

The Parables of Jesus

Ps 78:2

2 I will open my mouth in parables,
I will utter hidden things,
things from of old —

13 Lessons by

Mark 4:10-12 **Jim Wilsford**

10 When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. 11 He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables 12 so that,

"they may be ever seeing
but never perceiving,

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otherwise they might turn

and be forgiven!"

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The Parables of Jesus Christ

1. Introduction to the Parables of Jesus Christ

The parables of Jesus are one of his most often used teaching methods. In fact, in the entire Bible there are only four instances of parables outside the teaching of Christ. In the Old Testament, there are two examples of parables, both in 2 Samuel: the parable of the ewe-lamb told by Nathan in 2 Samuel 12:1-9, and the parable of the woman of Tekoah in 2 Samuel 14:1-13. In the New Testament, the Greek word for parable is found outside the teachings of Christ only in Hebrews 9:9 and 11:19. In Hebrews, the word for parable is translated *figurative (ly)* in the NKJV and *illustration* and *symbolic* in the NIV.

Definitions

Parables are generally included in those symbolic uses of language that extend a metaphor to its many parts. These include parables, allegories, and fables. The parable, however, is more condensed than the allegory; for in a parable a single principle comes to bear, and a single moral becomes apparent. In contrast to the fable that bestows human abilities to animals and objects, the parable is true to life in all of its corresponding parts. The story of a parable may be fictitious, but its elements are true to life.

It is interesting that the historical roots of the word *parable* are very similar to those of the word *devil*. In ancient Greek, the word for parable is *paraballein*, which meant to compare but came from the root words *para* + *ballein*, to throw more at. *Devil*, on the other hand, came from the ancient *diaballein*, to slander, from the root words *dia* + *ballein*, to throw across. Therefore, *parballein* became *parable*, and *diaballein* became *diabolos* in Greek, *diabolus* in Latin, *dEofol* in Old English, *devel* in Middle English, and *devil* in modern English.

Apparently, while the devil was throwing slander, Christ was throwing spiritual truths by comparisons to common and everyday understandings. One, the devil, was a deceiver; the other, the Christ, was a revealer of truth and light.

W. E. Vine summarizes the New Testament meaning and use of the word parable:

1. *parabole* NT:3850 literally denotes "a placing beside" (akin to *paraballo*, "to throw" or "lay beside, to compare"). It signifies "a placing of one thing beside another" with a view to comparison (some consider that the thought of comparison is not necessarily contained in the word). . . . It is the lesson that is of value; the hearer must catch the analogy if he is to be instructed (this is true also of a proverb). Such a narrative or saying, dealing with earthly things with a spiritual meaning, is distinct from a fable, which attributes to things what does not belong to them in nature. . . .

Two dangers are to be avoided in seeking to interpret the parables in Scripture: that of ignoring the important features and that of trying to make all the details mean something. . . . (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

Peter forever separated the meaning of parables from fables in 2 Peter 1:16-17: "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty." NKJV.

The Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God

The parables in Matthews' gospel refer to the kingdom of heaven, and the parables in Luke and the other gospel writers refer to the kingdom of God. A close review of the scriptures

illustrates that these phrases refer to the very same kingdom. In Matt 4:17, Matthew wrote of Jesus after he was baptized, "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'" Mark records this same event in Mark 1:14-15, using the kingdom of God, "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'" Matthew and Luke use the two different phrases in recording the beatitudes. Matthew quoted Jesus in Matt 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Luke used the kingdom of God phrase in Luke 6:20, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." In the account of the parable of the mustard seed, Matthew used the kingdom of heaven and Mark used the kingdom of God. In Matt 13:31-32, Matthew recorded Christ as saying, "He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field.'" But Mark recorded in Mark 4:30-32, "Again he said, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground.'"

Since both phrases clearly refer to the same kingdom, why did the gospel writers make the difference? Since Matthew wrote his gospel to the Jews, he may have chosen to use the phrase kingdom of heaven in order to reach the Jews in a non-prejudicial way. The Jews were reluctant to use the name of God out of reverence. The Jews also expected the Messiah to reestablish David's kingdom and saw the kingdom of God as the continuance of the Old Testament, earthly, Jewish kingdom. Certainly, a gospel writer would want to avoid this misconception. There is no reason to think that the phrases refer to two different kingdoms or concepts of the Kingdom.

Matthews' use of the kingdom of heaven as the same as the kingdom of God is completely inconsistent with any notion of a future, earthly kingdom yet to come as the millennialists teach. The kingdom was not of this world then and is not of this world now. Jesus said in John 18:36, "Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.'"

The Meaning and Use of Parables in Christ's Teaching—Matt 13:10-17; 34-36

Matt 13:10-17: 10:

The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

11 He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 12 Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables:

'Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.'

14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. 15 For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'

16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 17 For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

The disciples asked the question directly, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" The key to the Lord's answers follows the statement: "This is why I speak to them in parables."

Some hear the words of the Lord, but they do not hear and do not understand. Isaiah, quoted here to make the Lord's point, said that their hearts were calloused, their ears, deaf, and their eyes, closed. On the other hand, the true disciples see, hear, and understand. That the prophets and righteous men wanted to hear and see is reiterated by Peter in 1 Peter 1:10-11:

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, 11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

In Matt 13:34-36:

34 Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. 35 So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet:

"I will open my mouth in parables,

I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world."

36 Then he left the crowd and went into the house.

Outline of the Lessons on the Parables of Jesus

1. Introduction to the Parables of Jesus
2. The Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:3-9, 18-23)
3. The Parable of the Weeds in the Field and Others in Matthew 13 (Matt 13:24-33, 36-52)
4. The Unmerciful Servant (Matt 18:21-35)
5. Two Parables for the Pharisees: The Two Sons (Mt 21:28-32) and The Wicked Vinedressers (Mt 21:33-46)
6. The Wedding Feast (Mt 22:1-14) and the Wise And Foolish Virgins (Mt 25:1-13)
7. The Talents (Mt 25:14-30)
8. The Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37)
9. The Rich Fool (Lk 12:13-21) and the Rich Man And Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31)
10. The Friend At Midnight (Lk 11:1-13)
11. Taking The Lowest Place (Lk 14:7-11) and the Great Banquet (Lk 14:15-24)
12. The Lost Sheep (Lk 15:1-7), The Lost Coin (Lk 15:8-10), and The Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32)
13. The Persistent Widow (Lk 18:1-8) and The Separation of Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46)

2. The Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:3-9, 18-23)

The Parable of the Sower teaches that the kingdom of heaven (God) is like a sower sowing in the field. In this regard, the Parable of the Sower fits perfectly the definition of a parable.

Lesson one on the parables illustrated that a parable is a story true-to-life in all its details, and that it is a story that teaches a spiritual truth. In the parables of Jesus, the parables illuminated spiritual truths concerning the kingdom of heaven (God). Matthew uses the term kingdom of heaven, which is clearly synonymous with Luke's use of the term kingdom of God (See lesson one for details).

