
**The
Parables
of Our Lord
Volume 1**

By Louis Rushmore

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Dedication

Leonard “Buck” and Vera Groves

Valiant Servants of the Risen Savior

Like Aquila and Priscilla, “Buck” and Vera Groves comprise a husband and wife team. Aquila and Priscilla and the apostle Paul by trade were tentmakers (Acts 18:3). These Christians made tents so that they could financially support themselves while they heralded the Gospel (Acts 18:24-28). Especially Paul labored to help sustain others, too, who likewise preached the Gospel (Acts 20:34).



Characteristically, brethren underestimate the great good our “tentmaking” preachers have done in the past or are doing now. Buck and Vera, by their willingness to provide their own livelihood, enabled themselves to serve a congregation that otherwise could little afford a steady laborer in the Word.

Further, their tenacity and initiative for over a decade with the small Southern Hills church of Christ (Columbiana County, Ohio) have largely assured a permanence for the Lord’s people in that location. The church there would not be the same had they not heartily embraced the work left for them to do by the Master. Happily, our every expectation is that they will so continue well into the future.

Though humble, they deserve more esteem than they grant themselves and the admiration of every faithful Christian. Buck and Vera are unpretentious souls who enjoy life and anticipate eternal bliss as well.

Buck and Vera are my friends and co-laborers in the Lord’s vineyard (Philippians 4:3; 3 John 4). Remarkably, they have a good report of them who are outside the Lord’s church as well as sound brethren (1 Timothy 3:7). More importantly, Buck and Vera are the friends of God (James 2:23).

~Louis Rushmore

Publisher's Statement

Louis and Bonnie Rushmore are God's special answer to our prayers. When J.C.'s cancer recurred in 2005, and his health continued to deteriorate with the passing months, we recognized anew our total dependence on God to supply the people who were needed to carry on the work that had been developing since 1960. Beginning as missionaries in Karachi, Pakistan in 1962, our overseas involvement had fostered the printing of books as follow-up tools for radio and TV programs. Many of the books were printed in India, Sri Lanka, Singapore and the Philippines, but because of the need for literature in other places J.C. began printing materials in the States as well. That has grown to be a service for WBS, jail ministries, local evangelism and foreign evangelism, in addition to becoming the publisher of the accounts of the lives and work of missionaries in many parts of the world.

Good things – eternal things – were being done through these efforts, and we didn't want them to end with J.C.'s death. In the fall of 2007, God brought the Louis Rushmores to be a part of our World Evangelism team in Winona. With Louis' background in preaching, teaching for ten years in a school of preaching, writing and publishing books and editing his online magazine, *Gospel Gazette Online*, he and Bonnie were ideal for the work that needed to be done. We continue to be thankful for their decision to move to Winona and to join hands with us to share the printed word with people who are hungry for the message.

Louis brought with him a small printer and a number of books that he had written and printed in the past. *Parables, Volumes 1 and 2* are two of those books. We are happy to make them available for use in this format, and we look forward to enabling many souls to learn the depths of our Lord's teachings more perfectly through these publications. To that end, we commend this volume to you.

Betty (Mrs. J.C.) Choate
Winona, MS 38967
February 6, 2009

Chapter 1: The Parables of Our Lord

Truly, the fitness of our Lord for teaching and preaching was unsurpassed. Jesus was the Ideal Teacher — the Model Teacher. Jesus became Truth Incarnate — the embodiment of Truth, and thereby he exemplified what he taught. Further, our Lord was a precise teacher who taught with clarity, conviction, power and authority; his life was the demonstration of what he taught. No man ever spoke and taught like Jesus (John 7:45-46). Our Lord taught as one having authority (Matthew 7:28-29). The common people heard him gladly (Mark 12:37). Jesus the Master Teacher was also “. . . the very personification of parabolic preaching and story telling.”¹ “Parables comprise more than one-third of the recorded teachings of Jesus.”² No one has ever more effectively used **pictorial speech** to express and enforce Divine Truth.³

Parables are found before the Incarnation of Christ in the Old Testament, perhaps the most famous of which was uttered by the prophet Nathan to King David (2 Samuel 12:1-13). Though, “. . . the use of parables was a unique feature of the popular teaching of Jesus . . . He did not invent this form of teaching. Parables go back to antiquity.”⁴



Further, the Talmud, the official body of Jewish tradition, also incorporates parables within its pages, as does much of the Apocrypha, too. Interestingly, though, no parables appear in the Apocryphal Gospels; apparently their penmen acknowledged the utter hopelessness of attempting to imitate the matchless parables of our Lord.

Adam Clarke quotes Dr. John Lightfoot that in Jesus' day “[n]o scheme of Jewish rhetoric was more familiarly used than that of parables.”⁵ “In the age and country in which Christ appeared, parables were a common and popular method of instruction.”⁶

However, our Lord achieved such lasting renown through his employment of parabolic teaching that to simply say the word “parables” causes one to instantly think of Jesus Christ; certainly no other mouth ever more masterfully used this method of teaching than our Lord's.

Mention parables and one person and one person only comes to mind both uniformly and promptly. That person is the Christ. He is the great PERSON of parabolic preaching and story-telling sermons. Few indeed are the parables in the Bible aside from Jesus and outside his personal preaching and earthly ministry messages. Since he is Deity and thus played an originating role in ALL Biblical teaching of the Old Testament, then even its parables . . . are connected closely with the Second Person of the gracious Godhead.⁷

. . . the parables of Jesus are superb in their aptness, conciseness, beauty and appeal. Although he did not create the parabolic type of teaching, he certainly endowed it with high originality and gave it a deeper spiritual import and dimensions hitherto unknown.⁸

Definition of Parables

“A parable is a comparison between a familiar fact and a spiritual truth.”⁹ Used in Scripture, the parable, “. . . always involves the idea of *comparison*.”¹⁰ But, additionally:

The word “parable” is an anglicized form of the Greek term *parabole*. In the King James Version it is translated “comparison” once (Mk. 4:30); twice it is rendered “figure” (Heb. 9:9; 11:19); once “proverb” (Lk. 4:23); and, forty-six times it is simply found as “parable.” The word is a derivative of two roots — *para* meaning “beside” and *ballo* “to throw.” It thus literally suggests throwing (or placing) something beside something else for the ultimate purpose of making a comparison.¹¹

The parables of our Lord are found exclusively in Matthew, Mark and Luke. The Book of John does not use the Greek “parabole,” but employs a different Greek word which is once rendered in the King James Version by our word “parable” (John 10:6).

The other word used for “parable” is *paroimia*, meaning an “adage, dark saying, wayside saying, a proverb . . .” This word is almost peculiar to John, who uses it four times . . . John never uses the word *parabole*, the only one employed by Matthew, Mark and Luke.¹²

Perhaps one of the most easily remembered definitions of the term “parable” is “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.”¹³ “By the side of a familiar earthly story Jesus placed a spiritual lesson relative to the kingdom. By the eloquent employment of parables Jesus taught the unknown (Heavenly and spiritually-minded lessons) from the known (earthly narratives).”¹⁴ Jesus readily used common circumstances with which his audiences were immediately familiar to illustrate spiritual truths about which they knew little or nothing.

Therefore, a parable is a figurative method of teaching Divine Truth. The Bible employs primarily five figures of speech of which the parable is one. Modern man, though, often further divides these figures into several additional subclasses.

In the Scriptures we have the parable, the proverb, the type, and the allegory named. We also have the fable used, but not named. . . . The parable is the oldest and most common of all the figures of speech. The Old Testament contains many of them, and the Saviour taught almost constantly by that medium of illustration.¹⁵

Many writers have endeavored to distinguish between the parable and other figures of speech employed in God’s Word; one of the most concise such attempts and yet sufficiently meaningful was penned by B.W. Johnson. “The parable differs from the

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proverb in being a *narrative*, from the fable in being *true to nature*, from the myth in being *undeceptive*, from the allegory in that it *veils the spiritual truth*.”¹⁶

A parable is draped in the background of possibility. The events in a parable around which is built a spiritual lesson either did occur or could have happened. “It has been supposed, indeed, that some of the parables uttered by our Saviour narrate real and not fictitious events; but whether this was the case or not is a point of little consequence.”¹⁷ Parables use realistic earthly vehicles to convey spiritual and eternal lessons. Fables, for instance, often resort to talking animals, trees, etc. Proverbs are pithy sayings; allegories are self-interpreting; and parables are stories that must be pondered.

The Bible does not specifically define the word “parable,” but presents a great number of them for careful perusal. (The subtitle of Lockyer’s book, *All the Parables of the Bible*, states: “A Study and Analysis of the More Than 250 Parables in Scripture.”) Over fifty books are said to have been written which especially treat the parables of our Lord. Yet, there is no universal agreement as to the number of Christ’s parables because there is no commonly accepted definition of the parable.

It is difficult to say how many parables are present in the Gospels. The exact number depends on one’s definition of a parable. If the word *parable* is taken to include proverbs, riddles, and simple comparisons as well as those in story form, the number is about sixty in all. Not counting all of the parabolic statements, the number is usually estimated as being from thirty to thirty-five.¹⁸

Lockyer estimates the range suggested for the number of the Lord’s parables varies from less to more than the above citation, and he opts for more than less.

. . . the parables uttered by our Lord, which are dealt with in varying numbers from twenty-five to seventy. It is felt by many writers that parables, in the stricter sense of this term in Christian Theology, number about thirty . . . thirty by no means offers a complete list of our Lord’s fully-formed parables. Almost His entire oral ministry was cast in parabolic form.¹⁹

The summary definition of the parable as it pertains to the parables of Jesus need not be complicated nor difficult to remember. First, the parable must be understood in relationship to its etymology — the Greek word from which it comes and its corresponding root words. Second, the parable always involves a comparison between a familiar fact and a spiritual truth. Third, the most concise and frequently repeated definition of the parable remains: “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.”^{20 21} An infinitely benevolent God chose the most efficient possible means to manifest his Divine Will to mortal man; through Christ, God chose the parable. In this connection Lockyer observed: “Because of his infinity, God had to condescend to those things with which man was familiar in order to convey to man’s finite mind the sublime revelation of His will.”²²

Purpose of Parables

“The same day” of Matthew 13:1 “. . . was the turning point in his (Jesus’) public teaching . . .”²³ “. . . Christ’s use of parables (Matthew 13 and onward) represents a dramatic change in His teaching methods.”²⁴ H. Leo Boles observed:

We now enter upon a new phase of the teachings of Jesus . . . This was a new phase of teaching and his disciples did not understand why he had at this time made the change, and perhaps they did not understand this new form of teaching. At least they did not understand why Jesus would adopt such a form of teaching as to furnish seven parables in one discourse.²⁵

Robertson noted concerning that “day”:

. . . this group of parables is placed by Matthew on the same day as the blasphemous accusation and the visit of the mother of Jesus. It is called “the Busy Day,” not because it was the only one, but simply that so much is told of this day that it serves as a specimen of many others filled to the full with stress and strain. . . . It was not the first time that Jesus had used parables, but the first time that he had spoken so many and some of such length.²⁶

Clarke wrote here: “Our Lord scarcely ever appears to take any rest . . .”²⁷

“The apostles were quick to notice the dramatic change in the Saviour’s teaching methods and promptly asked the reason for it.”²⁸ “And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” (Matthew 13:10).

Christ’s first reply is found in the next verse: “He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given” (Matthew 13:11). Jesus’ initial explanation for his use of parables was twofold: (1) to **reveal** Divine Truth, and (2) to **conceal** Divine Truth.

In Matthew 13:12-17 Jesus expanded his answer to the disciples’ query and in the process quoted Isaiah 6:9-10. This horrific spiritual condition was frequently characteristic of God’s people as well as the rest of the world, too. “This is one of the most important prophecies in the Old Testament, and it is quoted five times in the New Testament (Matthew 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:39-40; Acts 28:26-27).”²⁹

“The parabolic [sic] form veils the truth from those who do not want it, but unveils the truth to those who are ready for it and will receive it.”³⁰ “This is **why** parables were spoken — to **unveil** truth for the godly and to **veil** it for the scoffers and scorners of salvation.”³¹ God, though, is neither blameworthy nor responsible for the lost condition of impenitent sinners.

Their wills of rebellion and defiance overruled God’s will to save them. Today, the same situation largely prevails. Closed Bibles and closed hearts will never



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lead one into the sunlit realm of truth heard, truth believed, truth loved, truth obeyed and salvation received and retained.³²

With Clarke we must concur:

On the whole I conclude, that the grand object of parabolical writing is not to *conceal* the *truth*, but to convey information to the hearts of the hearers in the most concise, appropriate, impressive, and effectual manner.³³

The **nature** of parables has as its purposes:

(1) To reveal truth: making the people to understand the unknown by a comparison with the known. (2) For the purpose of concealing truth from the minds of those who had no right to it, or who would abuse it if it were given to them. (3) They were made the means of embalming truth. (4) And in the fourth place, for the purpose of causing men to assent to truth before they could know it certainly meant them.³⁴

Another purpose of our Lord's use of parables was to fulfill Messianic Prophecy.

“All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 13:34-35).

Herein Jesus quoted Psalm 78:2, “I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old” and applied it to Himself.

One of Matthew's purposes in writing his Gospel was to show how Jesus Christ, in His life and teaching, fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures. “That it might be fulfilled” is one of his key statements (see 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14).³⁵

Interpreting Parables

Only two of the Lord's parables are explained by him — the first two, *The Sower* and *The Tares*. It would seem reasonable that having two parables explained by our Savior, by them man should possess sufficient insight into the proper understanding of the balance of Christ's parables. It is imperative that Jesus' explanation of those parables serve as “. . . the standard for the interpretation of all parables . . .”³⁶

Yet, there is sometimes disagreement even among brethren regarding the interpretation of some of the points of these first two parables. It is little wonder, then, that through the centuries men have often grossly perverted the parables of our Lord.

There are two extremes to be avoided in the interpretation of parables. One is to make *too much* of them — The other to make *too little* of them.³⁷

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Therefore, some careful, prudent considerations are in order before anyone attempts to interpret the parables of Christ; this is even more so the case should one also then purpose to convey those interpretations to others.

First, “[i]t is a basic rule of Bible study that we examine each passage of Scripture in the light of its literary classification.”³⁸ This principle does not reflect unfavorably upon the inspiration of the Bible, but simply denotes a difference, for instance, between literal and figurative language. Above all: “Interpretation is limited by the original intent of the parable . . .”³⁹

It would be a serious mistake and a violation of legitimate hermeneutics to ignore this principle. Otherwise, the Bible would forever mean nothing at all in particular and everything at the same time; the Bible would then be wholly subjective — meaningless.

“*Study each parable in its context*”⁴⁰ is also a maxim! The context includes the background behind the parable.

