sheep—people considered beyond hope—the gospel of God's kingdom. Before you were a believer, God sought you; and his love is still seeking those who are yet lost.

We may be able to understand a God who would forgive sinners who come to him for mercy. But a God who tenderly searches for sinners and then joyfully forgives them must possess an extraordinary love! This is the kind of love that prompted Jesus to come to earth to search for lost people and save them. This is the kind of extraordinary love that God has for you. If you feel far from God, don't despair. He is searching for you.

The Shepherd The Thief and The Doorkeeper

John 10:1-18

"I assure you, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! [2] For a shepherd enters through the gate. [3] The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

[4] After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they recognize his voice. [5] They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't recognize his voice."

[6] Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn't understand what he meant, [7] so he explained it to them. "I assure you, I am the gate for the sheep," he said.

[8] "All others who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. [9] Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. Wherever they go, they will find green pastures. [10] The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.

[11] "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. [12] A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will leave the sheep because they aren't his and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. [13] The hired hand runs away because he is merely hired and has no real concern for the sheep.

[14] "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, [15] just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. [16] I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice; and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

[17] "The Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may have it back again. [18] No one can take my life from me. I lay down my life voluntarily. For I have the right to lay it down when I want to and also the power to take it again. For my Father has given me this command."

At night, sheep were often gathered into a sheep pen to protect them from thieves, weather, or wild animals. The sheep pens were caves, sheds, or open areas surrounded by walls made of stones or branches. The shepherd often slept in the pen to protect the sheep. Just as a shepherd cares for his sheep, Jesus, the good shepherd, cares for his flock (those who follow him). The prophet Ezekiel, in predicting the coming of the Messiah, called him a shepherd (Ezekiel 34:23).

In the sheep pen, the shepherd functioned as a gate, letting the sheep in and protecting them. Jesus is the gate to God's salvation for us. He offers access to

safety and security. Christ is our protector. Some people resent that Jesus is the gate, the only way of access to God. But Jesus is God's Son—why should we seek any other way or want to customize a different approach to God? (See also the note on John 14:6.

In contrast to the thief who takes life, Jesus gives life. The life he gives right now is abundantly richer and fuller. It is eternal, yet it begins immediately. Life in Christ is lived on a higher plane because of his overflowing forgiveness, love, and guidance. Have you taken Christ's offer of life

A hired hand tends the sheep for money, while the shepherd does it for love. The shepherd owns the sheep and is committed to them. Jesus is not merely doing a job; he is committed to love us and even lay down his life for us. False teachers and false prophets do not have this commitment

“other sheep” were non-Jews. Jesus came to save Gentiles as well as Jews. This is an insight into his worldwide mission—to die for the sins of the world. People tend to want to restrict God's blessings to their own group, but Jesus refuses to be limited by the fences we build.

Jesus' death and resurrection, as part of God's plan for the salvation of the world, were under God's full control. No one could kill Jesus without his consent.

The Doctor and the Sick

Matthew 9:12

When he heard this, Jesus replied, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do."

The Pharisees constantly tried to trap Jesus, and they thought his association with these “lowlifes” was the perfect opportunity. They were more concerned with their own appearance of holiness than with helping people, with criticism than encouragement, with outward respectability than practical help. But God is concerned for all people, including the sinful and hurting ones. The Christian life is not a popularity contest! Following Jesus’ example, we should share the gospel with the poor, immoral, lonely, and outcast, not just the rich, moral, popular, and powerful.

The Sheep and the Goats

Matthew 25:31-46

"But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. [32] All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. [33] He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. [34] Then the King will say to those on the right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. [35] For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. [36] I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.'

[37] "Then these righteous ones will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? [38] Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? [39] When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?' [40] And the King will tell them, 'I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'

[41] "Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his demons! [42] For I was hungry, and you didn't feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn't give me anything to drink. [43] I was a stranger, and you didn't invite me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me no clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me.'

[44] "Then they will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?' [45] And he will answer, 'I assure you, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.' [46] And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life."