The figure to the right shows how parables illuminate

spiritual truth. The spiritual truths in the parables of Jesus all illuminated the spiritual concept of the kingdom of heaven (God). Since humankind had never experienced the kingdom of God, it would be impossible for them to understand the concept and characteristics of that heavenly kingdom. Through the ages, the spiritual truths of the kingdom of God were unavailable to man. Man could not even conceptualize such things. Jesus took everyday truths from the real experience of humankind and used them to illuminate the spiritual truths of the kingdom. Paul and Peter spoke of the necessity for this illumination by Jesus. Paul wrote in 1 Cor 2:7-10:

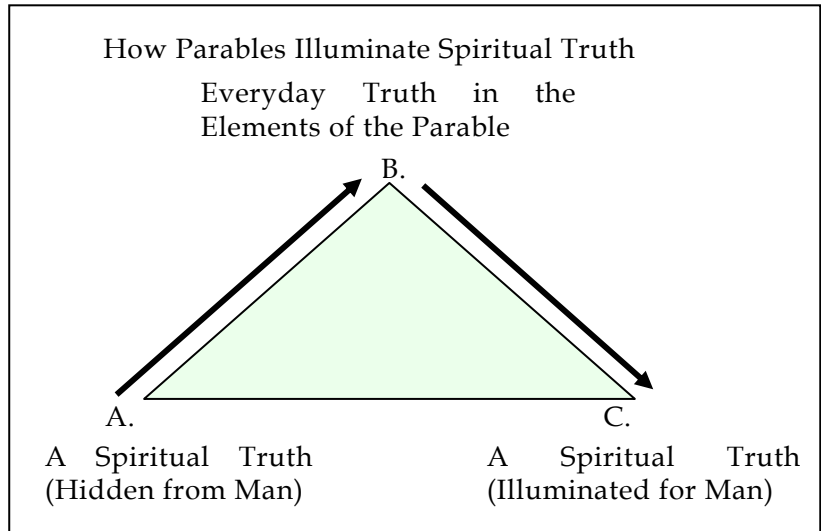
7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 However, as it is written:

"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him" –

10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

According to Peter in 1 Peter 1:10-12, not even the Old Testament writers knew and understood the grace that was to come:

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, 11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.



Jesus Tells the Parable of the Sower

Matt 13:1-9:

1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. 2 Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9 He who has ears, let him hear."

The actor in this parable is the farmer and his action is sowing his seed in order to have a crop. The seed itself falls on different soil: Some seed fell on soil along the path and the birds ate the seed up. Other seed fell on rocky places where there was little soil. The plants scorched in the sun and withered. Other seed fell among the thorns, which choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil where it produced a crop.

The story of this parable is so simple and true that even a child could understand it in its plain, everyday meaning. An explanation by the Lord of the meaning of the parable follows in chapter 13:18-23. This explanation by the Lord is just as clear as the story itself. He leaves no doubt as to his teaching. He illuminates the truth about his kingdom.

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Sower

Matt 13:18-23:

18 "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20 The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. 22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. 23 But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

The farmer is the one who spreads the message of the kingdom. Once he has sown his seed, the outcome is out of his hands. As Paul wrote, "God made it grow." The seed in the parable is the word [original: logos] of the kingdom. The word seed is often used to mean the word of God. Paul used this analogy in 1 Cor 3:6-9:

6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

According to John in 1 John 3:9-10, God's seed (his word) keeps us from sinning:

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. 10 This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

Peter describes the word of God as imperishable seed in 1 Peter 1:23-24, "For you have been

born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”

The four kinds of soil are the different kinds of people and their hearts on whom the word of the kingdom falls: The seed sown along the path is the man who hears the word and does not understand it. The evil one snatches it away.

The seed sown upon the rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

The seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

The seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what he sowed.

Conclusion

The parable of the sower is perhaps one of the most powerful examples of teaching that we have. In one brief story, the Lord conveyed the work of those in the kingdom was to sow the word. He conveyed the relationship of this sown word to the growth of the kingdom. He showed how the devil, earthly cares, worries, and lack of perseverance steal the word from the hearts of the hearers. He concludes with the most powerful lesson: we must hear the word, understand it, and produce a crop in our lives. This idea—the word of God is the powerful means used in building the kingdom—finds restatement repeatedly in the work of the apostles. Paul declared in Rom 1:16, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” He re-asserted that the word (message) of the cross was the power of God in 1 Cor 1:18, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Peter concluded that this word (seed) was imperishable, living, and enduring in 1 Peter 1:22-24, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”

Study Questions

How do parables illuminate spiritual truth? _____

Who planted the seed in Corinth? _____

Who watered? _____

Who added the increase? _____

How did Peter describe the word of God? _____

What are the four kinds of hearts upon which the seed might fall? _____

How does God’s seed (word) keep us from sinning? _____

What is the primary work of one who hears and understands the word? _____

3. The Parable of the Weeds in the Field and Others in Matthew 13 (Matt 13:24-33, 36-52)

After the parable of the sower, Jesus follows with several parables, each of which extends the characteristics of the kingdom of heaven (God). Just as Jesus did with the parable of the sower, he follows the parable of the weeds in the field with a clear explanation of its meaning. In this case, as with the sower, Jesus explains each part of the parable and the overarching meaning of the parable. This lesson will follow the parable of sower, presented in lesson 2 with the rest of the parables of Matthew 13.

The Parable of the Weeds in the Field

Matt 13:24-30:

24 Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

27 "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

28 "'An enemy did this,' he replied.

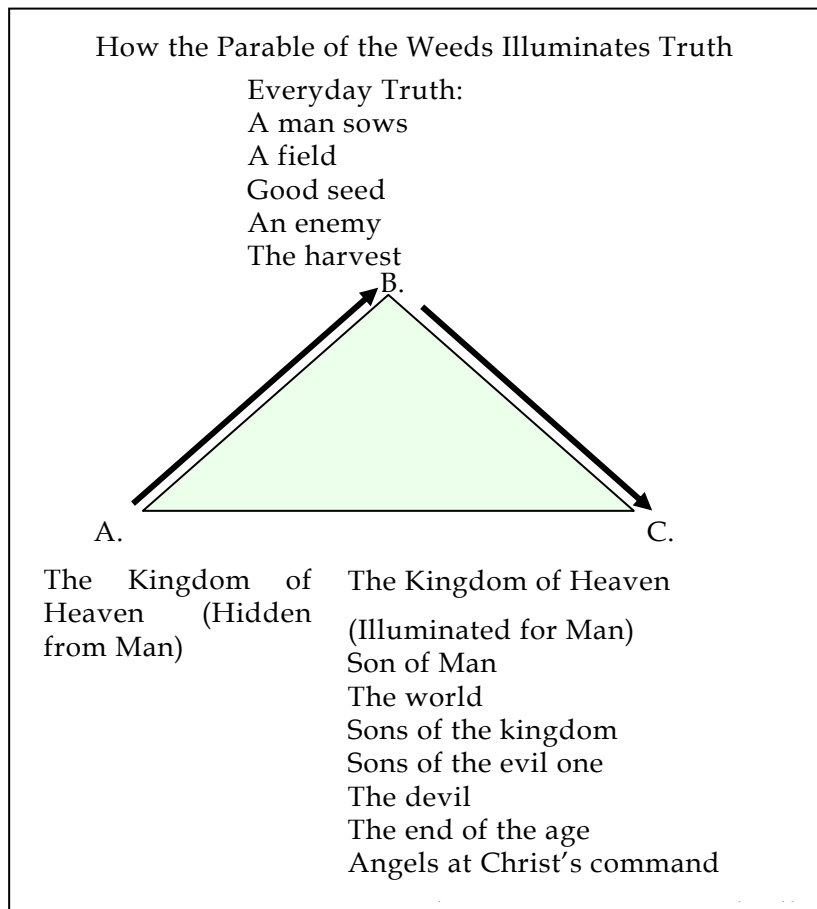
"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