. . . the Bible student should undertake to determine the immediate historical background of the parable; and if possible, the implied or stated purpose of the narrative. This would prevent many serious mis-applications. . . . It cannot be overstressed; the background of a parable is frequently vital to its interpretation. . . . The imagery, especially as it relates to the 1st century era and Palestinean [sic] culture, should be carefully noted. . . . By an examination of the contextual setting, determine the basic purpose of the parable. A parable, divorced from context, can often become fertile soil for the speculator.⁴¹

Further, consideration must be given to **details**. Details in the narrative of a parable need to be carefully handled to avoid teaching indefensible doctrines; it is also indefensible to teach truth from a passage which does not treat that axiom. “Incidental elements in these stories of the Savior must not be exploited to unjust ends.”⁴²

A failure to recognize that all of the details of a parable are not meaningful has led many astray in their interpretations. . . . The details of a parable are there most often just to add color to the story.⁴³

Some of the parables are quite detailed, such as the sower and the tares, while others have very little detail. It is not necessary to make everything mean something unless the context warrants it. . . . In connection with this principle, the symbols used in different parables do not always represent the same thing.⁴⁴

Still another guideline for the proper interpretation of parables must be: “No point of doctrine, that is not elsewhere clearly affirmed, may be derived from an incidental parabolic reference.”⁴⁵ That is, “[t]raits which, if interpreted, would teach doctrines not elsewhere taught in Scripture belong only to the coloring.”⁴⁶ Also, “[t]raits which, if literally interpreted, would contradict Scripture, are colouring . . .”⁴⁷ “*The parables were given to illustrate doctrine, not to declare it.* In other words, don’t try to build a case for some doctrine *only* on the basis of a parable.”⁴⁸ Akin to these principles is: “Traits which cannot be applied to the relation between God and man belong only to the coloring.”⁴⁹

Parables Categorized

Perhaps an extensive introduction to the parables of our Lord, such as this, would be incomplete without some kind of list or chart of those parables. However, how many and which parables should be included? Exactly in what manner would those parables be best arranged? The classifications of the parables number as many as the writers who have undertaken the task of writing about them. Yet, probably none of those lists are perfect.

It is largely individual taste that must determine the arrangement of the parables. Any division will be open to attack, for a parable may have so many aspects of truth that it will leap over any fence of classification by which we may endeavor to confine it. The chronological plan, if same could be determined, might be the best, but such a chronological order in which the parables were spoken is unknown.⁵⁰

Maybe the only list that cannot be too sorely criticized is one in which the parable-stories of our Lord are listed according to the Gospel records in which they are found. Such a chart appears in what is commonly called the “Dickson Bible,”⁵¹ which chart also attempts to list the parables in chronological order. Lightfoot provides a more comprehensive list of the parables according to their location.⁵²

Resources

The Parables of Our Saviour is unique and priceless since it is comprised of numerous lectures on parables, researched and explained by some of the most biblically conservative brethren in the Lord’s church. The first lecture therein, written by brother Robert R. Taylor, Jr., “Introduction Of The Saviour’s Parables,” has as its theme the same subject of this chapter, and proved to be of great value in the preparation of this material.

The Parable in Profile was especially useful and by itself was the basis of several lectures on the parables presented in the Upper Ohio Valley (1991) in a Bible class comprised of members from several congregations. The degree to which other works are beneficial can be ascertained by the quotations made from them.

It is hoped that the multiplicity of resources cited will benefit the reader; special care was exercised to peruse numerous written works, select the best remarks from a wide field of biblical scholarship and arrange those citations in a fluid, balanced presentation of truth about the parables of Christ.

Questions

1. What was different about the Lord’s teaching (Matt. 7:28-29)?
2. About what portion of the Lord’s teaching was done through parables?
3. True or False? Jesus was the first person in the Bible to use parables?
4. The parables of Jesus are found only in what three books of the Bible?
5. What is thought to be the easiest remembered definition of a parable?
6. The Bible uses five figures of speech in its pages; name them.

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7. What are some of the unique qualities of a parable versus other figures of speech used in the Bible?
8. There are about how many parables in the Bible?
9. The parable always involves the comparison of what two things?
10. In what chapter of Matthew is it recorded that Jesus began to teach with parables?
11. To what does the phrase “the busy day” refer, and what is its relationship to parables?
12. When asked why he began teaching in parables, what two answers did Jesus give his disciples (Matt. 13:10-11)?
13. What is the four-fold purpose of miracles?
14. How many of our Lord’s parables were explained by Him? Name them.
15. What are the two extremes to avoid in the interpretation of parables?
16. What relationship does the original intent of a parable sustain to interpretation and application today?
17. Describe the context of a parable and explain the relationship sustained by the context of a parable to interpretation and application today.
18. What emphasis usually should be given to the details of a parable?
19. What caution should be observed regarding incidental parabolic references?
20. Name the best method for categorizing the various parables of our Lord.

Endnotes

¹Robert R. Taylor, Jr., “Introduction of the Saviour’s Parables,” *The Parables of Our Saviour*, Garfield Heights church of Christ, p. 1.

²Neil R. Lightfoot, *The Parables of Jesus, Vol. I*, ACU Press, p. 1.

³Herbert Lockyer, *All the Parables of the Bible*, Zondervan Publishing House, p. 9.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵Adam Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary, Vol. I*, Abingdon Press, p. 143.

⁶Lockyer, p. 9.

⁷Taylor, p. 5.

⁸Lockyer, p. 10.

⁹W. Gaddys Roy, *Sermon Outlines on the Parables of Jesus*, W. Gaddys Roy, 1974.

¹⁰Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament, Vol. I*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., p. 74.

¹¹Wayne Jackson, *The Parables in Profile*, Star Bible & Tract Corp., p. 6.

¹²Lockyer, p. 12.

¹³Lightfoot, p. 1.

¹⁴Taylor, p. 4.

¹⁵D.R. Dungan, *Hermeneutics*, Gospel Light Publishing Co., p. 226.

¹⁶B.W. Johnson, *The People’s New Testament with Explanatory Notes*, Gospel Advocate Co., p. 76.

¹⁷John M’Clintock and James Strong, “Parables,” *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, Vol. VII*, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, p.643.

¹⁸Lightfoot, p. 4.

- ¹⁹Lockyer, p. 125.
- ²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 13.
- ²¹Warren W. Wiersbe, *Windows on the Parables*, Wheaton, Scripture Press, p. 12.
- ²²Lockyer, p. 10.
- ²³Johnson, p. 76.
- ²⁴Jackson, p. 8.
- ²⁵H. Leo Boles, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew*, Nashville, Gospel Advocate Co., p. 284, 287.
- ²⁶Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, pp. 100.
- ²⁷Clarke, p. 142.
- ²⁸James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, Austin, Firm Foundation Publishing House, p. 187.
- ²⁹Wiersbe, p. 12.
- ³⁰Boles, p. 287.
- ³¹Taylor, p. 9.
- ³²*Ibid.*
- ³³Clarke, p. 155.
- ³⁴Dungan, pp. 230, 231.
- ³⁵Wiersbe, p. 14.
- ³⁶R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, p. 510.
- ³⁷Lockyer, p. 19.
- ³⁸Wiersbe, p. 16.
- ³⁹Lockyer, p. 21.
- ⁴⁰Wiersbe, p. 1.
- ⁴¹Jackson, pp. 10, 11.
- ⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 12.
- ⁴³Lightfoot, p. 3.
- ⁴⁴Wiersbe, p. 17.
- ⁴⁵Jackson, p. 12.
- ⁴⁶M'Clintock and Strong, p. 649.
- ⁴⁷Lockyer, p. 22.
- ⁴⁸Wiersbe, p. 17.
- ⁴⁹M'Clintock and Strong, p. 649.
- ⁵⁰Lockyer, p. 133.
- ⁵¹Anonymous, *The New Analytical Bible and Dictionary of the Bible*, Chicago, John A. Dickson Publishing Co., p. 1241.
- ⁵²Lightfoot, pp. 5, 6.

Chapter 2: The Sower

Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15

Introduction

Jesus, then Master Teacher, frequently used figurative language in his teaching. Some people classify nearly all these colorful illustrations as parables (e.g., Matthew 5:13-16). However, strictly speaking, Jesus began to use fully developed parables in Matthew 13. Our Lord's disciples acknowledged that he changed his method of teaching and asked why. "And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" (Matthew 13:10).

The parables of our Lord were very effective. Jesus outfitted ". . . each parable with lines as sharp as an etching."¹ His parables are noteworthy for their brevity and simplicity. In theme he appealed to the familiar circumstances of agriculture, home life, merchants, civic duties, social life and nature to teach spiritual truths. Hence, a common definition of parables is that they are earthly stories with heavenly meanings.

The Parable of the Sower received its name from Jesus himself (Matthew 13:18). It is one of only two of our Lord's parables that he interpreted for us. (Jesus also explained *The Parable of the Tares*, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.) Therefore, a thorough understanding of these two parables is necessary to have sufficient insight as to the meanings of the rest of them. Understanding *The Parable of the Sower* (and *The Parable of the Tares*) is the key to understanding all the parables of Christ.

Jesus also explained why he spoke in parables (Matthew 13:10-17). Our Lord recited a phrase that was applied often to the Jews throughout their history (Deuteronomy 29:4; Isaiah 6:9-10; Jeremiah 5:21; Ezekiel 12:2). The apostle Paul likewise portrayed some of the people to whom he preached as insensitive to God's message for them (Romans 11:8).

"Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed *are* your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear" (Matthew 13:13-16).

Chapter 2: The Sower

The Parable of the Sower is one of about a dozen kingdom parables. The concept of a spiritual kingdom arises in the Old Testament and is an object of prophecy, preparation and fulfillment. “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom . . .” (Daniel 2:44). This kingdom was the subject of preaching by John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, their disciples, Philip, Paul and John (Mark 1:15; 3:1-2; Acts 8:12; Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9). These and similar New Testament passages variously refer to the kingdom and often use the phrases “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” interchangeably.

In this parable, the Lord’s kingdom is compared to a plant. Similarities that readily appear include gradual, nearly imperceptible growth and an orderliness. Patience, then, is necessary for either the growth of crops or the expansion of the kingdom (James 5:7; Luke 8:15).

“In Christian growth we should not expect the ear before the blade.”² Orderliness and growth of the kingdom directly relate to individual conversions and subsequent spiritual maturity. Babies in Christ must feed on a steady diet of God’s Word (1 Peter 2:2) to mature. Christians (and the kingdom) are stunted in their growth when they fail to mature (1 Corinthians 3:1-4; Hebrews 5:11-6:2). Christians (and consequently the kingdom) must grow though the growth may be gradual.

Fortunately for the sower, who today in principle is each Christian, he does not have to know how the seed grows. The sower must, though, choose pure seed, know how to plant and how to harvest. “. . . The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11).

Further, all the sower has to do is to sow. It is beyond his power to make the seed grow.³

The joint participation of God and man is essential to both successful agriculture and growth of the kingdom. Especially concerning the kingdom of God, man cannot grow the kingdom without God, and God will not grow the kingdom without the obedient participation of man. The apostle Paul observed: “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:6). “A principle of partnership must operate if there is to be a harvest.”⁴

The Parable of the Sower may have been calculated (besides its primary application) by Jesus Christ to help prepare the apostles for certain disappointment in their ministries. The apostles ultimately suffered the loss of their Teacher to death on the cross. Before and after that event, they encountered opposition to the Gospel message that they preached. Jesus apprised the apostles of rejection and persecution before sending them on the limited commission (Matthew 10:16-25).

The rejection of the Gospel from the mouth of Paul is chronicled throughout the latter half of the Book of Acts. Paul’s afflictions appear in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. Especially in Athens, the preaching of the Gospel met with little success (Acts 17).

If reduced to percentages, *The Parable of the Sower* indicates only 25 percent of evangelistic efforts will meet with lasting success. Few, comparatively, will be saved (Matthew 7:13-14). However, still there will be multitudes innumerable in heaven (Revelation 7:9). At one point, the apostles acknowledged that there were voids in their

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lives because they followed the Christ. What, then, they asked, shall we have instead. Jesus assured them of divine compensation exceeding all losses (Matthew 19:27-30).

The apostles and other early Christians had cause for discouragement (Acts 8:1-4). Even today rejection hurts when we attempt to tell someone about Jesus. They and we, however, have reason to rejoice in our redemption and the comparatively few others who obey the Gospel.

Background

The Parable of the Sower was spoken by Jesus to “great multitudes” outside and near Capernaum. Jesus used a boat as a platform from which to address his audience on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 13:1-2).

Earlier in the day, Jesus healed a man possessed with a demon (Matthew 12:22), which generated interest and controversy (Matthew 12:23-37). The Pharisees asked for a miracle but Jesus refused to give them additional signs or miracles (Matthew 12:38-45). Jesus’ earthly family came to see him but because of the crowds they could not (Matthew 12:46-50). Now, “the same day” Jesus spoke in parables, including *The Parable of the Sower*.

The Parable

“And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow” (Matthew 13:3).

Sowing seed was a familiar activity to our Lord’s auditors. Anyone can sow. Even a small child can cast seed to the ground whereby it can grow. Similarly, all Christians can sow the seed of the kingdom (Acts 8:4; 2 Timothy 2:24; Hebrews 5:11-6:2).

When Jesus said “Behold,” he may have gestured toward someone beyond the crowd, who in a field not far away was sowing seed as Jesus spoke this parable. It was usual for first century inhabitants of Canaan to live in villages and cities. To sow seed or any other agricultural activity they literally “went forth.”

“And when he sowed, some *seeds* fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up” (Matthew 13:4).

The parable assumes that pure seed was sown. The same good seed was sown in each instance under consideration in the parable. It is axiomatic that there could be no crop to harvest unless seed was first planted. The crop is predictable according to the seed sown; seed produces after its own kind (Galatians 6:7-8; Genesis 1:11). Any harvest will be proportionate to the amount of seed planted in fertile soil (2 Corinthians 9:6).

The seed in this parable is the Word of God (Matthew 13:19; Mark 4:14; Luke 8:5, 11). This seed is living, incorruptible and eternal: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Peter 1:23; Isaiah 4:8). Like seed sown in fields, the Word of God when planted is fruitful:

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“For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10-11).

This spiritual seed, the Word of God, is able to save souls (James 1:21). The words of Jesus when planted in honest hearts are life to the soul (John 6:63). Instead, one can choose to sow sinful seeds of death (Galatians 6:7-8). Fruitlessness results in destruction (John 15:2, 6).

The “wayside” soil is the first of four soils represented in the parable and into which seed fell. Though called by Christ *The Parable of the Sower*, emphasis in this parable is not on the sower. The sower is not blameworthy for a poor harvest.

The variables lie with the soils. The soils represent the Bible hearts of men (not the muscle in one’s chest that pumps blood). The Bible heart is comprised of intellect (Romans 10:9-10), emotion (Matthew 22:37) and will (Romans 6:16-17). “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23; Mark 7:20-23).

The wayside soil is a compacted pathway. Sowing seed there is comparable to scattering seed on a highway. The wayside soil is unaffected by the seed. The seed lies uselessly on top of the ground. It does not germinate. Fowls, representative of the devil (Matthew 13:19), eat it before it can grow.

From Matthew 13, verses four and 19, it is apparent that the heart represented by this soil heard the audible Word but ignored it. That person has a closed mind. Therefore, as Matthew 13:19 reads, “understandeth it not.” “They do not understand because they will not understand”⁵ That person has a hard heart toward or is not interested in the Gospel.