God will separate his obedient followers from pretenders and unbelievers. The real evidence of our belief is the way we act. To treat all persons we encounter as if they are Jesus is no easy task. What we do for others demonstrates what we really think about Jesus' words to us—feed the hungry, give the homeless a place to stay, look after the sick. How well do your actions separate you from pretenders and unbelievers?

Jesus used sheep and goats to picture the division between believers and unbelievers. Sheep and goats often grazed together but were separated when it came time to shear the sheep. Ezekiel 34:17-24 also refers to the separation of sheep and goats.

This parable describes acts of mercy we all can do every day. These acts do not depend on wealth, ability, or intelligence; they are simple acts freely given and freely received. We have no excuse to neglect those who have deep needs, and we cannot hand over this responsibility to the church or government. Jesus demands our personal involvement in caring for others' needs (Isaiah 58:7).

There has been much discussion about the identity of the "brothers." Some have said they

are the Jews; others say they are all Christians; still others say they are suffering people everywhere. Such a debate is much like the lawyer's earlier question to Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). The point of this parable is not the who, but the what—the importance of serving where service is needed. The focus of this parable is that we should love every person and serve anyone we can. Such love for others glorifies God by reflecting our love for him.

Eternal punishment takes place in hell (the lake of fire, or Gehenna), the place of punishment after death for all those who refuse to repent. In the Bible, three words are used in connection with eternal punishment.

(1) Sheol, or "the grave," is used in the Old Testament to mean the place of the dead, generally thought to be under the earth. (See Job 24:19; Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 38:10.)

(2) Hades is the Greek word for the underworld, the realm of the dead. It is the word used in the New Testament for Sheol. (See Matthew 16:18; Rev. 1:18; Rev. 20:13-14.)

(3) Gehenna, or hell, was named after the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem where children were sacrificed by fire to the pagan gods (see 2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chron. 28:3). This is the place of eternal fire (Matthew 5:22; Matthew 10:28; Mark 9:43; Luke 12:5; James 3:6; Rev. 19:20) prepared for the devil, his angels, and all those who do not believe in God (Matthew 25:46; Rev. 20:9-10). This is the final and eternal state of the wicked after the resurrection and the last judgment.

When Jesus warns against unbelief, he is trying to save us from agonizing punishment.

WEDDINGS AND FEASTS

The Children in the Marketplace

Matthew 11:16-19

"How shall I describe this generation? These people are like a group of children playing a game in the public square. They complain to their friends, [17] 'We played wedding songs, and you weren't happy, so we played funeral songs, but you weren't sad.' [18] For John the Baptist didn't drink wine and he often fasted, and you say, 'He's demon possessed.' [19] And I, the Son of Man, feast and drink, and you say, 'He's a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of the worst sort of sinners!' But wisdom is shown to be right by what results from it."

Jesus condemned the attitude of his generation. No matter what he said or did, they took the opposite view. They were cynical and skeptical because he challenged their comfortable, secure, and self-centered lives. Too often we justify our inconsistencies because listening to God may require us to change the way we live

The Arrogant Guest

Luke 14:7-11

When Jesus noticed that all who had come to the dinner were trying to sit near the head of the table, he gave them this advice: [8] "If you are invited to a wedding feast, don't always head for the best seat. What if someone more respected than you has also been invited? [9] The host will say, 'Let this person sit here instead.' Then you will be embarrassed and will have to take whatever seat is left at the foot of the table! [10] "Do this instead—sit at the foot of the table. Then when your host sees you, he will come and say, 'Friend, we have a better place than this for you!' Then you will be honored in front of all the other guests. [11] For the proud will be humbled, but the humble will be honored."

Jesus advised people not to rush for the best places at a feast. People today are just as eager to raise their social status, whether by being with the right people, dressing for success, or driving the right car. Whom do you try to impress? Rather than aiming for prestige, look for a place where you can serve. If God wants you to serve on a wider scale, he will invite you to take a higher place.