29 "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'

Jesus introduces the parable of the weeds with the pointed comparison characteristic of all parables, "The kingdom of heaven is like." Even though the word like usually signals a figure of speech called a simile, in the case of parables the figure is more like an extended metaphor. Each part has meaning, and each parable has an overarching meaning coming from the sum of all the parts. In the parable of the weeds, Jesus tells us exactly what he means.

Matt 13:36-42:

36 Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us



the parable of the weeds in the field."

37 He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

40 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

The Lord's explanation is so clear that it needs no further explanation. Since it is so straightforward, the explanation is useful to illustrate how parables work. Using the paradigm presented in the study of the parable of the sower, the above illustration shows how parables illuminate spiritual truth. There appears to be no middle ground between the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one. Neither is there a middle ground in the fate of these sons. Jesus expressed this same teaching in John 8:44, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him."

The parable also makes clear when the end of the age is to be. Some say it will come at a restoration of a kingdom here on earth. Some say it came at the destruction of Jerusalem, c. AD 70. This parable teaches that the end of the age will be at the final harvest of God, rewarding the good and punishing the bad. The parable is in harmony with Paul's teaching in 1 Cor 15:23-24, "But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power." The parable itself uses kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of the Father interchangeably, eliminating any doubt that they are the same. The righteous are now sons of the kingdom; and at the end of the age, we will shine like the sun in the kingdom, making the kingdom the same now and forever.

The Revelation describes the harvest in detail in Rev 14:14-20:

14 I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15 Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." 16 So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

17 Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 18 Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." 19 The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. 20 They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.

The Other Parables of Matthew 13

Matt 13:31-33; Matt 13:44-50; Matt 13:52:

31 He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. 32 Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of

garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."

33 He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."

45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

47 "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 48 When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. 49 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

52 He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

These other parables of chapter 13 fill in many details about what the kingdom of heaven is like. Consider these parables as a group:

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed: From planting the least bit of the word of God, the kingdom will grow larger and larger.

The kingdom of heaven is like yeast: Get the kingdom started, and it will spread throughout the world.

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure found in a field: Once we find the true kingdom of heaven, we will give all that we have for it.

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant finding a pearl of great value: Once we find the kingdom of heaven we will give up all that we have for it.

The kingdom of heaven is like fishermen who separated their fish: This parable repeats the lesson of the weeds. At the end of the age, the wicked will be thrown into a fiery furnace.

The kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old: The teachers who instruct in the law must incorporate the new teachings of Christ with the teaching of the law and the prophets.

Conclusion

The parables of Matthew 13 begin to illustrate the spiritual nature of the kingdom of heaven. These parables teach among other things that the master is always the Lord, the seed is the word of God, good plants are sons of God; bad plants, sons of the devil. The sons of God will shine like the sun, and the sons of the devil will be in outer darkness. The enemy is the devil. The end of the age will be when judgment comes. Once a man understands with ears that hear, he will give all that he has for the kingdom of heaven. However, many there will be who do not hear, and even hearing, they do not understand.

Study Questions

What is the seed of the kingdom? _____ What is the field? _____

Who is the owner? _____ When is the end of the age? _____

Who are the sons of the kingdom? _____ Who is the enemy? _____

Once one truly understands the kingdom of heaven, what will he give for it?

How must a teacher of the law deal with the teachings of Jesus on the kingdom of heaven? _____

4. The Unmerciful Servant (Matt 18:21-35)

The account of the parable of the unmerciful servant begins with a question brought to the Lord by Peter in Matt 18:21-22

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Jesus' answer to Peter was in sharp contrast to the practice of the Jews and the teaching of the Law of Moses. Jesus had set the standard for Christian behavior in the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5:38-42:

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye , and tooth for tooth.' 39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Most versions translate seventy-seven with the equally acceptable seventy times seven. Metaphorically, this gives no end to the number of times Christians are to forgive one another. Thus, metaphorically, we are always to forgive our brother.

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

Matt 18:23-35:

23 *"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.*

26 *"The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' 27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.*

28 *"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.*

29 *"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'*

30 *"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.*

32 *"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' 34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.*

35 *"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."*

In contrast to the parable of the sower and the parable of the weeds, this is the first parable in this study where the reader must supply the one to one relationship between the parts of the parable and the overarching lesson about the kingdom of heaven. Once again, readers must look to find the hidden truth of God, illuminated in this simple story. With the parable in

mind, one can easily see the illuminated truth of God.

The king is the heavenly Father. Everything that we have and do—including our hope of an eternal life— comes from the Father. Our debts are great beyond our ability to pay. Peter wrote in James 1:17, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." According to Paul in Eph 1:3-4, God's blessings include every spiritual blessing, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." Acts 17:28 teaches, "For in him we live and move and have our being." Our debts of sin and death were paid for with the blood of the only begotten son. In Rom 6:23, Paul wrote, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