Without a change of heart, such a soul cannot be saved by the Gospel that he rejects. Though unlikely, it is possible for a hard heart to be softened. “Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for *it is* time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you” (Hosea 10:12).

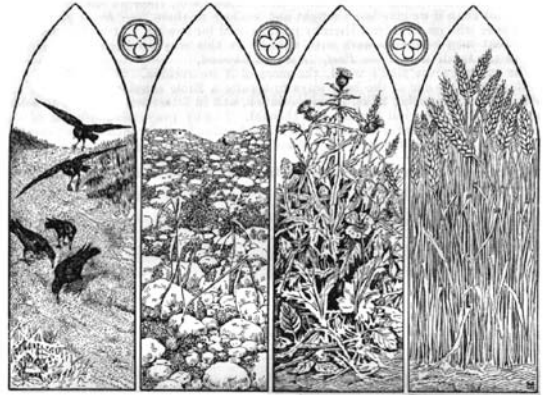
“Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away” (Matthew 13:5-6).

“But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended” (Matthew 13:20-21).

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A thin layer of soil over a bed of rock, according to the illustration, is incapable of sustaining a crop through to the harvest. The seed germinates in the shallow soil but it has no staying power because it is not well rooted. Therefore, when tested by the heat of a sunny day, whereas plants rooted in good soil thrive, the plant in this soil withers and dies.

The heart described by this soil quickly embraces the Gospel but as quickly backslides or apostatizes. This parable, then, here and the next soil to be discussed, implies the possibility of apostasy. The disciple with a stony-soil heart makes an emotional response and lacks strong convictions. He may be impulsive and has not sufficiently ‘counted the cost of discipleship’ (Luke 14:27-33). The lack of earnestness evident in him causes his faith to fail when faced with the tribulations, which encountered by others cause them to mature (James 1:2-4). It is easier to become a Christian than to practice Christianity.



A plant cannot survive that is not adequately rooted. One must be rooted in Christ (Col. 2:7; Eph. 3:17).⁶

“And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:” (Matthew 13:7).

“He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22).

The plant that begins to grow where thorns or weeds also grow, unsuccessfully competes for space and resources. The seed was not purposely sown in the weeds, but the weed seed was present in the soil when the good seed was planted. Weeds grow naturally. The soil did not lack fertility; the good seed simply encountered overwhelming competition from weeds. The good seed did not have enough room to grow. Therefore, it died and obviously was not fruitful. Had the thorny soil been properly prepared, it could have produced a bumper crop.

The thorny-soil heart, though he responds to the Gospel, is preoccupied with the influences of the world and materialism. “A thorn is anything that crowds Jesus out of our lives.”⁷ Thorns may be money, pleasure, power, authority, popularity, family, education, hobbies, recreation, sports, etc. Even legitimate interests, if unrestrained, can undercut effective Christianity. Thorny-heart Christians are lukewarm (Revelation 3:15-16) and have set aside their first love (Revelation 3:2). They neglect the reality of eternity and the preparation necessary for a heavenly hereafter, for fleeting moments of pleasant distraction (Hebrews 11:24-25).

Man cannot equally serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24). Christians must get their priorities in the proper order (Matthew 6:33).

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“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40).

The thorny-soil heart also implies the possibility of apostasy. Contrary to objections, the Bible teaches that a child of God can sin so as to be lost. Numerous passages teach this, though one verse of Scripture is sufficient to teach any truth (2 Peter 2:20-22).

“But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold” (Matthew 13:8).

“But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth *it*; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matthew 13:23).

The good soil permitted the good seed unhindered growth. The crop continued to thrive through the growing season to the harvest. Good soil plus good seed resulted in fruitfulness.

Good-soil hearts are those who “heareth the word, and understandeth it” (Matthew 13:23), “hear the word, and receive it” (Mark 4:20) and “having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit” (Luke 8:15).

These last souls are the ones upon whom the Lord can depend. Jesus is the Captain of their salvation (Hebrews 2:10; 5:8-9). Instead of being immature (Hebrews 5:11-6:2), they are “apt to teach” (2 Timothy 2:2, 24). Good-soil heart Christians comprise the church that will weather every adversity for the faith (Acts 8:1-4), evangelize the world (Mark 16:15-16), exercise pure living (Titus 2:12) and gladly worship together (Hebrews 10:25). These souls know that they know that they have been redeemed (1 John 2:1-3). It is for these alone Jesus will return in the clouds to receive his bride (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; John 3:29; Revelation 21:2; 22:17).

“Who hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 13:9).

No one has to be lost. Every accountable soul can hear, (i.e., “having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit,” Luke 8:15). Every man and woman can make a course correction this side of eternity.

Conclusion

(1) Satan knows the power of God’s Word and will attempt to snatch it away from us. (2) “But sowers, especially preachers of the Word, must learn from the parable before us that much of their labor is hard and sometimes fruitless from a human standpoint. It may seem as if much of their work is wasted.”⁸ (3) Whereas James 3:1 and Romans 16:17-18 address the responsibility of teachers, *The Parable of the Sower* teaches the responsibility of hearers. (4) God’s Word, like a small seed, is powerful. (5) Like a seed,

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God's Word produces fruit. (6) Like a seed, God's Word must be planted, cultivated and protected. (7) "Church members like to blame teachers and preachers for their lack of spiritual growth, but perhaps the problem is dull hearers."⁹ (8) We need the attitude of 1 Samuel 3:10, "And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth." (9) One needs to hear; it is important what one hears; it is important how to hear. (10) It is always time to sow God's Word. (11) God's Word is as powerful today as it has ever been. (12) One's heart is not honest and good if when presented with truth he does not obey it.

Questions

1. In what chapter in the Gospel According to Matthew did Jesus begin to use fully developed parables? How can one know that was the point in our Lord's ministry that he began to use parables?
2. List two things for which our Lord's parables are especially noteworthy.
3. List six themes Jesus used in his parables while illustrating spiritual truths.
4. What is a common definition of parables?
5. How did the *Parable of the Sower* derive its name?
6. Name the parables of our Lord that he explained.
7. Why did Jesus speak in parables?
8. The *Parable of the Sower* has something in common with about a dozen other parables of our Lord; what is it?
9. In what ways is the Lord's kingdom like a plant?
10. What quality is needed by mankind regarding both farming and the church?
11. What stunts Christian growth?
12. Who is the sower?
13. Regarding either farming or growth of the kingdom, what three things are required?
14. What is the seed in the parable?
15. Explain the principle of partnership that is necessary for both successful agriculture and growth of the kingdom.
16. For what did the *Parable of the Sower* prepare our Lord's disciples?
17. What percentage of our evangelistic efforts may well meet with failure?
18. Outside what city did Jesus present the *Parable of the Sower*?
19. What did Jesus use for a pulpit from which to preach this parable?
20. Why did Jesus refuse the request of the Pharisees to perform a miracle?
21. What may have been the significance of Jesus prefacing this parable with the word "behold"?
22. In first century Canaan, where were the fields in relationship to the homes of the farmers?
23. What two things are predictable about farming?
24. Describe the "wayside soil."
25. What happened to the seed sown here?
26. What do the birds in this parable represent?
27. What would have to occur before a "wayside-soil" heart could be fruitful?

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28. Describe the “rocky soil.”
29. Why are people depicted in the parable as “rocky-soil” hearts unfruitful?
30. What was wrong with the “thorny soil”?
31. What was correct about the “thorny soil”?
32. Why are people depicted in the parable as “thorny-soil” hearts unfruitful?
33. What is a thorn in the life of “thorny-soil” hearts?
34. How can good things become thorns in people’s lives?
35. What about the “good soil” allowed it to contribute to a bumper harvest?
36. Which of the four soils described in the parable represent faithful Christians and those upon whom the Lord can depend?
37. Who has the ability to make changes in themselves that will permit the divine seed (the Word of God) to germinate in their hearts and finally result in fruitfulness?
38. Which soil or soils represent souls who never become Christians?
39. Which soil or soils, if any, represent souls who become Christians but afterward become unfaithful?
40. What bearing, if any, does the *Parable of the Sower* have on the subject of apostasy? Is it possible for a child of God to sin so as to be lost?
41. In what way does this parable comfort servants of God whose labors for Christ sometimes appear fruitless?
42. The *Parable of the Sower* addresses the responsibility of what group of people?
43. When should the child of God sow the Word of God?
44. How can one identify an honest heart?

Endnotes

¹ Lockyer, p. 144.

² Lightfoot, p. 19.

³ Lockyer, p. 177.

⁴ Wiersbe, p. 24.

⁵ Jackson, p. 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁷ Lightfoot, p. 12.

⁸ Lockyer, p. 176.

⁹ Wiersbe, p. 31.

Chapter 3: the Tares

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Introduction

The Parable of the Tares is one of only two of our Lord's parables that he explained. *The Parable of the Sower* is the other. Both parables share the same background so familiar to Jesus' auditors.

Each of these two parables features the sower and his good seed. However, whereas in *The Parable of the Sower* any righteous soul (including Christ) is the sower, in *The Parable of the Tares* the sower of the good seed ("the householder") is Jesus alone. The Word of God was identified as the seed in *The Parable of the Sower*, but in *The Parable of the Tares* the good seed represents righteous people. The bad seed ("tares") represents unrighteous souls.



The Parable of the Tares also has a second sower — the devil. Additional persons include servants of the householder (the righteous) and angels. Further similarities and contrasts involve the four soils in the former parable and a single field of good soil in the latter parable.

Further the term kingdom is used differently in the two parables. "Kingdom" in its usual sense (when the Bible addresses spiritual matters) pertains to the dominion of God — to us the church — and is employed in the *Parable of the Sower* (Matthew 13:19; Luke 8:1). In the *Parable of the Tares* and the *Parable of the Pounds or Money* (Luke 19:11-27) the word "kingdom" refers to the world, in which are both righteous and unrighteous souls.

The Parable of the Tares develops through two questions accompanied by two answers. The questions and answers are prefaced with essential details on which the parable depends for illustration and background ("good seed," apparently good soil ["field"], "while men slept," "enemy," weed seed ["tares"], "the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit" and "servants").

The Parable

"Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his

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way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn” (Matthew 13:24-30).



“Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 13:36-43).

Jesus then explained that the “field” represents the “world,” “the good seed are the children of the kingdom,” “tares are the children of the wicked one,” the “enemy” is the “devil,” “the harvest is the end of the world” and “the reapers are the angels.” Jesus identified the sower in this parable as “the Son of Man,” which phrase appears in the New Testament about 80 times and applies to Jesus Christ (Acts 7:56).

The soil (“his field” or “world”) into which the wheat seed was sown belongs to our Lord. “He [Jesus] here claims proprietorship.”¹ “The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fullness thereof, thou hast founded them” (Psalm 89:11). The material universe, our planet, all creation including our souls and our bodies belong to our Creator. The devil may rule in the kingdoms of men (2 Corinthians 4:4), but everything really belongs to God. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, and they that dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1).

The good seed and the resulting wheat are Christians. In the wheat field, whatever is not wheat is a weed. There is no in between. Christians necessarily are in the world, but we must not be of the world (John 15:18-19; 17:9-18) and we must not conform to the world (Romans 12:1-2; James 4:4).

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Discovery of the tares was a “sad surprise.”² Apparently, the tares were indistinguishable from the wheat, not only as seeds but as developing plants, too. However, after the ear was formed the difference became obvious. This gives heightened meaning to Jesus’ words, “wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20).

Tares among the wheat amounted to opposition to a bountiful harvest by imitation. Similarly, world religions and denominationalism purport to offer communication to and from God and promise redemption or some other type of a reward. Especially some denominations closely imitate primitive, New Testament Christianity. Further, even within the Lord’s church there may be impenitent, sinful souls who, unknown to us, are lost. Though men may not always be able to discern sinners, God is not fooled. He will separate the wicked from the righteous (Matthew 25:31-46).

These tares were sown “while men slept” which may simply mean the deed was done under the cloak of night darkness. If so, no indictment of the sleeping men is warranted because good men ordinarily sleep at night. Contrary to the tactics of the devil, Jesus Christ and his followers work in the light (John 3:18-21). Our Lord’s mission, in which we participate, is to turn souls from the darkness of sin to the light of righteousness (Matthew 5:14-16; Acts 26:16-18).

The devil delights in counteracting the work of Christ. Satan is the enemy of Jesus and his church. The spiritual conflict in which we find ourselves is the greatest confrontation imaginable (i.e., more significant than WW1, WW2, or WW3 should it occur).

This second sower in *The Parable of the Tares* is variously identified in the passage before us. He is referred to as “his enemy,” “an enemy,” “the wicked one” and “the devil” (Matthew 13:25, 28, 38-39). From three perspectives, the “enemy” was trespassing when he sowed tares. He was a trespasser (1) for secretly entering the householder’s property, (2) for entering another man’s property for the explicit and premeditated purpose of causing harm, and (3) simply because he was “an enemy” and therefore rightfully unwelcome. This enemy was also cowardly.

The tares, after they attained a certain stage of development, were at once recognized as counterproductive to the anticipated harvest. The sole reason these tares were in the wheat field was to vent the hate of an enemy. No party had anything substantive to gain by sowing tares among the wheat.

The householder elected to separate the tares during the harvest. Separating the tares from the wheat was a difficult, time consuming and unpleasant added chore at harvest time.

The harvest in this parable represents the end of the world and judgment. Hence, this is a judgment parable; the final judgment will come. There will be a separation between the righteous and the unrighteous (2 Peter 3:10, 12; Revelation 20:11-15; Matthew 24:31, 46). Though we do not know when the judgment harvest will occur, there is a God-appointed time that it will be executed (Acts 17:31).

The reapers are the angels (Matthew 13:41; 25:31; Jude 14-15). The disposition of the tares in the parable represents hell (Matthew 5:22; Hebrews 10:27; Mark 9:43, 48).

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The judgment of the tare — souls in this parable — is described: “furnace of fire” and “wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:42). These phrases and companion passages portray the horror of hell, fierceness of torment and hopeless despair (Luke 10:19-31; Revelation 20:11-15; Matthew 25:31-46).

Happily, this parable also pictures an eternal reward for those in the parable represented as the good seed and the wheat (Matthew 13:43). The last verse of the parable, with the phrase “who hath ears to hear, let him hear,” intimates that the soul in this life represented by the tares could change. Thus hell can be avoided by conforming to the doctrine of Christ (Romans 6:17-18; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Conclusion

Good and evil stand beside each other in this life. However, eventually there will be a permanent separation. For now, though, the world is like a field of wheat and tares.

Jesus taught that there will be a final judgment, illustrated by the harvest at the end of the growing season. Until the Lord returns, this is the growing season. We must prepare to meet God (Amos 4:12).

Clearly, our Lord taught the existence and activity of the devil. Consonant with the personage of the devil, he taught the reality of a devil’s hell. As assuredly as there is heaven for which we long, hell, too, exists and must be avoided.