Jesus taught two lessons here. First, he spoke to the guests, telling them not to seek places of honor. Service is more important in God's kingdom than status. Second, he told the host not to be exclusive about whom he invites. God opens his kingdom to everyone.

How can we humble ourselves? Some people try to give the appearance of humility in order to manipulate others. Others think that humility means putting themselves down. Truly humble people compare themselves only with Christ, realize their sinfulness, and understand their limitations. On the other hand, they also recognize their gifts and strengths and are willing to use them as Christ directs. Humility is not self-degradation; it is realistic assessment and commitment to serve.

The Bridegroom's Attendants

Matthew 9:15

Jesus responded, "Should the wedding guests mourn while celebrating with the groom? Someday he will be taken from them, and then they will fast.

Jesus knew his death was coming. After that time, fasting would be in order. Although he was fully human, Jesus knew he was God and knew why he had come—to die for the sins of the world.

The Bride's Girlfriends or Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

"The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. [2] Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. [3] The five who were foolish took no oil for their lamps, [4] but the other five were wise enough to take along extra oil. [5] When the bridegroom was delayed, they all lay down and slept. [6] At midnight they were roused by the shout, 'Look, the bridegroom is coming! Come out and welcome him!'

[7] "All the bridesmaids got up and prepared their lamps. [8] Then the five foolish ones asked the others, 'Please give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out.' [9] But the others replied, 'We don't have enough for all of us. Go to a shop and buy some for yourselves.'

[10] "But while they were gone to buy oil, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was locked. [11] Later, when the other five bridesmaids returned, they stood outside, calling, 'Sir, open the door for us!' [12] But he called back, 'I don't know you!'

[13] "So stay awake and be prepared, because you do not know the day or hour of my return.

Jesus told the following parables to clarify further what it means to be ready for his return and how to live until he comes. In the story of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), we are taught that every person is responsible for his or her own spiritual condition. The story of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) shows the necessity of using well what God has entrusted to us. The parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46) stresses the importance of serving others in need. No parable by itself completely describes our preparation. Instead, each paints one part of the whole picture.

This parable is about a wedding. On the wedding day the bridegroom went to the bride's house for the ceremony; then the bride and groom, along with a great procession, returned to the groom's house where a feast took place, often lasting a full week.

These ten virgins were waiting to join the procession, and they hoped to take part in the wedding banquet. But when the groom didn't come at the expected time, five of them were out of lamp oil. By the time they had purchased extra oil, it was too late to join the feast.

When Jesus returns to take his people to heaven, we must be ready. Spiritual preparation cannot be bought or borrowed at the last minute. Our relationship with God must be our own.

The Tower Builder and The Warring King

Luke 14:28-32

"But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first getting estimates and then checking to see if there is enough money to pay the bills? [29] Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of funds. And then how everyone would laugh at you! [30] They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and ran out of money before it was finished!'

[31] "Or what king would ever dream of going to war without first sitting down with his counselors and discussing whether his army of ten thousand is strong enough to defeat the twenty thousand soldiers who are marching against him? [32] If he is not able, then while the enemy is still far away, he will send a delegation to discuss terms of peace.

When a builder doesn't count the cost or estimates it inaccurately, his building may be left half completed. Will your Christian life be only half built and then abandoned because you did not count the cost of commitment to Jesus? What are those costs? Christians may face loss of social status or wealth. They may have to give up control over their money, their time, or their career. They may be hated, separated from their family, and even put to death. Following Christ does not mean a trouble-free life. We must carefully count the cost of becoming Christ's disciples so that we will know what we are getting into and won't be tempted later to turn back

The Wedding Feast or The Unwilling Guests

Matthew 22:1-10

Jesus told them several other stories to illustrate the Kingdom. He said, [2] "The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a great wedding feast for his son. [3] Many guests were invited, and when the banquet was ready, he sent his servants to notify everyone that it was time to come. But they all refused! [4] So he sent other servants to tell them, 'The feast has been prepared, and choice meats have been cooked. Everything is ready. Hurry!' [5] But the guests he had invited ignored them and went about their business, one to his farm, another to his store.