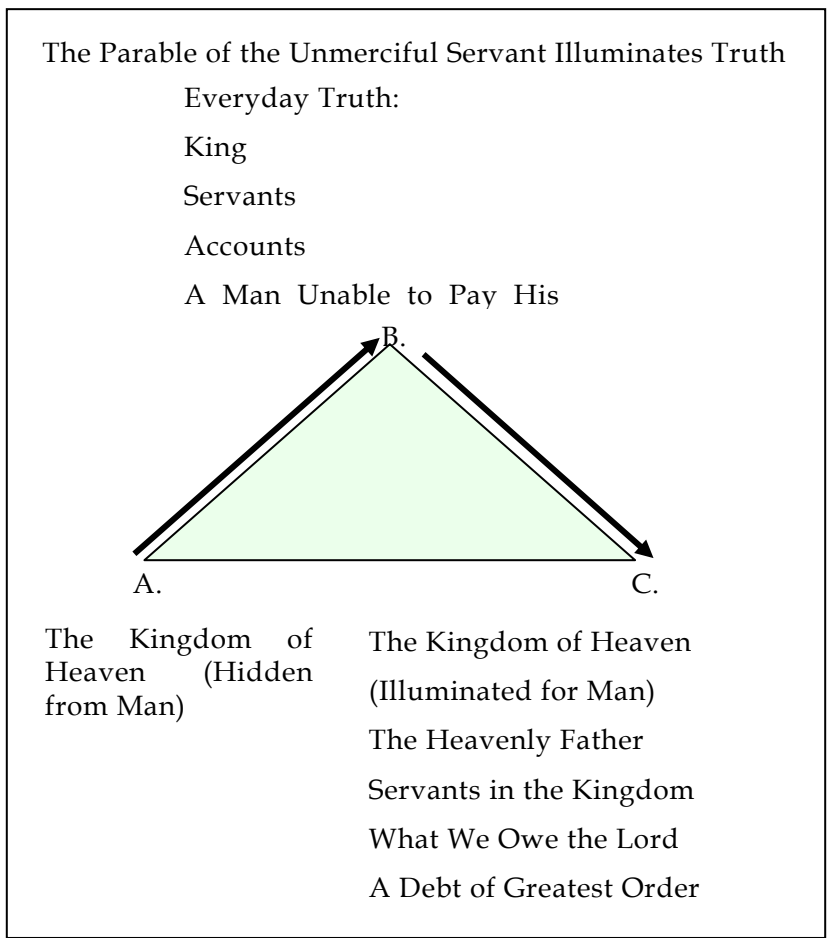
The servants are the servants in the kingdom of heaven. All the servants of God are sinful and need His grace. The grace came through Jesus, the son. Titus 2:11-14 reads:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Yet, these servants continue to be vulnerable to the sins of the mind and flesh; some more than others. Therefore, the servants must petition the Father to forgive us our debts. In 1 John 1:8-10, John explains:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

The accounts are what we owe the heavenly Father. The accounts are the record of what the Lord's servants owe Him. Matt 25:19 uses the idea of settling spiritual accounts in the parable of the talents. Rev 20:12-13 portrays the final and conclusive settling of spiritual accounts:



12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.

Our debt is of the greatest order. The 10,000 talents—millions of dollars to us—represent a debt to God of the greatest order. The metaphor offers an amount that is, theoretically, impossible to pay back. Only through the grace of God and the blood of Jesus is man redeemed. Left alone, man is hopelessly lost.

A servant who has the very great debt is all those who have sinned against the Lord. If we as sinners petition the Lord, he will forgive us our debts. If we faithfully ask, God will forgive us.

The fellow servant is the one who has sinned against us. The wicked servant made no application and transfer of the principle of God's grace given to him, and the principle of the grace that he should extend to a fellow servant of God. However, Jesus had taught from the beginning that fellow servants should forgive one another, even as the father forgives them. Jesus taught the disciples to pray in Matt 6:12-15:

12 Forgive us our debts ,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

John taught in 1 John 5:16-17 that if anyone sees a brother sin, a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray for him:

If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

The hundred denarii—a few dollars—represents a minor debt, of little consequence and of the lowest order. Compared to the forgiveness of the Lord of our great debt, forgiving our brethren is inconsequential. The wicked servant could not manage this forgiveness. When man compares his spiritual debt to the heavenly Father, he should see that his brother's debt amounts to nothing.

The jailor and torture represent man's final punishment if he is unforgiving. Rev 20:14-15 teaches that those whose names are not in the book of life will be thrown in the lake of fire. What is at risk if we do not forgive our brother is our eternal life.

Conclusion

The parable of the unfaithful servant teaches two overarching lessons. The episode began with Peter's question in Matt 18:21:

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

The lesson drawn from the parable is that a Christian is always to forgive a fellow Christian.

The second overarching lesson is that one with which the Lord concluded in Matt 18: 35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." Not forgiving our brethren may result in the loss of our eternal soul. The Lord's last words were explicit: "Forgive your brother from your heart." No pretences, no artificial accommodation before the church, no secret thought of "I'll get you back later," will do. The Lord expects forgiveness from the heart for as many times as it takes.

Study Questions

How many numerical times are we to forgive a fellow servant? _____

How great is our debt to God? _____

How great is our brother's debt to us? _____

How does Christ instruct us to pray about our debts? _____

What must happen before the Lord forgives us our debt? _____

Metaphorically, are we to forgive our brother? _____

What may our fate be if we do not forgive our brother? _____

5. Two Parables for the Pharisees: The Two Sons (Mt 21:28-32) and the Wicked Vinedressers (Mt 21:33-46)

In Matt 21:23-22:1, the elders came to Jesus and challenged his authority. The common people of the day had accepted Jesus' authority from the beginning of his ministry. In Matt 7:28-29 at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew recorded, "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." A centurion in Matt 8:8-12 explained clearly the issue of Jesus' authority. Jesus responded with the same conclusion that he is now going to give to the elders:

8 The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

10 When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. 11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The two parables of this study follow a dramatic situation where the elders ask Jesus who gave him authority. Jesus answered by presenting them a dilemma that they could not answer.

Matt 21:23-27:

23 Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"

24 Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 25 John's baptism – where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'" 26 But if we say, 'From men'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet."

27 So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

Then Jesus followed with two parables, which illustrated what happens if you reject and kill the master's son.

The Kingdom of Heaven Is Like a Man That Had Two Sons

Matt 21: 28-32:

28 "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

29 "'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

30 "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

31 "Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

"The first," they answered.

Jesus said to them,

"I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

The first son represents the tax collectors and prostitutes who generally rejected God but who with the advent of Christ accepted God. The second son of this parable are the elders representative of Israel who being the chosen of God rejected the Lord. The first group is similar to the centurion of the introduction. This parable and that statement in Matthew 8 show that under Christ what one does determines his salvation. The final lesson of the parable applies throughout the ages: people must repent and believe Christ to be saved.

The second parable of the planted vineyard illustrates that not believing, the Jews killed John the Baptist and would soon kill the very son of God.

The Landlord Planted a Vineyard

Matt 21: 33-44

"Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

35 "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. 37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.

38 "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' 39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

41 "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"'The stone the builders rejected

has become the capstone;

the Lord has done this,

and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44 He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

The conclusion of this parable is in verse 43, which reiterates the lesson of the Lord's first parable: "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given

to a people who will produce its fruit.”

Jesus relates the killing of the son in this passage the prophecy in Psalms 118:22-23: “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?” The testing of Jesus as a capstone shows the ultimate destruction of those who reject him. This is the same rock upon which Jesus said, “I will build my church,” in Matt 16:18. Paul spoke of this same foundation in 1 Cor 3:10-11:

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Peter traced this same figure from the Old Testament forward in 1 Peter 2:4-8 and concluded,

4 As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him – 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For in Scripture it says:

"See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame."

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

"The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone,"

8 and,

"A stone that causes men to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for.