Though used as a poplar quibble, *The Parable of the Tares* does not teach against church discipline. Church discipline (Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10) is not discussed in the parable. Contrariwise, the church is obligated to exercise church discipline when necessary (1 Corinthians 5).

Finally, *The Parable of the Tares* and the erroneous doctrine of premillennialism conflict. “The millennium theory is refuted in this parable.”³

Questions

1. What unique characteristic do only the parables of *The Sower* and *The Tares* share?
2. In *The Parable of the Sower*, the sower represented any righteous person. In *The Parable of the Tares* who does the sower represent?
3. In *The Parable of the Sower*, the seed represented the Word of God. In *The Parable of the Tares* what does the seed represent?
4. Who is the second sower in *The Parable of the Tares*?
5. Identify the following terms in *The Parable of the Tares*: householder, the field, wheat, the reapers, the harvest, and the tares.
6. In what sense is the word “kingdom” used in *The Parable of the Tares*? To what does the word kingdom usually refer in the parables of Christ and generally in the New Testament?
7. Jesus interjected himself into this parable by the use of what phrase?
8. To whom does the world belong according to this parable?
9. At what stage in the development of the tares were they identified?
10. What does the phrase “while men slept” likely mean?
11. Why is the ongoing spiritual war more serious than even world wars?

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12. What was the purpose of sowing tares among the wheat?
13. What does the parable teach about the eternal disposition of souls?
14. Though obviously in the physical world a tare cannot become wheat, what phrase in the parable suggests that in the spiritual application a tare could become wheat?
15. How long will the good and evil, according to this parable, stand side by side?
16. What does the parable teach about church discipline?
17. How does this parable affect the doctrine of premillennialism?

Endnotes

¹ Lockyer, p. 180.

² Roy, p. 22.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Chapter 4: The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19

Introduction

The “busy day” of Jesus continued as he recited additional parables. *The Parable of the Mustard Seed* and *The Parable of the Leaven* are called by some “sandwich parables.” These two parables appear between the initial presentation and later explanation of *The Parable of the Tares*.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed has the distinction of being the first fully developed parable of our Lord (in Matthew) for which he gave no interpretation. Jesus only interpreted two of his parables: *The Parable of the Sower* and *The Parable of the Tares*.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed is outstanding for its brevity, contained within two verses in each of the Gospel accounts of Matthew and Mark and three verses in Luke. However, the parable adequately conveys the single point regarding the kingdom for which Jesus uttered it. No extraneous words clutter this message. Yet, there is no apparent void due to a lack of words. As one would expect, considering that the parable was spoken by the Master Teacher, it is perfect the way it is.

Sometimes commentators stumble over the simplicity of the parables. Each of the parables of our Lord emphasizes one main idea, but often they are twisted to teach additional lessons and not infrequently false doctrine.

It should be the goal of every student of the Bible to ascertain what the original recipients of a divine message were expected to understand. It is equally indefensible to teach truth from a passage that does not teach that truth as it is to teach error. Truth should be taught from verses that respectively teach it and error should not be taught at all.

The Parable

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof” (Matthew 13:31-32).

One writer concisely noted the purpose of this kingdom parable. “The application of the parable is that the kingdom would commence with a small beginning, but would

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grow into a great institution.”¹ Another brother described the emphasis of *The Parable of the Mustard Seed* with these words: “The kingdom would have an insignificant beginning, but there would be phenomenal growth!”²

Modern man attributes success to big things. Hence, we boast super-tankers and mega-stores. In this parable, though, Jesus emphasizes something small and therefore perceived to be insignificant. The Lord’s kingdom, especially in its beginning, like a small seed, is also imagined by worldly souls to be equally insignificant. However, like the mature mustard plant, the growth of the kingdom of God far exceeds its modest beginning and cannot be ignored.

Efforts by some commentators to elevate parable details to the same level of the primary thrust of the parable are unwarranted and dangerous. For instance, the birds and the branches do not have special significance in this parable. Those details merely contribute to the main point regarding the obvious contrast between the small beginning and the expansive growth.

Parables were built upon familiar circumstances with which the auditors of the parables were aware. Doubtless the original beneficiaries of many Bible discourses had a better understanding of some references with which they were contemporary than we do (e.g., some of the figures of speech in the Book of Revelation).

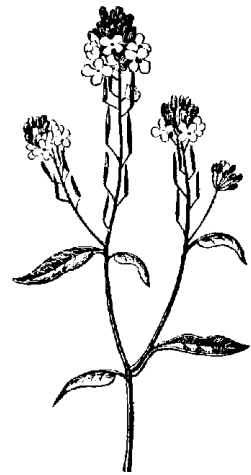
In this parable, we are unfamiliar with the type of mustard plant herein described. We are removed from this plant by distance and geography if not by climate and time also. Resources to which we can turn, though, verify the existence of such a shrub like herb.

Citations regarding the height of a mature mustard plant range from five to 20 feet. The mustard plant under discussion attains its greatest growth when it is nurtured in a “garden” (Luke 13:19). Though this mustard plant may resemble a tree, it lacks the woody-fiber of a tree. It attains all its growth in one growing season and dies after it produces flowers and seeds.

Several observers have noted that the mustard seed is not literally the smallest seed. Occasionally someone remarks that the mustard seed is the smallest herb seed. Jesus said that the mature mustard plant is the largest herb (Matthew 13:22). Additionally, “[t]he mustard seed was proverbial [among the Jews] for its smallness (Matthew 17:20).”³ Another suggests the mustard seed was the smallest seed with which the audience to whom Jesus was speaking was familiar.⁴

The dramatic difference in size between the minute mustard seed and the mature plant was immediately obvious to the audience to whom Jesus told *The Parable of the Mustard Seed*. They were also aware of how quickly this transformation occurred.

It was fitting, then, that Jesus compared the kingdom that he came to establish to the growth of the mustard seed. Both the mustard seed and the kingdom have humble beginnings. From their germination, both experienced an extraordinary spurt of growth.



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Additionally, the acute contrast between the beginning and the maturity of both the mustard plant and the kingdom was no less impressive.

Conclusion

Jesus compared the progress of his kingdom (prophetically then since he had not yet established his kingdom) to the robust growth of a living thing. On the inaugural day of our Lord's kingdom (church, Matthew 16:18-19), about 3,000 souls were **added** to the charter members (Acts 2:41, 47). Shortly thereafter, the membership increased by thousands more (Acts 4:4). Periodically, the citizenry of the kingdom multiplied (Acts 6:1-2, 7-8). The multitude increased daily (Acts 16:5).

The growth of the kingdom was visible. Persecution, regardless of the source from which it came (Jewish or Gentile), failed to hinder the expansion of the kingdom. Instead, persecution proved to be a catalyst for broadening its borders (Acts 8:1, 4). Horrific persecution of Christians after the period of biblical history failed as well to thwart the kingdom of God. The blood of martyrs, it was said, rather became the seed of the kingdom. Under Constantine, Roman policy changed to favor, encourage and manipulate Christianity (the kingdom), since it could not be eradicated. This more than persecution severely harmed the spread of the true kingdom of God.

The foregoing stamina of disciples of Christ under duress highlights the power of the seed of the kingdom, the Word of God (Luke 8:15; Romans 1:16). That power, though, like the mustard seed, is not activated until it is planted. The Gospel seed must be planted in honest hearts (1 Peter 1:23). God's plan requires human involvement in the planting, nurture and harvesting (Romans 10:13-17; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9). Despite difficulties of every variety, it is possible to widely sow the seed of the kingdom (Matthew 24:14; Colossians 1:23).

Truly in the figure of the prophet, a small stone has filled the entire earth (Daniel 2:31-45). "For who hath despised the day of small things? . . ." (Zechariah 4:10). The humble preface to the Lord's magnificent, universal kingdom included: (1) his impoverished, untimely birth in a stable, after which he was cradled in an animal's food dish; (2) his childhood in an obscure yet despised town, in a province itself held in low esteem by Judaeans (John 1:46; Acts 2:7); (3) his officers were uncultured, uneducated and unrefined (Acts 4:13); (4) Jesus had no rabbinical training (John 7:15); (5) our Lord also lacked the material wealth usually associated with earthly kings (Luke 9:58; 2 Corinthians 8:9); and (6) he himself was executed by the government.

Such circumstances ordinarily would doom any other movement besides that which God himself determined to establish. After the beginning of the kingdom, it became the object of intense scorn and persecution by the government and the Jews. The new kingdom's principals and members alike were hunted, imprisoned, beaten and killed. That this kingdom succeeded and encircled the globe and has stood so far for thousands of years attests the glory of Almighty God, and not the contributions of mere mortals. "People should not stay out of the church because it is small in some places."⁵ Those who absent themselves from small pockets (congregations) of the Lord's kingdom, perhaps despising such smallness, are misguided.

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Why did Jesus pronounce *The Parable of the Mustard Seed*? They knew firsthand from the missions on which Jesus sent them that not everyone was willing to conform to the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 10:1-25). Rejection is unpleasant. God's prophets and the messages of God that they heralded were often rejected (Romans 10:13-21). "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?" (Romans 10:16).

Later, Jesus Christ's earthly ministry abruptly concluded with his crucifixion. Not convinced that Jesus would be resurrected, having rather expected a physical kingdom (Acts 1:6), fearful and in despair, the apostles scattered (Mark 14:24, 50). Even after our Lord's resurrection they returned to their professions (John 21:3-14).

The apostles needed frequent encouragement. Additional to these discouragements, some of our Lord's parables were depressing, too.

In the parable of the Sower, the disciples had heard that only a fourth part of the seed sown prospered; in the Tares, they had heard of the hindrances which beset even the part that remained. Lest they should be tempted to despair, our Lord speaks these two parables [*The Mustard Seed* and *The Leaven*] for their encouragement.⁶

The Parable of the Mustard Seed, though short, is rich with meaning for children of the kingdom in every generation.

Questions

1. List the three passages of Scripture in which *The Parable of the Mustard Seed* is recorded.
2. Why is the day on which Jesus spoke this parable sometimes called the "busy day"?
3. Why is the phrase "sandwich parable" sometimes applied to this parable?
4. Name the other "sandwich parable."
5. Name the two parables that Jesus interpreted.
6. In how many verses do the three passages respectively record this parable?
7. How many main points does this parable have?
8. Is it proper to teach a lesson, even truth that is elsewhere taught in Scripture, if it is not taught in a passage (such as a parable) under consideration? Why?
9. In your own words, what was the purpose of *The Parable of the Mustard Seed*?
10. How does mankind usually view success?
11. What special significance do the birds and branches have in this parable?
12. Why did Jesus use the type of backgrounds that are found in his parables?
13. Why is it likely that sometimes the original recipients of Scripture and biblical discourses more easily understood some of the (especially figurative) references?
14. Why are we unfamiliar with a mustard plant of the proportion described in this parable?
15. How was this mustard plant different from a tree?
16. What are some possible explanations for referring to the mustard seed as the smallest seed when other seeds are smaller?

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17. Of what two things were the original auditors of this parable immediately aware?
18. In what way was this parable prophetic?
19. In what way was the growth of the early church (kingdom) similar to the growth of the mustard seed?
20. What affect did persecution have on the early church (kingdom)? Fully explain.
21. What policy of the Roman government harmed the Lord's church?
22. What is the relationship of early persecution of the church to the power of the seed of the kingdom?
23. When is the power of the seed of the kingdom (the Word of God) activated?
24. Describe God's plan for the planting, nurture and harvesting of the seed of the kingdom.
25. How can we be assured that it is possible to sow the seed of the kingdom throughout the world?
26. What does Daniel 2:31-45 have in common with *The Parable of the Mustard Seed* and the kingdom of God?
27. List six points that describe the humble beginning of the kingdom of God.
28. What enabled the kingdom of God to succeed in view of tremendous obstacles?
29. From what two primary sources did persecution of the kingdom come?
30. To what is the success of the kingdom of God attributable over the last nearly 2,000 years?
31. What is the spiritual danger of despising small things?
32. List several possible reasons why *The Parable of the Mustard Seed* was beneficial to the apostles of Christ.
33. In what ways is this parable useful today for the children of the kingdom?

Endnotes

¹ Roy, p. 24.

² Joe Gilmore, "The Parable of the Mustard Seed," *The Parables of Our Saviour*, Garfield Heights church of Christ, p. 260.

³ Jackson, p. 21.

⁴ Lenski, p. 528

⁵ Gilmore, p. 270.

⁶ Trench, p. 39.

Chapter 5: The Parable of the Leaven

Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21

Introduction

The Parable of the Leaven is one of the two “sandwich parables” that were mentioned in the previous lesson. It is also one of seven kingdom parables presented by Jesus in Matthew Thirteen.

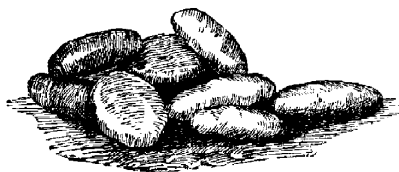
The Parable

“Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened” (Matthew 13:33).

The word “leaven” means “sour dough.” It is the fermented remnant of dough from a previous incident of baking bread.

In ancient times leaven as a separate ingredient was not available as it is today. In the leavening of bread, dough was kept over from a previous baking and inserted in the new mixture to ferment it.¹

When I was a boy, my mother bought cakes (cubes) of yeast to make her bread rise. Today, my wife buys dry yeast for the same purpose. The bread that we commonly eat (loaf bread, sticky buns, etc.) is essentially leavened bread. In contrast, the communion bread we eat lacks leaven or yeast and does not rise.



Jesus used leaven in this parable to emphasize similar characteristics between leaven as it affects bread dough and an object that affects the kingdom of heaven. Similarities include: (1) A small amount affects a larger mass. (2) The effect is gradual and constant. (3) Growth and progress are emphasized. (4) Small beginnings are contrasted with substantial results. (5) The effect occurs quietly or with little notice. (6) The object multiplies itself. (7) Ultimately, expansion is obvious.

The characteristics of leaven are further categorized by one commentator thus:

1. The inner influence. Leaven does its work from within. . . . 2. The changing quality. . . . 3. The contagious characteristic. Leaven works contagiously “until the whole is leavened.”²

Chapter 5: The Leaven

References to leaven appear several times in both testaments of the Bible.

Leaven under the Old Covenant was never used in a metaphorical (figurative) sense, but always in the literal. It was strictly forbidden in all offerings to the Lord by fire. . . . In any offering to be consumed by the priest and not on the altar, leaven could be used. . . . In the New Testament leaven is used in the metaphorical sense with the exception of one place. (Matt. 6:12) This exception is when Jesus' disciples thought he meant literal bread when he had reference to the figurative.³

The popular view regarding this parable is that leaven here represents something good. Herbert Lockyer, author of *All The Parables Of The Bible*, disagrees. He argues that leaven always had a bad connotation among the Jews.⁴ That it at least often was employed respecting evil is certain. "It is undoubtedly true, that leaven is used most frequently in Scripture as the symbol of something evil" (1 Cor. v.7; Luke xii. 1).⁵

In the New Testament leaven is used as a symbol of both good and evil. The Jews identified fermentation with rotteness, and thus leaven was often used by them to refer to an evil influence. Thus Jesus warned his disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod (Mark 8:15); and Paul on several occasions, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9). But leaven was likewise used by the Jews to represent a good influence. Standing either for good or bad, leaven was a figure for any strong and pervasive influence.⁶

Admittedly, references to leaven in the New Testament usually refer to something evil.