[6] Others seized his messengers and treated them shamefully, even killing some of them.

[7] "Then the king became furious. He sent out his army to destroy the murderers and burn their city. [8] And he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, and the guests I invited aren't worthy of the honor. [9] Now go out to the street corners and invite everyone you see.'

[10] "So the servants brought in everyone they could find, good and bad alike, and the banquet hall was filled with guests.

In this culture, two invitations were expected when banquets were given. The first asked the guests to attend; the second announced that all was ready. In this story the king invited his guests three times—and each time they rejected his invitation. God wants us to join him at his banquet, which will last for eternity. That's why he sends us invitations again and again. Have you accepted his invitation?

The Wedding Garment

Matthew 22:11-14

But when the king came in to meet the guests, he noticed a man who wasn't wearing the proper clothes for a wedding. [12] 'Friend,' he asked, 'how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?' And the man had no reply. [13] Then the king said to his aides, 'Bind him hand and foot and throw him out into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.' [14] For many are called, but few are chosen."

It was customary for wedding guests to be given garments to wear to the banquet. It was unthinkable to refuse to wear these garments. That would insult the host, who could only assume that the guest was arrogant and thought he didn't need these garments, or that he did not want to take part in the wedding celebration. The wedding clothes picture the righteousness needed to enter God's kingdom—the total acceptance in God's eyes that Christ gives every believer. Christ has provided this garment of righteousness for everyone, but each person must choose to put it on in order to enter the King's banquet (eternal life). There is an open invitation, but we must be ready. For more on the imagery of clothes of righteousness and salvation, see Psalm 132:16; Isaiah 61:10; Zech. 3:3-5; Rev. 3:4-5; Rev. 19:7-8.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31

Jesus said, "There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed and who lived each day in luxury. [20] At his door lay a diseased beggar named Lazarus. [21] As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man's table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores. [22] Finally, the beggar died and was carried by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, [23] and his soul went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Lazarus in the far distance with Abraham. [24] "The rich man shouted, 'Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in anguish in these flames.' [25] "But Abraham said to him, 'Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish. [26] And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. Anyone who wanted to cross over to you from here is stopped at its edge, and no one there can cross over to us.'

[27] "Then the rich man said, 'Please, Father Abraham, send him to my father's home. [28] For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them about this place of torment so they won't have to come here when they die.' [29] "But Abraham said, 'Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read their writings anytime they want to.' [30] "The rich man replied, 'No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will turn from their sins.' 31] "But Abraham said, 'If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even if someone rises from the dead.' "

The Pharisees considered wealth to be a proof of a person's righteousness. Jesus startled them with this story where a diseased beggar is rewarded and a rich man is punished. The rich man did not go to hell because of his wealth but because he was selfish, refusing to feed Lazarus, take him in, or care for him. The rich man was hardhearted in spite of his great blessings. The amount of money we have is not as important as the way we use it. What is your attitude toward your money and possessions? Do you hoard them selfishly, or do you use them to help others?

16:20 This Lazarus should not be confused with the Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead in John 11.

16:29-31 The rich man thought that his five brothers would surely believe a messenger who had been raised from the dead. But Jesus said that if they did not believe Moses and the prophets, who spoke constantly of the duty to care for the poor, not even a resurrection would convince them. Notice the irony in Jesus' statement; on his way to Jerusalem to die, he was fully aware that even when he had risen from the dead, most of the religious leaders would not accept him. They were set in their ways, and neither Scripture nor God's Son himself would shake them loose.

The Bible says in Roman 10:9-10,13 how to come to Christ as our Saviour and Lord.

Romans 10:9-10

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine

heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. [10] For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Romans 10:13

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Please pray to receive Christ:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. I ask you to come into my heart, forgive me of my sins and save me now.

I pray in Jesus name.

Amen.