Conclusion

Matt: 21:45:

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. 46 They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

The chief priests and the Pharisee knew what Jesus meant. It is clear that the kingdom of God will go to those who produce its fruit. It will no longer belong to the physical kingdom of Israel. People who stumble will stumble because of their disobedience.

Study Questions

Why were the people amazed at Jesus teaching in the Sermon on the Mount? _____

How did the centurion in Matthew 8 describe authority? _____

How did the elders test the Lord? _____

What dilemma did Jesus place them in? _____

What was the meaning of the two parables? _____

Who will be allowed to enter the kingdom of God? _____

Did the chief priest and the Pharisees understand Jesus teaching? _____

Did they leave searching for the truth? _____ What were they looking for? _____

6. The Wedding Feast (Mt 22:1-14) and the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Mt 25:1-13)

In these two parables, the Lord uses the experiences—common to all men—of weddings to illuminate the spiritual concept of the kingdom of heaven. The first parable uses the state of preparedness for the feast; the second, the suddenness with which the bridegroom will come. This symbolic use of weddings to describe the aspects of the kingdom runs throughout the New Testament. The central metaphor in all of these figures is that Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the bride. Christ as the bridegroom and the church as the bride also are central to the very meaning of the entire gospel story and the New Testament.

The Church Is the Bride of Christ

In John 3:29-30, Jesus spoke clearly that Christ was the bridegroom and the coming kingdom would be his bride: “The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice.” The apostle Paul also taught that the church was a pure virgin promised to Christ in 2 Cor 11:2, “I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.” In Eph 5:25-33, Paul extends this metaphor in order to explain Christ’s love of the church and the church’s obligation to Christ:

. . . Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. . . . He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— 30 for we are members of his body. . . . 32 This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church.

The revelation concludes with this same strong figure concerning Christ and the church. In Rev 21:1-2, the church is the Holy City and the New Jerusalem: “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” The writer of Hebrews related these figures directly to the church in Heb 12:22-23: “But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.”

Rev 21:9-10 is even more direct in using the words wife and bride: “‘Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” All of heaven celebrates this marvelous union of Christ and his bride in Rev 19:6-8:

6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

7 Let us rejoice and be glad

and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready.

8 Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear.”

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

These scriptures illuminate the truth of Christ and the church for us. Those listening to the Lord’s parables could draw from these everyday stories some of the same truths that are now so evident.

The Wedding Feast

Matt 22:1-14.

1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 2 "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

4 "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'

5 "But they paid no attention and went off – one to his field, another to his business. 6 The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

8 "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. 9 Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' 10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless.

13 "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

14 "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

The Lord came to the entire world. The commission that he gave said the gospel was to go to the whole creation. The Lord invites many who refuse to come. Worse than this is that God, the king, has prepared everything. God's invitation is still before those who leave for the sake of their own property and business. Some even kill the servants of God. On this group, God will have no mercy, for he will destroy the murders and burn their city. Rev 21:8 describes their fate, "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

God, the king, now invites those people rejected by high society. One would not expect that God should invite such people as these. They are both good and bad. Once they are at the feast, one is improperly dressed. The clothes of the man should be the righteous acts of Rev 19:8. Those in the kingdom without righteous acts receive the same fate as those who never come in to begin with. They are thrown into outer darkness where their will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The Lord supplies the over-arching meaning to this parable: "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

The Wise and Foolish Virgins

Matt 25:1-13:

1 "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4 The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. 5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

6 "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

7 "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

9 "'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

10 "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

11 "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!'

12 "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

13 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

The parable of the wise and foolish virgins teaches the over-arching principle: keep watch, because you do not know the day or hour. The coming of the Lord, the bridegroom, is always eminent in the lives of all Christians for all time. It is note worthy that the prepared virgins could not help those unprepared. Those sad words, "I don't know you." will be heard by many. Paul wrote in 2 Thess 1:7-10:

This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

The suddenness of the Lord's coming is a central theme of the Revelation. In Rev 1:3 teaches that the time is near for each of us, "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." The coming will not only be sudden to each of us but it will also be universally apparent in Rev 1:7:

7 Look, he is coming with the clouds,
and every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him;
and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.

In other words, the foolish virgins were clear on what they needed to do but it was too late. The Revelation concludes with the same urgency in Rev 22:18-20:

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The overarching truth of the parable is true for all people for all time: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

Conclusion

These two parables have in common the need for all men to be ready for the Lord's coming. Some will refuse to come to the kingdom. Some will come to the kingdom but not be dressed in righteous acts. Some will be planning to be there but out doing something else when the Lord comes. Christians are to be prepared at all times and everywhere for the Lord's coming.

Study Questions

What will be the fate of those who do not attend the feast? _____

What will happen to those who attend but do not wear the proper clothes? _____

What will happen to those who run out of oil? _____

What is the day and the hour of the coming of the Lord? _____

Describe the church as the bride of Christ. _____

7. The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

Some estimate that a gold talent in today's dollars is worth \$660,000. The parable of the talents does not make clear as to whether it means a gold or silver talent. Either a gold or silver talent would be a large sum of money. God has richly blessed us all—even those of us with just one talent.

Our English word *talent* derives its meaning directly from this parable by the Lord. According to the Miriam Webster Dictionary, our word comes from the Middle English, from Old English *talente*, from Latin *talenta*, plural of *talentum* unit of weight or money, from Greek *talanton* pan of a scale, weight; from the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. In the sense of the parable, it was a unit of value equal to the value of a talent of gold or silver.

The Lord forever cast the meaning of a talent to be the natural endowments of a person. Separate from this parable, the meaning as relates to money has not survived. The parable of the talents is a perfect example of how a known objective reality can convey and illuminate an unknown spiritual reality.

God Gives Gifts to All His People

Matt 25:14-18.

14" Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. 15 To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

In the parable, the Lord gives the servants different gifts of money. In interpretation, the gifts must be something other than money, since a figure compares two things essentially unlike one another. The talents here are the enabling gifts of the kingdom of heaven with their attendant responsibilities. From the beginning of the Lord's ministry, he had described these gifts, common in degrees to all Christians—most notably in the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. Matt 5:3-10 give us these spiritual talents, which were to become the currency of the kingdom of heaven: the poor in spirit, those that mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted because of righteousness.

Peter shows how the nurturing of these talents allows Christians to be partakers of the divine nature in 2 Peter 1:3-9:

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

All the Christian's gifts come from the Lord, and without him, there is no starting place. One cannot use what one does not have. Just as the master in the parable, God, the Father, gives us

our gifts. James wrote in James 1:17:

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights." In Eph 1:3-4, Paul, said, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

We as servants of God in His kingdom must set about to use the talents that he has given us. We will each one have to seize the opportunity to serve him or bury the talent that he gave us.