"Your glorying *is* not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Lockyer affirms that if in this parable leaven refers to something good, it is the only such citation in the Bible.⁷

Notwithstanding objections, the employment of the word leaven in this parable cannot be a symbol of evil. Leaven is used in a good sense in *The Parable of the Leaven*. Here the leaven is equivalent to the Word of God, which elsewhere is said to be the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11), "[t]he law of the Lord" (Psalm 19:7). "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11). Otherwise known as the Gospel, it is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). As the leaven is in the dough and affects it, the Gospel in an honest heart affects it.

The leaven in this parable pertains to the growth and expansion of the kingdom in the sin-blackened world. How we influence the world depends on how much a godly affect the Gospel has on us. Each Christian teaching other souls is God's leavening plan for the expansion of the kingdom (2 Timothy 2:2, 24).

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The significant factor regarding a Word-filled kingdom and the primary way it resembles the affect of leaven in dough is that it multiplies itself. The early kingdom (church) literally multiplied itself (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 9:31; 11:23-24; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20).

Commentators differ regarding whether the “woman” and the “three measures of meal” have significance. The “three measures of meal” appear to be an ordinary allotment of flour for one batch of bread (Genesis 18:6). Other than that, the meal is a detail of no major importance.

Likewise, the woman is largely incidental to the teaching of the parable. The domestic circumstance of a woman baking bread is merely part of the vehicle by which Jesus taught a spiritual lesson. Bread was a staple in the Jewish diet. Therefore, its production was a familiar routine in their lives.

It might be observed, though, consistent with other biblical references, that like the “woman” in the parable, human instrumentality is essential to the growth of the kingdom (Acts 2:14, 37-47; 8:5, 8, 12, 26-40; 9; 22:16; 10; 11:14). Leaven is purposely placed in the dough with hands and human agency is needed to place the Gospel in honest hearts. Paul noted that the Gospel was deposited in “earthen vessels” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

God determined to trust the proclamation of his saving message to preaching (1 Corinthians 1:18-21).

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:13-17).

Preaching was prominent in the growth of the infant church or kingdom. The mouth, hands and feet by which God sends the Gospel to the world today are the Christian’s mouth, hands and feet (Mark 16:15-16).

The words “. . . took, and hid . . .” refer to the process of placing the remnant of dough from a previous baking into new dough. Likewise, the Gospel attained from another place (heaven), when placed in the lost world (John 1:17), makes changes in the world (Acts 3:19; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Colossians 1:13). The spiritual kingdom, which is not from or of this world, thereby was established (John 18:36).

The words “. . . till the whole was leavened” may be viewed as a prophecy of a triumphant kingdom (Matthew 16:18). Jesus died for the whole world (John 3:16). Many souls respond to God’s conditional invitation for salvation (Matthew 24:14; Colossians 1:13). Unfortunately, the majority of accountable souls will be lost (Matthew 7:13-14). Happily, an innumerable host of souls will be rewarded with heaven (Revelation 7:9).

Conclusion

The Parable of the Leaven, like *The Parable of the Mustard Seed* discussed in the last lesson, was prophetic regarding church (kingdom) growth. Jesus had not yet established his kingdom when he uttered these parables.

Questions

1. In what two passages is *The Parable of the Leaven* found?
2. How many kingdom parables are in Matthew 13?
3. What does leaven mean?
4. Describe the procedure about which this parable speaks for acquiring and applying leaven.
5. What is used in baking today?
6. Name a food we eat today that is essentially leavened bread.
7. Give an example of unleavened bread that is commonly used today.
8. List seven similarities between leavened bread and the kingdom of heaven.
9. List three characteristics of leaven that in principle are shared by the Gospel.
10. In which testament of the Bible is leaven used exclusively in a literal sense?
11. In what was leaven forbidden?
12. The popular view of *The Parable of the Leaven* is: (a) the word leaven refers to something evil, (b) the word “leaven” refers to something good, (c) that it is too difficult to understand and therefore it is a mystery.
13. Usually the Jews identified leaven with what?
14. What corresponds in this parable to “the leaven”?
15. Noting the way in which leaven affects dough, describe the spiritual counterpart to this activity.
16. To what does the leaven in this parable pertain regarding the kingdom?
17. How are Christians and the church comparable to the activity of leaven in dough?
18. What is God’s leavening plan for you?
19. What is the primary way that the early church resembled the activity of leaven in dough?
20. What is the significance of the words “three measures of meal”?
21. What is the significance of the word “woman” in this parable?
22. How important is human participation in the works of God?
23. List applications regarding the words “took, and hid.”
24. Discuss the phrase “till the whole was leavened.”
25. In what way was this parable prophetic?

Endnotes

¹ Lightfoot, p. 26.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

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³ Ben Vick, “The Parable of the Leaven,” *The Parables of Our Saviour*, Garfield Heights church of Christ, pp. 146-147.

⁴ Lockyer, pp. 190, 192.

⁵ Trench, p. 43.

⁶ Lightfoot, p. 26.

⁷ Lockyer, p. 192.

Chapter 6: The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

Matthew 13:44

Introduction

The parables of the *Hidden Treasure* and the *Pearl of Great Price* are sometimes called the twin parables. Both emphasize the value of the kingdom to individuals and together represent the common Hebrew practice of parallelism. These two parables plus *The Parable of the Drag Net* and *The Parable of the Householder* were spoken to the apostles after Jesus sent the multitude away, returned to Capernaum and entered a house (Matthew 13:36).

Especially in *The Parable of the Hidden Treasure* there are details that often arouse curiosity. Some people propose that a moral or ethical problem exists. For instance, was the treasure-finder in this parable dishonest for hiding the treasure again, not informing the owner of the land and purchasing the field?

The parable does not address the ethics of the treasure-finder. Jesus neither sanctioned nor condemned the motives and activities of the man in this regard. Similarly, God is somewhat compared to an unjust judge in a parable that encourages persistency in prayer (Luke 18:1-8). Not every part of a parable is presented for imitation. One must be careful not to press a parable beyond the lesson it was intended to teach. The emphasis in *The Hidden Treasure* is on the vigor with which an individual sought the kingdom of heaven. Idle questions such as why the owner of the treasure never retrieved it or why the current owners of the field were willing to sell it or why the treasure-finder was prospecting on another person's property are not relevant to the spiritual message Jesus conveyed. "The secret *things* belong unto the Lord our God: but those *things which are* revealed *belong* unto us and to our children for ever, that *we* may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Homes of antiquity in Palestine were often meager shelters that were primarily used for sleeping. They were not suitable places to safely store precious assets (i.e., silver and gold). When unoccupied, these homes were not easily secured against thieves



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(Matthew 6:19). It was not practical to carry one's personal wealth every place one went (Luke 10:30). Therefore, valuables were secreted in the earth (Job 3:21; Proverbs 2:4).

A writer on Oriental customs says, that in the East, on account of frequent changes in dynasties, and consequent revolutions, many rich men divide their goods into three parts: one they employ in commerce, or for their support; one they turn into jewels, which might be easily carried; and a third part they bury.¹

Lacking banks and vaults, to preserve their wealth people often buried it in the ground. However, should one die unexpectedly and if his family was unaware of either the existence of the treasure or where it was deposited, it could not be recovered easily. Among the Jews, one's wealth was frequently referred to as treasure (Matthew 2:11; 6:19; 12:35; 19:21). In *The Parable of the Talents*, the one-talent steward buried the talent (of silver or gold) in the ground (Matthew 25:18). Apparently, some Jews searched for buried treasure (Job 3:21; Proverbs 2:4).

Some commentators suggest that the treasure-finder in this parable accidentally stumbled upon another man's buried treasure. Jesus, though, does not say how the man in the parable happened to discover the treasure. It has already been observed that at least sometimes buried treasures were deliberately sought.

However, an interesting and otherwise valid principle derives from an unintentional discovery of treasure in the parable. It is possible for people to find something for which they were not looking and yet, in which they may have great joy (e.g., a \$10 bill that one had not missed but found in a pocket of a laundered pair of pants). In this kingdom parable, the kingdom of heaven is likened to a found treasure. Though perhaps not looking for it, once uncovered, the finder earnestly endeavored to secure it for himself. Nathanael (John 1:43-49) and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:4-30) are New Testament examples of finding that for which they were not looking.

The Parable

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field” (Matthew 13:44).

In *The Parable of the Hidden Treasure*, the field represents the world, whereas the treasure, the thrust of the parable, represents the spiritual kingdom of heaven. The physical treasure of the parable highlights through contrast the spiritual treasure.

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:19-21).

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Earthly treasure is subject to inflation and fluctuating value, but heavenly treasure remains priceless.

Comparisons between earthly and heavenly treasures include: (1) “It is worth everything and every effort.”² (2) Much is given but more is received in return. (3) Great sacrifices may be required. (4) Commitment to a personal acquisition is necessary. (5) Nothing already possessed compares in value to the treasure sought. (6) No pursuit is as important as acquiring the treasure. (7) With no regrets but with joy one willingly sells all he has to acquire it.

Regarding the spiritual treasure, in this parable the kingdom of heaven: (1) “The kingdom is worth whatever sacrifices are necessary to obtain it.”³ (2) “A man who is genuinely converted does not grudgingly give up the past. He gives up his past life for something far better.”⁴ (3) The kingdom is only accessible to souls who are willing to count and pay the cost (Luke 14:25-33). (4) Total surrender of self is compulsory to receive the kingdom treasure. (5) Happily, spiritual treasures are available to even this world’s impoverished.

The priceless nature of the kingdom relates to the investment of God in it. The Godhead allowed God-the-Son to relinquish the glory of heaven, endure humility and temptation in a fleshly body and suffer the humiliation and excruciating pain of a public execution on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 12:2-3). The blood of God-the-Son, Jesus the Christ, was invested in the kingdom or church (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25). The magnitude of Jesus’ investment in the kingdom of heaven was compounded by the temporary desertion by the apostles (Matthew 26:56) and God-the-Father (Matthew 26:46).

The apostle Paul recognized the worth of the kingdom of heaven. Consequently, he willingly forfeited those things in life in which mankind usually prides itself (Philippians 3:4-8). Paul also resigned himself to great suffering and deprivation to acquaint the world with this kingdom (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

Conclusion

Every honest soul who acknowledges the value of the kingdom (church) will obey the Gospel, whereby admission to the kingdom is conditionally allotted by God (Acts 2:37-38, 41, 47). Only citizens of the kingdom are beneficiaries of its blessings (Ephesians 1:3). Kingdom treasures enrich their possessors in life, in death and eternally (1 Timothy 4:8; 2 Timothy 4:6-8). Kingdom citizenship is inseparably linked with the forgiveness of sins (2 Timothy 2:10).

“People who place the proper valuation upon the church express a deep and abiding interest in it.”⁵ With them, life in the kingdom becomes a completely encompassing new way of life (Romans 6:3-4; Acts 22:4; 24:14, 22). These are the ones upon whom the Lord and the church depend for a continued presence and expansion in any community. Without them, the visible existence of the Lord’s church on earth would vanish.

However, the kingdom is valuable even if no one recognizes its worth. Unfortunately, Christians often devalue the church by ignoble conduct, such as: (1)

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willfully absenting themselves from appointed assemblies (Hebrews 10:25-27); (2) living in sin from which they have been extracted by God (Romans 6:2, 6-13) and from which they repented (Luke 3:5; Acts 2:38; Matthew 3:8).

In conclusion, *The Parable of the Hidden Treasure* emphasizes the acute value of the kingdom of heaven. The lesson to remember from this parable is “. . . the incomparable worth and the ultimate triumph of the Kingdom of God.”⁶

Questions

1. Name the two “twin parables.”
2. What is the common theme of these two parables?
3. From a source outside this class book, define Hebrew parallelism and cite biblical examples.
4. List the four parables Jesus spoke to his apostles after he sent the multitude away.
5. From what site did Jesus present these four parables?
6. For what three reasons do some people perceive an ethical or moral problem with *The Parable of the Hidden Treasure*?
7. What information did Jesus provide that would help settle this question of ethics?
8. What similarity exists between this parable and *The Parable of the Unjust Judge*?
9. How might one properly answer such questions regarding ethics or other matters about which one desires more information than is provided in Scripture?
10. What is the emphasis in *The Parable of the Hidden Treasure* that should not be overlooked in preference for questions concerning details?
11. Why were homes in ancient Palestine often poor places to place one’s valuables?
12. List one or more reasons why it was not practical for people to carry their possessions with them wherever they went.
13. What alternative did people long ago choose for storing and protecting their valuable possessions?
14. What disadvantages were there to this type of depositing one’s valuables?
15. Is it possible to find the kingdom, though, perhaps one was not looking for it? Please illustrate.
16. In this parable what does the field represent? What does the treasure represent?
17. What is superior about a spiritual treasure over an earthly treasure?
18. List seven comparisons between earthly and heavenly treasures.
19. How much should one be willing to sacrifice to receive the kingdom treasure?
20. A man who is genuinely converted: (a) grudgingly gives up the past, (b) gives up a better life for a purer life, (c) freely turns from his former life to enjoy spiritual life.
21. To whom is the kingdom accessible?
22. In what way is kingdom treasure less allusive than earthly treasure?
23. Why is the kingdom of heaven priceless?
24. What two circumstances in the life of the apostle Paul indicate his recognition of the immense value of the kingdom?
25. What can be said rightfully concerning souls who do not obey the Gospel?
26. For whom are the blessings of the kingdom reserved by God?

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27. When can citizens of the kingdom enjoy the blessings of the kingdom?
28. How are forgiveness of sins and citizenship in the kingdom related?
29. Upon whom can the Lord depend?
30. In what two general ways do many Christians devalue the kingdom?
31. What one point especially should be remembered about *The Parable of the Hidden Treasure*?

Endnotes

¹ Trench, 46; the earliest printing in which this reference could appear in this title is 1948.

² Lightfoot, 30.

³ Jackson, 26.

⁴ Lightfoot, 30.

⁵ Roy, 30.

⁶ Lockyer, 197.

Chapter 7: The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price

Matthew 13:45-46

Introduction

This parable, only two verses, is variously interpreted. Commentators assign sundry meanings to such words as “merchant man” and “pearl of great price.” A view of *The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price* that is conservative, simple and largely parallel to the preceding parable seems the most useful.

Pearls are not mentioned in the Old Testament and were little valued by the Jews. However, pearls appear several times in the New Testament.

The Pearl of Great Price and *The Hidden Treasure* are companion, kingdom parables. In the previous lesson they were called “twin parables.” Each parable emphasizes the inestimable value of the kingdom of heaven. “The parable illustrates the unsurpassed value of the church.”¹

The Parable

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (Matthew 13:45-46).

In both cases the finder gladly parted with everything he had to acquire the object of the parable. The chief difference between the two parables is that *The Hidden Treasure* may have been found accidentally, while discovery of *The Pearl of Great Price* was the fruit of an ardent search.

The “merchant man” was a businessman whose profession led him to travel in search of valuable or “goodly pearls.” The man was not pursuing a mere hobby and neither was his acquisition of the “pearl of great price” a matter of covetousness. It was a business transaction — the greatest of his career. The end-user doubtless would have been a king or a queen (e.g., Cleopatra) or some other wealthy person.

The merchant was accustomed to evaluating pearls. It was his business to know the value of pearls.

He is a man with a definite purpose. He knows exactly what he is looking for.²

Chapter 7: The Pearl of Great Price

Convinced of the value of that one pearl, he was willing to pay the price. He entertained no misgivings about this transaction.

The merchant is comparable to the man who found treasure in the preceding parable. This man, though, was seeking the kingdom or the church. This seeker was able to positively identify the kingdom. Consequently, the parable describes one who was totally committed. No personal investment was too costly compared to the object of his attention.

The “pearl of great price” is the kingdom or the church. It is costly or of such immense value because of what it cost God — the blood of Jesus (John 3:16; Acts 20:28).

Likewise, the truth-seeker in every generation can identify the kingdom or church of the New Testament.

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8).

The value of the kingdom is obvious. He willingly pays the price without reservation. The truth-seeker is totally committed to the acquisition of the kingdom. No personal investment is too costly.

The cost, however, may be steep. To become a citizen of the kingdom, one will have to abandon the inferior religious kingdoms of men (i.e., denominationalism, Judaism, Islam, etc.). This may be difficult considering how entwined religion may be in one’s family history or ethnic background (Galatians 1:13-14). One may face the loss of family and social affiliations (Matthew 10:35-39). It is possible that to attain the kingdom a person may need to change careers, which also can be difficult, for instance if that required resignation from the generations old family craft (Acts 19:19). Additionally, seekers must renounce some of the worldly pleasures in which mankind often delights (Hebrews 11:25).

Seekers in the New Testament about whom we can read include Nicodemus (John 3), the eunuch (Acts 8), Cornelius (Acts 10) and the Bereans (Acts 17:11). The apostles made great sacrifices, including the turning from honorable trades to devote themselves to preaching the Gospel.

“Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last *shall be* first” (Matthew 19:27-30).

Sometimes we must experience the loss of this world’s goods (Mark 10:17-22).

Conclusion

The kingdom or church is worth more than the greatest possible personal investment any of us could ever make. Jesus gave himself for the kingdom or church (Ephesians 5:25). Only through and in Christ can anyone receive the benefit of kingdom citizenship (Ephesians 1:3).

Happily and “[c]ontrary to the to the assertions of Calvinism, it is possible to seek God. . . . Men can know when they find the truth, and know that they know it.”³ This quest is worth the effort and it is not beyond our reach.

Questions

1. In which testament of the Bible does the word pearls appear?
2. *The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price* is most nearly like which other parable?
3. What does *The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price* emphasize?
4. What was the price the merchant paid for that one pearl?
5. What is the chief difference between the twin parables?
6. Why was the merchant seeking goodly pearls?
7. Why would a person pay such a high price for one pearl?
8. Who was the likely customer of such a precious pearl?
9. Why did the merchant exhibit no indecision in buying the one pearl?
10. What does the “pearl of great price” represent?
11. Why was it so costly?
12. In what ways may the cost to truth-seekers be steep?
13. List some seekers about whom one can read in the New Testament.
14. How can a person enjoy the benefits of kingdom citizenship?
15. In what ways is this parable uplifting to truth-seekers?

Endnotes

¹ Roy, p. 33.

² Lightfoot, p. 31.

³ Jackson, p. 27.

Chapter 8: The Parable of the Net

Matthew 13:47-50

Introduction

The illustration that Jesus used in this parable called to mind the popular vocation of fishing. Jesus uttered *The Dragnet* in Capernaum, a city on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The first four parables in this series were spoken by Jesus, as he stood in a boat, to a crowd on the shore of the lake. Our Lord presented *The Dragnet* to his apostles, many of whom were professional fishermen (Luke 5:1-11). When Jesus called them from their ships and nets he told them: “. . . from henceforth thou shalt catch men” (Luke 5:10).



The net to which Jesus referred was a seine net. It was weighted at the bottom so it would drag the bottom of the lake. The net had floats at the top to keep it at the surface of the water. Perhaps a half mile long, after the net was stretched to its full length, its ends were brought together to trap the fish. All kinds of fish were caught and consequently, after the net was brought to shore, usable fish were sorted from the rest that were discarded.

The Parable

The Parable of the Dragnet bears similarities to *The Parable of the Tares* in the same series of Matthew 13 parables.

Tares: “The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 13:39-42).

Dragnet: “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into

Chapter 8: The Net

the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 13:47-50).

Not only are they both kingdom parables but they are also judgment parables. As in *The Tares*, “[i]n this parable Jesus places the emphasis on the wicked and their eternal destiny. The mission of the angels in each of these parables pertains to the wicked.”¹

Notice that in the parables for which Jesus gave some insight as to their meaning, he did not emphasize every detail. Instead, Jesus emphasized the thrust or purpose for which the parable was given. We should largely do the same.

The Dragnet involves a separation into two categories — good and bad. There was no in-between. A two-tier separation appears in several of our Lord’s parables.

In *The Parable of the Tares* the separation is between wheat and tares. In *The Parable of the Dragnet*, the separation is between good and bad fish. In *The Parable of the Marriage Feast*, the separation is between guests with and without a wedding garment. In *The Parable of the Householder*, the separation is between good and evil servants. In *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*, the separation is between wise and foolish virgins. In *The Parable of the Talents*, the separation is between profitable and unprofitable servants. In *The Parable of the Sheep and Goats* the separation is between them.²

The Parable of the Dragnet is especially similar to *The Parable of the Marriage Feast*.

As the servants told of in Matt. xxii. 10, “gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good,” so here the fishers take fish of all kinds within the folds of the net; men of all shades of moral character have the Gospel preached to them, and find themselves within the limits of the visible Church.³

The good and bad fish are good and bad members of the church of our Lord. The fish are comparable to the wheat versus the tares and sundry contrasts involving separation in other parables to which allusion has already been made above.

The sea, then, corresponds to the lost world. The net represents the church or kingdom of heaven. The fish are good and bad Christians. The fishermen drawing the net of fish are Christians who “catch men.” The beach is comparable to the judgment. The angels are represented by the persons sorting the fish. The vessels into which the good fish are placed stand for heaven. The discarding of useless fish represents consignment to hell.

The Dragnet suggests that evangelism involves human participation. Historically, *The Book of Acts* records human involvement in the growth of the church. God did not choose direct operation without preachers and teachers to acquaint mankind with divine messages (Romans 10:13-18; 2 Peter 1:20-21). The “they” in the parable, the fishermen, are Christians who “catch men.”

All who have been forgiven should be fishers. Soul-winners are God’s fishers.⁴

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As the net does not discriminate regarding the kind of fish it catches, we must not discriminate concerning to whom we declare the Gospel. The church on earth will be comprised of righteous and unfaithful souls. “God will purge evil from his kingdom.”⁵

Yes, there are hypocrites in the church. Yes, it is possible for a Christian to sin so as to be lost. Those whose evil conduct we can discern in contrast to the Scriptures, the church is obligated to discipline (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14). The rest God will detect and remove at the great judgment.

The ‘sitting down’ to sort the fish indicates deliberation and not hasty decisions. God will not make any mistakes in judgment, objections notwithstanding (Matthew 7:21-23).

Whereas here and in 2 Timothy 2:20-21 vessels can represent heaven or heaven bound Christians, other familiar figures also portray heaven as: a barn (Matthew 13:30), many mansions (John 14:2), everlasting habitations (Luke 16:9), a city (Hebrews 11:10; 12:22; Revelation 3:12; 21:22).

Likewise, there are several figures used in Scripture to portray hell: furnace of fire (Matthew 13:50), eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46), eternal fire (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 21:8), a place where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:43-48), outer darkness (Matthew 25:30), everlasting shame (Daniel 12:2), a place of eternal separation (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9), a place prepared of the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41).⁶

Conclusion

Parables do not teach new doctrine. They, however, illustrate and re-enforce biblical teaching found elsewhere. This parable is filled with lessons to help us better understand the nature of the Lord’s kingdom. The Gospel and hence the kingdom is for all mankind. Comparatively few people amidst a much larger world population will come into the kingdom. Members of the kingdom must draw others into it. A judgment is coming in which the angels will participate. Some Christians will be lost whereas others will enjoy eternal redemption. Hell and heaven certainly exist. Finally, *The Dragnet* is informative, poses a warning, offers consolation for faithful Christians and is interesting.

Questions

1. Why was fishing an especially useful illustration in *The Parable of the Dragnet*?
2. What did Jesus tell the fishermen that he recruited to be his apostles?
3. Describe the type of net used in this parable and tell how it was used.
4. How did this type of net discriminate between good fish and bad fish?
5. In what two ways are the parables of *The Dragnet* and *The Tares* similar?
6. With what did the angels concern themselves in each of these two parables?
7. How did Jesus treat details in the parables for which he gave insight as to their meaning?
8. Into how many categories were the fish separated? What were the categories?
9. List the pairs of separated items in the parables of *The Tares*, *The Dragnet*, *The Marriage Feast*, *The Householder*, *The Ten Virgins*, *The Talents*, *The Sheep and Goats*.

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10. What is the relationship between good and bad fish or wedding guests with or without wedding garments compared with the church or kingdom?
11. What does the sea represent?
12. What does the net represent?
13. What do the fish represent?
14. Who do the fishermen represent?
15. What does the beach represent?
16. Who do the persons sorting the fish represent?
17. What do the vessels represent?
18. What is the significance of discarding some fish?
19. What means did God choose to acquaint mankind with divine messages?
20. To whom does the pronoun “they” refer?
21. What is the counterpart to a non-discriminating net?
22. How does *The Dragnet* relate to the subject of apostasy?
23. What obligation does a congregation have regarding unfaithful Christians?
24. What can erring Christians who have escaped the attention of the church on earth expect in the judgment?
25. What does sitting down to sort fish indicate in this parable?
26. List four figures for heaven.
27. List eight figures for hell.
28. What relationship do parables sustain to new doctrine?
29. List eight lessons found in *The Dragnet*.

Endnotes

¹ Harry Darrow, “The Parable of the Net,” *The Parables of Our Saviour*, Garfield Heights church of Christ, p. 165.

² Lockyer, p. 208.

³ Trench, p. 51.

⁴ Lockyer, p. 206.

⁵ Jackson, p. 28.

⁶ Roy, pp. 36-37.

Chapter 9: The Parable of the Householder

Matthew 13:51-52

Introduction

The simple and endearing definition of a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. However, the Bible is replete with various kinds of figurative language. Consequently, there is not universal agreement what is a parable versus another figure. Therefore, there is also a lack of consensus regarding the number of parables, including the number of parables presented by Christ, versus other figurative language.

Hence, it is little surprise that some commentators count seven, parables of our Lord in Matthew 13, whereas others see eight parables in the chapter. Of course, identifying the species of figurative language employed as a vehicle to communicate divine messages is far less important than understanding those messages.

Most teachers categorize the first seven figures of speech as parables and ignore *The Householder* when discussing parables.

This last and eighth parable of this great parabolic chapter seems to be the unwanted orphan by many writers on the parables of our Lord.¹

The Householder, though, along with the seven parables, appear between the signaled beginning and ending of Jesus' parabolic teaching of that occasion (Matthew 13:3, 53).

“And he spake many things unto them in parables . . . And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence.”

The Parable

Parenthetically to the eight parables in Matthew 13, between parables seven and eight, Jesus somewhat superficially assessed the apostles' comprehension of the first seven parables. “Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? The say unto him, Yea, Lord” (Matthew 13:51).

That they thought they understood the divine message borne by the seven parables is probable. If they realized misgivings regarding our Lord's message the apostles might well have asked for an explanation as they did earlier. “And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be?” (Luke 8:9). However, it is obvious from other passages that there was yet much about the kingdom of heaven that Jesus' disciples did not understand (John 6:15; Luke 24:21). “When they therefore were come together,

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they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

However, in response to their affirmation that they understood, Jesus apprised them of their corresponding responsibility to convey that knowledge to others. With knowledge and opportunity comes responsibility in the kingdom. This interchange between Jesus and the apostles was the setting in which our Lord represented the eighth parable in this chapter.

“Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old” (Matthew 13:52).

The Householder, like the seven previous parables, pertains to the “kingdom of heaven.” The theme remained the same throughout these eight parables. The illustration, of course, is different.

Jesus dubbed his apostles as “scribes” to the kingdom of heaven. The scribes in Judaism, though trained in the scriptures and traditions, were not suitable for induction in that capacity into the kingdom of heaven. The scribes of Jesus’ day along with the Pharisees were rigorously, repeatedly and publicly reprovved by the Christ (Matthew 23).

In contrast, the apostles of Christ had no rabbinical training. Being from Galilee, they also lacked educational and cultural opportunities. Their association with Jesus, though was more precious and useful for their duties in the kingdom (Acts 4:13).

Another advantage the apostles had over the contemporary scribes was that they were better instructed regarding the kingdom of heaven. Whereas the apostles, like the scribes, had misgivings about that kingdom, at least the apostles did not reject the King of the kingdom. The apostles did not resist the Holy Spirit and every benevolent gesture of the Father. To their credit, the apostles were teachable. As a group, the contemporary scribes were not willing to be taught by the Master Teacher.

Naming those He has called to follow Him as Scribes, He commissioned these representative men to go out and interpret the mystery and message of the Kingdom of Heaven to an ignorant world.²

As his scribes, Jesus compared each of his apostles to a “householder.” This officer was in charge of the total resources of an estate over which he was placed, perhaps his own possessions. He managed all over which he had command with full authority and complete understanding of the most advantageous distribution for optimum operation.

The resources on which the householder relied, in this parable, were called treasure. The treasure was further described as “new and old.” Applied to the apostles, the treasure represented the knowledge attained through their discipleship of Jesus. The “new and old” represented the New and Old Testaments. Similar to horizontal strata or the foundation of a building, the New rests upon and is dependent upon the Old.

The Law is old, and the Gospel is new, yet the latter came as the development of the former. . . . The root is old; the fruit is new.³

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How are we to understand the words “old” and “new” in the text? Remember Matthew is writing to those of a Jewish background. How would a Jewish thinker respond? the “old” would be the riches of the Old Testament and the “new” would be the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.⁴

Conclusion

The responsibility that first belonged to the apostles (2 Corinthians 4:7) is the duty of other Christians, too (Mark 16:15-16; 2 Timothy 2:2). We must tell others the Gospel of Christ.