All Christians Have an Opportunity to Use Their Talents

Matt 26:16-18

16 The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. 17 So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. 18 But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

Each of the servants made a choice as how to use their talents. Some of us, as they did, will use the gifts of the Lord and bring growth and profit to the kingdom. Some, as they, will hide our talents, shrinking back, afraid to move forward. Notice that the gifts differed in amounts, but the expectation was only in relation to the gift given and not to the gifts given to others. That we are to serve according to the gifts given and the opportunity given is the principle at work in the parable of the talents. In Galatians 6:10, Paul affirmed the principle: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

On a varying array of fronts, the New Testament reiterates this principle as it works in the lives of Christians. We are universally gifted but with our own gifts. Paul writes 1 Cor 7:7, "I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift; another has that. In 2 Cor 9:6-7, the principle applies to giving of the prosperity provided each one of us by God: "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." For Timothy in 1 Tim 4:14, it was a matter of his using the spiritual gift, which came with the laying on of hands, "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you." Whatever the gift, Christians must use it to serve others. 1 Peter 4:9-11, Peter wrote, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." Just as in the parable, the servants were to serve the interest of the master, so too must we serve our God's interest. What a wonderful blessing that we can administer God's grace in its various forms.

The Rewards and Punishments of the Master Depend on How One Uses the Talent Given

Matt 25:19-28;

"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

21 'His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

22 'The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see,

I have gained two more.'

23 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

24 "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

26 "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? 27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.'

28 "'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. 29 For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The reward of the faithful servants is certain, coming for the faithful use of the talents given. The punishment of the lazy servant was just as certain. Modern ideas that there will be no real punishment wilt in the face of the master's strong language. It is interesting to note that Rev 21:8 places the cowardly right along with the murders and sexually immoral in Rev 21:8: "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." The American Standard Version uses the word *fearful* for the word *cowardly* in the NIV. The fate here is the same as that for the one who buries God-given talents and gifts.

Conclusion

God gives us gifts and talents to use for him in this present world. Our eternal reward or punishment depends on how we use these gifts. What is at risk is the greatest gift of all, which is our share of the master's happiness. Rev 22:17 sublimely states our reward as the free gift of the water of life:

17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

Study Questions

What did the master expect of each servant? _____

Why are the gifts in different amounts? _____

What does a faithful servant do with his gifts? _____

What does an unfaithful servant do with his gifts? _____

How will the Lord reward the faithful servant? _____

How will the Lord reward the unfaithful servant? _____

What is the greatest gift of all? _____

8. The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37)

The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates perfectly the principle that Christ expressed in the Golden Rule as recorded in Matt 7:12: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." This parable and the Golden Rule connect to the same one of the Ten Commandments. The fact that the expert in the law was testing shows his motive and his arrogance when he asked Jesus: "Who is my neighbor?" The prelude to the parable sets this dramatic situation.

What Must I Do to Inherit Eternal Life?

Luke 10:25-29:

25 *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

26 *"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"*

27 *He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

28 *"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."*

29 *But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

The dialogue began with a question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The answer to this question establishes a three-fold focus for each man. Love God, love yourself, and love your neighbor as yourself. This answer comes from two Old Testament passages combined: Duet 6:5 and Lev 19:18. Our every Christian obligation—what we must do to be saved—will fit into these three. Jesus is emphatic about the results. "Do this," he said, "and you will live." The expert in the law could not leave the question there; perhaps, because of the simplicity of the truth in the Lord's answer. "And who is my neighbor?" he asked. Jesus answered with the parable.

Who Is My Neighbor?

Luke 10:30-35:

30 *In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'*

The bad circumstances of the man traveling happened at random. He was just going down the road of life, as it were, when misfortune fell. He was naked, beaten, and half-dead. Clearly, he was helpless before his misfortune. Coincidentally, a priest, who should have been benevolent, came along also randomly. Then a Levite came. Each one of these religious people passed by on the other side to avoid the helpless man. *Out of sight out of mind* is the modern phrase to describe such avoidance of the misfortunate. A Samaritan was the last to come, and the text says that he took pity on the man. This Samaritan went the second mile in

taking care of the injured man. After he bandaged his wounds and poured oil and wine on them, he took him to an inn and took care of him. The Samaritan even arranged for his continuing care.

Implicit in all the scriptures telling us to take care of people is the responsibility of empathetic involvement. In James 1:27, the command to visit the widows and orphans carries the idea of visiting to take care of: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." The daily application of the religion of Christ is in these acceptable, pure, faultless acts. The meaning of our neighborliness extends to all men in Gal 6:10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

In one of our future parables, Christ relates to us that if we care for the hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned, and the stranger, we care for him:

37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" Matt 25:37-40.

The priest and Levite could have avoided the man because he was a Samaritan, a race to be shunned by the Jews; or they could have avoided the man because they did not want to be bothered. Today, we must serve men of low and high estate in their time of need. We must also serve them when it is convenient or inconvenient to our personal circumstances. If we serve only those whom we like, we have our reward. Jesus taught in Matt 5:46-48, "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Which of the Three Was a Neighbor?

Lk 10:36-37:

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

The expert in the law understood the parable, as certainly we understand it. Just understanding the teaching does not make us a good neighbor. As the expert was told, we must "go and do likewise." Doing becomes fundamental to being. In James 2:14-17, James bases our faith on works that we do:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

The Lord's teaching reinforces this command to be doers of the word in Matt 7:21-22: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Conclusion

The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches how Christians ought to act as neighbors to one another and as neighbors to those that we do not even know. This “good neighbor” teaching is rooted in the law of Moses; and by Christ’s reiteration, it becomes an eternal part of the law of God for us today: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” Luke 10:27; Duet 6:5; Lev 19:18.

Study Questions

In what way did the legal expert test the Lord? _____

Why did the priest and Levite avoid the man? _____

What does the word visit imply? _____

When is faith dead? _____

What must we do beyond saying, “ Lord, Lord?” _____

Who is your neighbor? _____

Who should we love in addition to our neighbor? _____

9. The Rich Fool (Lk 12:13-21) and the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31)

The parables—the rich fool and the rich man and Lazarus—are two of the most often referred to parables. In the first place, both deal with the deceitfulness of riches; and in the second place, they both deal with the sudden and unexpected end to our lives and our worldly wealth. Between the telling of these parables, the Lord teaches the fundamental lesson of perspective on the material and physical blessing of this life. Immediately following the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:22-34, Jesus taught that we should not be concerned about our life, even what we should eat or wear:

22 Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. 23 Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. 24 Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! 25 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 26 Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"

The pagan world runs after worldly matters, according to the Lord in Luke 12: 30-31: "30 For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well." If we seek his kingdom, Jesus continues in Luke 12:32-34, God is pleased to give it to us, and with it, a treasure that cannot be exhausted:

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

The Parable of the Rich Fool

Luke 12:13-21:

"13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

14 Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" 15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

This parable is set in the dramatic situation of a man who wants the Lord to tell his brother to divide his inheritance with him. Jesus responds that he is not a judge or arbiter in such matters and between people. It is clear that the son of God is not about material matters, nor is the kingdom of God. Material wealth has nothing to do with either. Further, to covet what a brother has is greed, and we are to guard against it. "Watch out!" exclaims the Lord. Since a man's life does not consist of the abundance of his possessions, it is nothing that we have them or that we do not have them.