Questions

1. Why is it difficult to determine how many parables of our Lord are recorded in this Gospel account?
2. How many parables are found in Matthew 13?
3. What occurred between the seventh and eighth parables of Matthew 13?
4. How well did the apostles understand Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom?
5. With knowledge and opportunity comes what?
6. What was the common theme of all the parables in Matthew 13?
7. In this parable, who did the “scribes” represent?
8. Why were the scribes in Judaism unsuitable to be scribes in the kingdom of heaven?
9. What three things did the apostles lack to be religious leaders under then, contemporary Judaism?
10. How did the apostles compensate for what they lacked (in question #9)?
11. About what were the apostles better instructed than the scribes?
12. What misunderstanding was common to both the apostles and the Jewish scribes?
13. In spite of their misgivings, what four advantages did the apostles have over the scribes?
14. What was the contrast between the apostles and the scribes regarding their relationship to Christ?
15. What were the apostles to declare?
16. To whom did the apostles make declarations?
17. To what did Jesus compare his disciples?
18. Describe the answer to Question #17.
19. What did the “new and old” treasure in the parable represent?
20. From what source did the apostles receive this treasure?
21. What responsibilities do Christians today have in common with the apostles?

Matthew 13 Parables Crossword Puzzle

Across

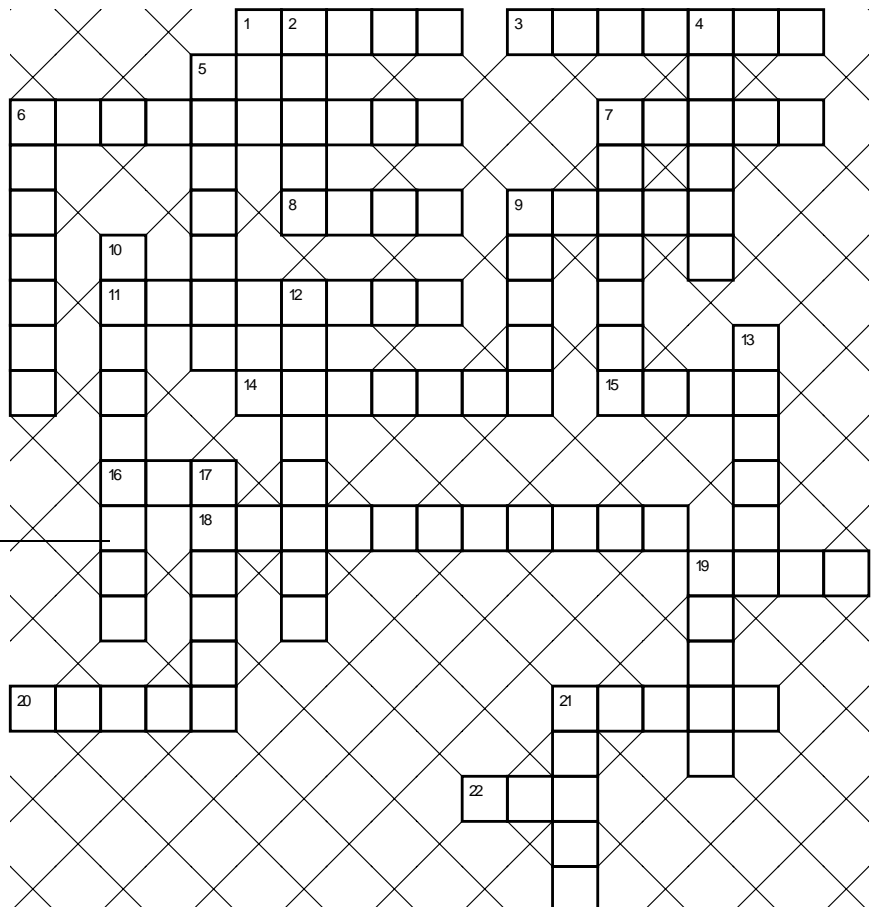
1. Site from which the large audience heard the parables.
3. Closest body of water to Jesus as he preached.
6. Heard the first three parables.

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7. Of great price.
8. Defective body parts.
9. Measures of meal.
11. Heard the last three parables.
14. Harvesters.
15. Defective body parts.
16. Collected good and bad.
18. Brought out old and new.
19. Platform from which Jesus preached.
20. Ate the seed.
21. Plants seed.
22. Number of parables Jesus interpreted.

Down

2. Site of Jesus' preaching last four parables.
4. Yeast.
5. Subject of the seven parables.
6. Greatest herb.
7. Earthly story with heavenly meaning.
9. Weed seed.
10. City outside of which Jesus preached.
12. Hidden in a field.
13. Prophet Jesus quoted.
17. Third soil.
19. Number of parables all agree upon.
22. Second soil.



Endnotes

- ¹ Lockyer, p. 208.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 210.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 212.
- ⁴ Darrow, p. 168.

Chapter 10: The Parable of the Householder and the Laborers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

Introduction

The word “for” with which this discourse begins signals that it is related to verses that precede it. When looking for the context of the passage, it is also helpful to remember that chapter and verse divisions are manmade. Frequently, a context will span a chapter heading.

The Context of Matthew 20:1-16 includes two immediately prior verbal exchanges between Jesus and others. The first is recorded in Matthew 19:16-22. Summarized, a young, rich man inquired how he might attain eternal life. Though he had kept sundry commandments, he sorrowfully departed when Jesus advised him to sell his possessions.

This incident prompted Jesus to address his apostles regarding the danger of riches (Matthew 19:23-26). The apostles admitted that this doctrine perplexed them. All the foregoing incited Peter to pose a question in Matthew 19:27. “. . . behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?”

Whereas the rich man refused to surrender all, the apostles did forfeit their livelihoods (Matthew 4:18-22; 9:9). Peter, perhaps somewhat with pride, drew a contrast between the rich and the poor, the latter group being those with whom he identified the other apostles and himself. Several years later, the apostle Paul warned the Corinthian church about comparing themselves with each other. “For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves among themselves, are not wise” (2 Corinthians 10:12). Jesus also noted a Pharisee who boastfully contrasted himself with a publican (Luke 18:9-14). The penitent publican was praised while the haughty Pharisee was accused.

However, Peter’s question following his observation demonstrated an improper attitude. It is, though, not unlike a question we might through our ignorance also ask. Perhaps Peter thought that the other apostles and he were entitled to some type of reward in view of their sacrifices.

Chapter 10: The Laborers in the Vineyard

About this time, James and John asked for commanding positions in the kingdom (Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45). Earlier the apostles sought preeminence in the Lord's kingdom (Mark 9:33-37). Jesus used a child as a living example of the humility that should characterize his disciples (Luke 9:46-48).

The attitude portrayed by Peter and the other apostles is dangerous because it can easily bloom in discontent. Anyone making a sacrifice wants to know that for which the sacrifice is made is more valuable than the costs incurred. Would the apostles' reward be prestigious positions in a physical, earthly kingdom as James and John supposed? Would their reward be eternal life after which the young, rich man sought? Just how were the sacrificial apostles more fortunate than other men?

Keenly aware of their state of affairs, Peter essentially petitioned Jesus to obligate himself to some type of compensation. "In short, the spirit of the hireling spoke in that question, and it is against this spirit that the parable is directed . . ." ¹

The Parable

"For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard" (Matthew 20:1).

This is another kingdom parable, and it was spoken specifically to the apostles (for the reasons already cited). All the characters of the parable are identified in the first verse. Jesus as the most visible person of the Godhead, God incarnate, is represented as the householder. The laborers **in the vineyard** are Christians. Additionally, verse one pictures the kingdom or church as the vineyard owned by the householder (Christ).

A householder, as previously described in an earlier chapter, was wholly responsible for the prosperity of the estate. He with complete authority and personal involvement ruled every aspect of the family business. It is noteworthy that the householder personally hired the laborers, and in that capacity he made himself the overseer from before the first laborers were hired, through and beyond the conclusion of the workday. The householder's day may have begun before dawn to secure workers and dispatch them to his vineyard before the beginning of the Jewish workday (about 6:00 a.m.).

"And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard" (Matthew 20:2).

A verbal contract was agreed upon between the householder and the first group of laborers. The stipulated wage for a day's labor was a "penny" (KJV) or denarius. It was a Roman silver coin equivalent to a day's wages for a soldier, or in this case, a laborer. These laborers were the only ones who negotiated their wages, and thereby knew for what precisely they were exchanging their labor.



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“And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive” (Matthew 20:3-7).

The third hour (about 9:00 a.m.), the sixth hour (about 12:00 p.m.), the ninth hour (about 3:00 p.m.) and the eleventh hour (about 5:00 p.m.) the householder returned to the marketplace to hire additional workers. To each of these the householder proposed a unilateral, verbal contract to which each agreed. “And he said unto them; whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way” (Matthew 20:4).

The different hours at which laborers were hired correspond to the different times in life when souls are converted. The marketplace represents the world. The idle, would-be laborers, in the marketplace (not yet in the vineyard) represent lost souls. Whereas the laborers in the marketplace represent lost souls, laborers in the householder’s vineyard represent Christians. In the spiritual realm, the only useful, laudable labor is in the Lord’s vineyard (the kingdom or the church). A laborer, though industrious, if he labors in the wrong vineyard, will not be rewarded by the Householder, who is Christ (Matthew 7:21-23). In the parable, the householder hired all he found and no laborer refused to labor in the vineyard.

“So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny” (Matthew 20:8-10).

After the twelfth hour (about 6:00 p.m.), the laborers gathered to be paid. Unlike an evil householder who kept the wages for which the laborers harvested crops (James 5:1-4), this householder paid-in-full those who labored in his vineyard, as also the Law of Moses required (Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:15). The “hire” or wages represent salvation.

Verses eight through ten record the payment of the wages. Every worker received the same pay though they worked varying numbers of hours. The householder honored the agreement between himself and the first laborers and likewise he honored the verbal agreement with the subsequent workers. The householder was generous to the latter laborers, paying every person the same (“a penny”). This became the basis of complaint.

“And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day” (Matthew 20:11-12).

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This generosity was despised by the early laborers. They had negotiated a contract with which they were apparently content initially. Now, though, they loathed their pact and hated the householder. The unequal treatment was not unjust but merciful and generous. Doubtless U.S. labor laws and unions would fault the householder today.

Comparing people and things precedes coveting. Simply, the complainers had not been wronged; they were merely jealous. The oddest side of the complaint is that the laborers were co-laborers, representative of fellow Christians, who alike were recipients of the same reward, representing salvation. It is inconceivable that any Christian could begrudge blessings shared by fellow Christians.

These blessings exceed the “common salvation” (Jude 3) and include earthly honors sometimes bestowed on Christians by other Christians. In this way some who have lately become Christians compared to “old soldiers” may be more lauded. “The Christian who is a people-watcher is never satisfied with what God gives him but always wants what somebody else has.”²

“But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” (Matthew 20:13-15).

The householder in the parable appealed to the power and authority that was inherent in his position. Commentators have observed justice, sovereignty and grace exhibited in this parable, reminiscent of the same qualities in the Godhead.

As the Lord of the Vineyard (Matthew 20:15), He claims the sovereign right to do what He wills in His own affairs. . . . *Sovereignty* will not be exercised at the expense of *justice* or of *grace* . . .³

The householder addressed one of the especially vocal dissidents. He first presented himself to his critics cordially and respectfully, despite the cross disposition with which they chided him. The householder reasoned that: (1) he uprightly fulfilled the contract with them; (2) they **ought** also to be content with that contract, which they negotiated; (3) the householder had a legal right to manage his assets as he willed; (4) he refused to be wrongfully portrayed as evil; (5) jealousy and covetousness comprised the true foundation for the verbal assaults on him.

“So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen” (Matthew 20:16).

Removing from the narrative of the parabolic illustration, Jesus concluded the discourse with a pithy application **to the apostles**. The summary conclusion to the parable in 20:16 mirrored our Lord’s concluding remark in his answer to Peter’s question: “But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first” (Matthew 19:30).

Chapter 10: The Laborers in the Vineyard

“The lesson taught is, that those who seem chiefest in labor, yet if they forget that reward is of grace, and not of works, may altogether lose the things which they have wrought. . .”⁴

Seniority in the Lord’s kingdom is ineffective as the basis to claim God’s grace. Even past usefulness as a servant of God can be undone by sin (Ezekiel 3:17-21). Sins for which the children of God will not repent cause God to remove their names from the Book of Life (Revelation 3:5; 22:19; Exodus 32:33).

Through this parable Jesus warned his apostles of their defective attitude, (1) toward their fellow men, and (2) toward God and his system of grace for mankind. God, through his grace, gives his disciples what they do not deserve — like the third, sixth, ninth and eleventh hour laborers in the vineyard. “Though some may personally labor well, their disposition towards others may need improvement.”⁵

‘First’ and ‘last’ relationships also characterized groups of people in the dawn of the Gospel Age. The Jews were the first group to whom the Gospel was initially preached. They not only predated by a decade the reception of the Good News by the Gentiles, where Jews and Gentiles both comprised local populations, the Jews still heard the Gospel first (Romans 1:16; Acts 13:46-48). However, the Jews as a group exhibited a defective attitude toward other men and toward the gracious redemption of God through Christ.

Last in time to come into the kingdom, the Gentiles through their service would be made first, and the Jews, who were once first, because of their hatred of others would be made last.⁶

Conclusion

Laborers in the Lord’s vineyard today must not challenge the authority of the Householder (Christ). At first opportunity we ought to gladly accept our Lord’s invitation to labor in his vineyard; everything outside Christ’s vineyard is idleness. Jesus will only reward those who labor in his vineyard. He will not acknowledge labor in adjacent vineyards. The grace of God exceeds both man’s capability to merit it and even man’s expectations. Defective attitudes, either toward our fellow man or toward God’s grace, will impair one’s usefulness in the kingdom and may endanger his eternal reward.

Questions

1. This parable is immediately preceded by two discourses. To whom did Jesus speak in these discourses?
2. What two topics did Jesus address in these discourses?
3. For what two reasons was Peter’s question improper?
4. Cite two other instances in which the apostles displayed an unhealthy ambition.
5. In what way were the apostles susceptible to a discontent similar to the complainers in the parable?
6. At this time, what type of kingdom did the apostles suppose Jesus would establish?
7. What kind of parable did Jesus present?

Chapter 10: The Laborers in the Vineyard

8. To whom was the parable spoken?
9. Who did the householder represent?
10. Who worked the longest of the persons involved in this parable?
11. The laborers in the marketplace represented whom?
12. The laborers in the vineyard represented whom?
13. Between whom was a contract negotiated in the parable?
14. Describe the day's wages mentioned in the parable.
15. At what times of day did the householder hire workers?
16. What do the different hours represent?
17. What does the marketplace represent?
18. Spiritually, the only useful labor is where?
19. Under what obligation was the householder to reward laborers, who though they labored, they labored in another man's vineyard? How does that principle apply in religion today?
20. Of the laborers the householder found, how many did he hire?
21. Of the laborers hired, how many went to the vineyard and labored?
22. What was the responsibility of a Jewish employer living under the Old Testament regarding payment of wages?
23. What do the wages represent?
24. How much was each group of laborers paid?
25. In what way did the householder violate the verbal contract with the first group of laborers?
26. Did the householder honor the contract with the subsequent laborers?
27. What was the basis of complaint in this parable?
28. What precedes coveting?
29. What was the spiritual malady of the complainers?
30. In the spiritual lesson, what relationship would the complainers sustain to the other laborers?
31. The blessings brethren may enjoy on earth have what two origins?
32. Describe a people-watcher.
33. Did the householder exceed his authority in the parable? Describe a householder.
34. What three qualities did a righteous householder share with the Godhead?
35. With what attitude did the householder respond to his spiteful critics?
36. Enumerate the five-point, reasoned argument the householder presented in his defense.
37. To whom did Jesus specifically apply this parable?
38. What declaration concludes the parable and also concludes the earlier answer to Peter's question?
39. How might more recent converts overshadow the Christian service of earlier converts?
40. What does seniority have to do with eternal Christian reward?
41. What can annul past Christian service?
42. Describe the two-fold defective attitude of the apostles.