Therefore, the purpose of the parable is not to criticize the man who had large crops and needed more storage. The lesson of the parable is that the riches did not prepare him for eternal life.

Luke 12:16-20:

16 And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. 17 He

thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

18 "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." '

20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

21 "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

Many people today are like the rich man. Instead of crops and big barns, we are encouraged to get annuities, 401Ks, stock portfolios, and other stockpiles of money so that we can retire and live the good life. We will eat, drink, and be merry, as it were. We, as the rich man, say in effect, that we have plenty of good things, enough for many years. God may require our lives of us at any time, and we must be ready. If our preparation only has to do with earthly riches, someone else will get those. What will we have? The corollary to "is not rich toward God" is that we must be rich toward God. That is all that matters in the matter, one might say. Jesus stated the case eloquently in the Revelation:

17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Rev 3:17-18.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-17:1:

19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

30 "'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

This parable of the rich man and Lazarus illuminates the destiny of those prepared and those unprepared. Worldly riches had nothing to do with either man's end. Earthly riches could not get the rich man to Abraham's bosom. No one can go from torment to bliss, once the fate is sealed. There is no comfort coming, not even a drop of water. There is no way to warn loved

ones still on the earth. In the parable—the elements of a parable are always true to life—there is consciousness, there is a hell, and there is a state of bliss. These states are of the spirit, and they last eternally with no second chance.

James summarizes the dire straights of those who place earthly riches first in their life: James 5:1-6

5:1 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. 4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

Conclusion

These two parables allow us to understand that earthly riches are not the answer to our security in either this world or in the kingdom of God. We must be rich spiritually in this life to inherit the state of blessedness called eternal life.

Questions:

Is it wrong to have great worldly wealth? _____

Can you relate the rich man's fate to that of the five talent man in the parable of the talents? _____

According to the teaching of the two parables, what did the beggar have that the rich man did not have in order to go to Abraham's side? _____

What was the only chance for the rich man's relatives to be saved? _____

What is the answer to those who hear the word, but want "hard proof"? _____

10. The Friend at Midnight (Lk 11:1-13)

The parable of the friend at midnight instructs to what degree that we can expect the Father to answer our prayers. It begins with a dramatic situation where the disciples ask the Lord to teach them to pray:

Luke 11:1:

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

Jesus responded to them by teaching them what many now know as the Lord's Prayer. A more apt designation might be the disciples' prayer, since they were the ones instructed to so pray.

The Prayer that the Lord Taught His Disciples

Luke 11:2-4:

2 He said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come.

3 Give us each day our daily bread.

4 Forgive us our sins,

for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation.'"

The grammar of the prayer is what connects it to the parable that follows. The verbs are in the imperative mood, which makes them direct commands, requests, and prohibitions in the most straightforward form. Hallowed be, give, forgive, and lead are all verbs in the imperative mood. "How can we command God?" one might ask. Speaking of prayer, Paul included requests in 1 Tim 2:1, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone." The word here for requests was translated supplications in the NKJV and the ASV. *Supplications* is, perhaps, stronger and more direct to the point. Webster calls it a humble entreaty. The entire meaning of these requests depends on the attitude of the one asking. All the commands relate to what God has in mind for us. That we should hallow his name, that his kingdom come, that he provide for us only day by day, that he forgive our sins, and that we not be tempted – all of these lie at the heart of our obedience as children. The meaning of the direct commands has a direct connection to the seek, the knock, and the ask commands in the parable that follows.

The Friend Who Came at Midnight

Luke 11:5-8

5 Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, 6 because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'

7 "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with

me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

Has someone knocked on your door at night, and you said, "I just wish they would go away!" But you went to the door. Or has your phone rung, and you said, who can that be?

For God to give us what we need and ask for, we must go before him with boldness. This is the truth of this parable; and the truth of the parable of the widow and the unrighteous judge. In Luke 18:1-8, Jesus taught:

18:1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

4 "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'"

6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

The attitude illustrated in these parables is explained by Paul in 2 Tim 1:7, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." One who is not a disciple cannot go to God, the Father, with this spirit, for as Paul says, God gives it. An interesting counterpoint is that the cowardly join other evil workers—the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, etc.—in the fiery lake in Rev 21:8: "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

Ask, Seek, and Knock

Luke 11:9-10:

9 "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

The key to this verse is boldness from the parable. With the spirit of power and love from God, we must ask, seek, and knock. The context limits the power of receiving, finding, and opening the door to the disciples. Matthew's account of this same teaching has an abiding principle stated in the immediate context in Matt 6:33-34: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Conclusion

Luke 11:11-13:

11 "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Just as a father does not deny his son a fish and give a snake or deny an egg and give a scorpion, the Father in heaven does not deny us; but He gives us the Holy Spirit—the most valuable of all gifts. The use of snakes and scorpions, as unspeakable as they are, has an interesting scriptural parallel. In Luke 10:19-20, the Lord said, “I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.” This power of the enemy is fully explained in Rev 9, as the lusts and sins which beset us. In the end, the disciples are victorious, for they have the gift of the Holy Spirit of God:

13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory. Eph 1:13-14

Study Questions

To whom are the parable and this teaching directed? _____

Will one out of harmony with the Father have his prayers answered? _____

How does the father/child relationship illustrate the meaning of the parable? _____

What will be the fate of the timid and cowardly? _____

11. Taking the Lowest Place (Lk 14:7-11) and the Great Banquet (Lk 14:15-24)

These two parables – Taking the Lowest Place and The Great Banquet – occur when Jesus went to the house of a prominent Pharisee to eat. Jesus had tested them twice: once regarding the healing of a man with dropsy on the Sabbath and the other regarding the pulling of one's ox out of the ditch on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees had no answer either time. Jesus tells the first parable, beginning in Luke 14:7.

Taking the Lowest Place

Luke 14:7-11:

7 When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: 8 "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. 9 If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. 10 But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Jesus noticed how the guests picked places of honor at the table. One would think that this is the natural thing to do. Jesus seized upon the event to tell the first parable. The parable tells how it is better to take the lowest place, thus avoiding the humiliation of the host asking you to move in order to make way for a more important guest. Of course, if the host asks you to move up, you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. The first lesson of this parable is "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Jesus taught this same lesson in principle in Luke 9:46-48:

46 An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. 47 Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. 48 Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all – he is the greatest."

Luke 14:12-15:

Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

15 When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

Jesus concluded the parable with a teaching directed to the host, and by inference, directed to all of us. We get nothing from inviting those with whom we associate or are related. They will pay us back with an invitation of their own. Rather, we should invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. You will be repaid, not by these guests, but by our Father in heaven at the resurrection of the righteous.

Jesus teaching often reiterates this principle. In Matt 5:46-48, Jesus taught:

"If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

James repeated the Lord's teaching, relating it to the assembly of the church in James 2:1-7:

2:1 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

The reward for our behavior toward the least comes with the resurrection of the righteous. Jesus said in Rev 22:12-13, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

The Great Banquet

Luke 14:16-24:

16 *Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. 17 At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'*

18 *"But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'*

19 *"Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'*

20 *"Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'*

21 *"The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'*

22 *"'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'*

23 *"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. 24 I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"*

At the dinner, Jesus told another parable using the analogy of a dinner to make his point. In this parable, the man sent for guests, and they each had an excuse why they could not come. In the kingdom of heaven, we are invited to feast in the kingdom. Our excuses are the same; worldly affairs are more important than feasting with the Lord. Our Lord will find others to eat at his banquet, and not one of those who gave excuse will get a taste. Everyone should think about this parable when they allow earthly affairs to interfere with our service in the kingdom.

Conclusion

The lessons in these parables are simple and straight forward.

Do not seek the high place.

To not relegate the poor, lame, and blind to the low places.

Do not turn down the Lord's invitation.

Study Questions

Who will be exalted in the kingdom of heaven? _____

How does one get exalted? _____

When will our reward be? _____

Why should we not turn down the Lord's invitation? _____

How should we treat poor people who come into the assembly? _____

When will we eat at the Lord's table? _____

What are some of the excuses we use to stay away from the Lord's banquet? _____

12. The Lost Sheep (Lk 15:1-7), The Lost Coin (Lk 15:8-10), and The Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32)

The lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son—all of these show the value that God places on each and every lost soul. The parables follow an exchange between the Lord, the Pharisees, and the teachers of the law. People from all lifestyles gathered to hear the Lord, but specifically mentioned here are tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees and teachers muttered, showing their disapproval.

Luke 15:1-2:

1 Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

From this criticism, Jesus took the occasion to teach the three parables, all illustrating the value God places on a single lost soul. Perhaps, there is no more difficult concept than understanding the Father's love and forgiveness of the worst sinners. Peter spoke of this as the patience of God in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

Luke 15:3-7:

3 Then Jesus told them this parable: 4 "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep' 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

The repentant person chooses a course that covers a multitude of sins. James 5:19-20 teaches, "My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins." The great victory is over death and if death, then, sin. Paul wrote in 1 Cor 15:54-57:

54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

55 "Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The conquering of sin makes the one lost soul who repents to be valued so highly that heaven rejoices.

The Parable of the Lost Coin

Luke 15:8-10:

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house

and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The lost coin illustrates the rejoicing in heaven over a single lost soul. Fortunately, Revelation has a scene that depicts the content and enthusiasm of such rejoicing in Rev 5:6-14:

6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. 8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song:

"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. 12 In a loud voice they sang:

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!"

13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea

and all that is in them, singing,

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

14 The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32:

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

13 "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' 20 So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he

ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

21 *"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*

22 *"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'* So they began to celebrate.

25 *"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'*

28 *"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'*

31 *"'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'*"

The parable of the prodigal son concludes this trilogy of parables on the value of the single lost soul to God. The key to this parable is in the expression: "this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So it is with the kingdom of heaven.

Conclusion:

The lessons of these three parables are clear:

Though the ninety-nine are safe, the Lord wants the one who is lost.

Even the angels in heaven celebrate and rejoice at the finding of one lost soul.

We should be glad and rejoice when the one dead becomes alive again and when the ones who is lost, is found.

Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus summarizes the lessons of these parables in Luke 19:1-10:

19:1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"

8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Study Questions

Why were the Pharisees and teachers of the law murmuring against Jesus? _____

Why was Jesus spending time teaching the tax collectors and sinners? _____

How would you describe a good shepherd? _____

What was wrong with the older son's attitude? _____

Over what will the angels in heaven rejoice? _____

How can a rich man like Zacchaeus be saved? _____

13. The Persistent Widow (Lk 18:1-8) and the Separation of Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46)

These final two parables in this study deal with the coming of the Lord and the consequences to humankind. The persistent widow illustrates the need for prayer and the relationship of prayer to faith. The separation of the sheep and the goats illustrates the need for doing what is good to all men while we are here on this earth. Both parables deal directly with the second coming of the Lord, and as parables, they teach principles that are true in their components: the second coming, the judgment, the reward, and the punishment.

The Persistent Widow

Luke 18:1-8:

1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

4 "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'"

6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Jesus states directly the teaching intent of the parable of the persistent widow. The parable teaches that disciples are always to pray and not give up. Prayer is the sustaining force for struggling Christians. Later when the disciples are sleeping while waiting for him in the garden, Jesus said in Matt 26:41, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." Just as the widow who cried out to the unrighteous judge received an answer, much more so shall Christians who cry out to God receive an answer to their prayers. Our cry must be persistent. We should cry out to God day and night if we expect his justice.

To pray in this manner requires continual prayer and thanksgiving. In Eph 6:18, Paul taught, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints." Paul also gave the Thessalonians a similar admonition in 1 Thess 5:16-18, "Be joyful always; 17 pray continually; 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Justice will be delivered now and with the coming of Jesus. Paul wrote in 2 Thess 1:6-10:

6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

The last statement of the parable shows a connection between prayer and faith that cannot be

severed. Jesus concluded, "However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" The key to maintaining our faith is continual, fervent prayer.

The Separation of the Sheep and the Goats

Matt 25:31-46

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

45 "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

In this parable of the separation of the sheep and the goats, the Lord once again relates the events described to when the Lord comes. All the parts of a parable being true, we are to understand that when the Lord comes it will be for judgment and the throne upon which he sits will be the "his throne in heavenly glory." The scene described is the same scene as the one above in 2 Thess 1. Rev 22:1-5 describes the throne and its glory:

22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

Rev 5:6-14 shows the Lamb on the throne and the inclusion of the righteous in the glory of the throne:

6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the

throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. 8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song:

"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. 12 In a loud voice they sang:

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!"

13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

14 The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

However, just as the reward is eternal, real and awesome, so the punishment is eternal, severe, and awful. The eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels is the destiny of the unrighteous. The conclusion of all things evil begins with Rev 19:20:

20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

The fate of the devil and his minions includes the same lake of fire in Rev 20:12-15

12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Finally, there is the destruction of all the wicked in Rev 21:6-8:

6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

The separation of the righteous and the wicked—the sheep and the goats—occurs based on the most easily done of good works. “For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me,” Jesus said. These good works are things that we can all do. In Gal 6:7-10, Paul similarly taught:

7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. 9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Conclusion

These two parables connect two areas of living the Christian life to the reward that will come to us in the last day when the Lord comes. Will he find us faithful in doing good works and will he find us faithful in petitioning our heavenly father? The reward is awesome in heavenly splendor, and the penalty is awful in its fiery and eternal punishment.

Study Questions

What is a parable? _____

Are the elements of a parable true or untrue? _____

What was the main subject illustrated by the teachings of all the parables? _____

Can you draw a diagram to illustrate how parables work to teach a spiritual lesson? _____