Chapter 10: The Laborers in the Vineyard

43. 'First' and 'last' also affected what two groups in the early church, and in what way?
44. Challenging the authority of the householder, in spiritual matters, would be equivalent of challenging the authority of whom?
45. Spiritually, when should souls today agree to labor in the Householder's vineyard?
46. Estimate the value of activity outside the Lord's vineyard.

Endnotes

¹ Trench, p. 62.

² Wiersbe, p. 138.

³ Lockyer, p 221.

⁴ Trench, p. 63.

⁵ Jackson, p. 30.

⁶ Lightfoot, p. 60.

Chapter 11: The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen

Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19

Introduction

The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen was spoken by Jesus in the temple on the day following his triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-18). Jesus was teaching the people when he was interrupted by the chief priests, scribes and elders (Matthew 21:23; Mark 11:27-28; Luke 20:1). They demanded to know by what authority he taught (Matthew 21:23; Mark 11:28; Luke 20:2). Doubtless these religious leaders expected Jesus to defend himself from their attack on his authority. However, our Lord's response not only surprised them, but it also prompted these religious leaders to become defensive themselves (Matthew 21:24-27).

“And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing; and answer me: The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not? But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. And they answered, that they could not tell whence *it was*. And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things” (Luke 20:3-8).

In the context of this verbal exchange, Jesus spoke two parables which he applied to these religious leaders. Our Lord concluded *The Parable of Two Sons* by saying “. . . the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you” (Matthew 21:31). Immediately, Jesus then presented *The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen*.

The Parable

“Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them

Chapter 11: The Wicked Husbandmen

likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast *him* out of the vineyard, and slew *him*. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out *his* vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet" (Matthew 21:33-46).

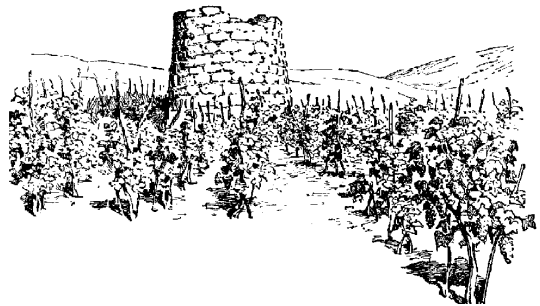
In this latter parable, Jesus referred to a form of agriculture with which all inhabitants of Palestine were very familiar. Vineyards abounded and were especially adaptable to terraced hillsides where other crops were less suited. The vineyard that Jesus described excelled some vineyards. The householder himself planted it. He "hedged" it, essentially putting a fence around the vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7). This vineyard also had a winepress and a tower (Matthew 21:33).

A winepress consisted of two troughs that were either dug in the earth and lined with stone or hewn in bedrock. The elevated vat into which the grapes were placed was where laborers mashed the grapes with their feet (Judges 9:27; Isaiah 63:3). Through a small hole in the side of this trough, grape juice flowed into a lower trough.

A tower provided a vantage from which watchmen could view all the vineyard. Men guarded the vineyard from thieves and animals. This vineyard lacked no advantage and was a thriving business.

The householder rented his vineyard ". . . to husbandmen, and went into a far country" (Matthew 21:33). The rent due was a portion of the crop. We might say that the householder was to be paid in kind. At the time of harvest the vineyard's owner sent servants to receive the fruit (Matthew 21:34).

However, the wicked husbandmen respectively beat, stoned and killed the householder's servants (Matthew 21:35-36). Finally, the householder sent his only son, his heir, who the husbandmen murdered. They plotted to steal the vineyard for themselves (Matthew 21:37-39).



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Then Jesus paused and asked, “When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?” (Matthew 21:40). The religious leaders answered the question correctly, unaware, at first, that the parable applied to them, they unwittingly condemned themselves (Matthew 21:41).

In an earlier reference already cited, God through Isaiah compared the Jews to a vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7). Also, one of the characteristics of parables was that their auditors often acknowledged their messages before realizing that the respective parables applied to them (2 Samuel 12:1-9). Jesus used *The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen* and the one preceding it precisely this way.

In the parable before us, the householder represents God. The vineyard is the church, first in prophecy initially prophesied to old physical Israel. Afterward, taken from them, it was given to new, spiritual Israel. Compare Paul’s teaching in Romans 11:15-24. The Jews were amply prepared by God for the arrival of Christ and the establishment of the church. However, they crucified the Christ and persecuted the church.

The husbandmen in the parable are old, physical Israel. The far country represents the centuries of divine silence between the testaments. The servants are the prophets of God. They were abused and killed (Matthew 23:34-35; 1 Kings 18:13; 19:10; 2 Kings 16:31; 22:24; 2 Chronicles 36:16; Jeremiah 20:1-2; Acts 12:1-3; Hebrews 11:36-38). The new husbandmen are the Gentiles (Romans 11:15-24).

The son and heir is Jesus Christ. In Mark’s account of this parable, the householder had one beloved son (Mark 12:6). As the heir in the parable was killed outside the vineyard, Jesus Christ was killed outside Jerusalem. Through this parable Jesus prophesied his own death (Matthew 16:21).

As the servants preceded the heir in the parable, the prophets preceded Jesus Christ. As the heir occupied a superior advantage over the servants, Jesus is superior to the prophets. In the parable, the heir was sent last. Jesus also was sent last.

Jesus Christ is the only redeemer whereby mankind can be saved. The Jews who cast off Jesus had no other redeemer to whom they could appeal (Hebrews 10:26). From the parable, evidently the Jewish religious leaders were not completely unaware of the Divine nature of Jesus, whom they caused to be killed (John 3:1-2).

“The admission that the Son was the “heir” reveals that the murder of Christ was not a *totally* ignorant act on the part of the Jews (cf. Luke 23:34; Acts 3:17).¹

All three accounts of *The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen* record the acknowledgment of the chief priest, scribes and elders that the parable was spoken against them (Matthew 21:46; Mark 12:12; Luke 20:19). Therefore, they desired to capture and afflict Jesus. They restrained themselves, though because they feared the people, who recognized Jesus to be a prophet from God. Religious leaders should have guided the people to receive Jesus as more than a prophet — the Christ, the Messiah. Instead, these leaders could have learned from the people. Little did these dishonest and incompetent leaders realize that God’s providence would use their maliciousness to accomplish redemption through Christ (John 11:47-53; Acts 3:23-36).

Chapter 11: The Wicked Husbandmen

Our Lord concluded this discourse by referring to Old Testament prophecies, which he applied to himself. The religious leaders rejected Jesus similarly as the “stone” in prophecy was rejected. Like the durable, victorious stone, Jesus taught that he would triumph over the Jews who opposed him. Compare the following passages.

“The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. . .” (Psalm 118:22ff).

“Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder” (Matthew 21:42-44).

“Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste” (Isaiah 28:16).

“Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces” (Daniel 2:34-35).

“To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed” (1 Peter 2:4-8).

See also 1 Corinthians 1:23 and 10:4.

Jesus is the stone and the rock cited in the verses above. A cornerstone joins and strengthens two walls. Jesus Christ, through prophecy and fulfillment, joins the Old and New testaments.

Conclusion

Did Jesus have authority to teach the people? Unquestionably he did; honest souls found that conclusion inescapable. Not only does Jesus continue to have that authority, dear reader, you and I will someday be judged by his words (John 12:48).

Questions

1. In what place did Jesus present *The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen*?
2. When during the ministry of Christ did he recite this parable?
3. What was Jesus doing when he was interrupted?
4. Who interrupted Jesus?
5. Why did they interrupt Jesus?
6. How did Jesus put them on the defensive?
7. Name the first parable Jesus presented in response to his critics.
8. How was the vineyard of the second parable superior to other vineyards?
9. Describe a Bible-times winepress.
10. What purposes did a tower in a vineyard serve?
11. In what form of payment did the householder expect a rent payment?
12. What did Jesus accomplish by asking what the householder would do when he came?
13. In this parable, identify who or what is represented by each of the following: householder, vineyard, wicked husbandmen, a far country, the son and heir.
14. What did Jesus prophesy through this parable?
15. What about the servants regarding the heir was also true pertaining to the prophets and Christ?
16. Did the Jews mistakenly suppose Jesus Christ to be a wicked person and have him killed? Explain your answer.
17. What did the critics of Jesus on this occasion understand about Jesus' parables?
18. What prevented the critics of Jesus from capturing him?
19. How did these critics fail the people?
20. In what way did God overrule the maliciousness of the Jews respecting the death of Jesus?
21. What did Jesus do in the conclusion of this discourse?
22. What two things, like a cornerstone between two walls, does Jesus join?
23. In what way does the authority of Jesus affect mankind today?
24. How will that authority affect mankind in the future?

Endnotes

¹ Jackson, 34.

Chapter 12: The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

Introduction

The apostles were the original recipients of this oral instruction: *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* (Matthew 24:3). The parable was part of our Lord's response to questions posed by his close disciples, after he prophesied that the magnificent temple buildings would be destroyed (Matthew 24:2).

Actually, the apostles asked three questions. They thought that they were essentially making a single inquiry (Matthew 24:3). However, our Lord correctly answered two queries: (1) when will Jerusalem be destroyed (Matthew 24:4-35) and (2) when will the Second Coming of the Christ occur (Matthew 24:36-41)? The apostles could not conceive of the destruction of Jerusalem with the consequent utter demolition of the temple before the destruction of the world, at which time the Messiah would come again.

Not even our Lord's apostles fully comprehended that Jesus would leave them, how he would depart or through what Jesus would undergo before his exit. They were equally confused, as even later many Christians generally were, concerning the Second Coming of Christ. Early Christians desired and expected a soon return of Christ (Titus 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3). Jesus cautioned the apostles lest they should be fooled by false Christs, claiming a Second Coming (Matthew 24:4-5, 23-26).

Immediately after answering the apostles' questions, Jesus re-enforced his teaching with five illustrations: (1) *The Goodman of the House and the Thief* (Matthew 24:42-44), (2) *The Faithful Steward and the Evil Servant* (Matthew 24:45-51), (3) *The Ten Virgins* (Matthew 25:1-13), (4) *The Talents* (Matthew 25:14-30), (5) *The Great Judgment* (Matthew 25:31-46). Hence, chapters 24 and 25 comprise a single occasion of instruction about being prepared for the unannounced conclusion of earth and time, and the commencement of man's eternal habitation, inaugurated with judgment.

Our current study focuses on *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*. Brother in Christ and cherished friend, Grady Miller has composed an excellent background to this parable as follows.

The parable finds its setting during the week leading up to the death of Jesus on the cross. Matthew records our Lord's entry into the city of

Chapter 12: The Ten Virgins

Jerusalem in chapter 21. During the next several days we find him cleansing the temple of the moneychangers (21:12-13), debating with his enemies (22:15-23:39), defending his authority to preach and teach (21:23-27), and speaking in parables to the people (21:28-41, 22:1-14).

It was on Tuesday during this last week of the Saviour's life that Jesus departed from the temple for the final time (24:1). As he and his disciples made their last tour of that impressive structure, Jesus shocked his followers by proclaiming, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (24:2). A little later, the Lord and his band of disciples had reached the Mount of Olives and were sitting on the western slope. There they could enjoy a panoramic view of Jerusalem and its marvelous temple. His disciples (Peter, James, John and Andrew — Mark 13:3) took this opportunity to ask Him to explain His startling prediction, saying, "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (24:3).¹

The Parable

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. They that *were* foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, *Not so*; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 25:1-13).

The Parable of the Ten Virgins deploys the common and joyous occasion of the marriage feast as it was practiced among the Jews. Jesus was a master at using familiar scenes in everyday Bible-times life from which to indelibly inscribe heavenly messages in the minds of his auditors. Jesus was no stranger to the marriage feast, either as a participant (John 2) or as the backdrop for instruction (Matthew 9:15; 22:1-14; John 3:29).

Marriages were usually arranged while the prospective brides and grooms were children. A later stage of this protracted process was the betrothal, which occurred from several months to about a year before the marriage ceremony. The betrothal included the

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payment of a dowry by the groom to the parents of the bride. From the betrothal forward, though they were not cohabiting yet, dissolution of their marriage covenant required divorce, or in the case of infidelity capital punishment (Deuteronomy 22:23; Matthew 1:19).

Customarily, on the day of their marriage, the bridegroom escorted his bride from her father's house to his house. Along the way, friends of the groom and bride joined the procession. Others waited at the groom's home where the marriage feast was to occur. In their festivities and solemnity surrounding a marriage, chaste, unmarried women were often in attendance. Similarly, bridesmaids accompany brides in our society.

Ten of these virgins awaited the wedding procession. They were outside the groom's home. The ten virgins expected that the wedding party would arrive after dark and brought lamps. None of them, though, knew how long the bridegroom would delay coming. However, five of the virgins had made adequate preparation for such an eventuality.

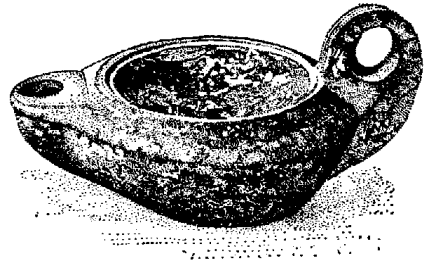
The lamps were pottery bowls with a handle and top openings for a wick and to fill with oil. For extended use, five virgins brought extra olive oil.

After considerable delay and after all ten virgins fell asleep, the groom arrived. The five virgins whose lamps were extinguished for lack of oil turned from the oncoming procession to acquire more oil for their lamps. While they were absent everyone present entered the house and the door was shut. Later, the unprepared five returned and were denied entry. These five neither expected the delay nor did they anticipate that they would be denied admission to the marriage feast.

In this parable, the bridegroom represents Jesus Christ. Christ is also the groom in 2 Corinthians 11:2 where the bride is the church. The bride is not mentioned in the parable, though, because she is not essential to Jesus' teaching on that occasion. The virgins represent believers or members of the Lord's kingdom. The number ten was used by the Jews to signify completeness (e.g., "ten sons," 1 Samuel 1:8). The delay pertained to the delay of and the unannounced Second Coming of Christ. The shut door was prophetic of the point beyond which no one can make further preparation for eternity. The refusal of the bridegroom to admit the five virgins is comparable to our Lord's refusal to admit to heaven disobedient souls (Matthew 7:21-23).

The ten virgins from all available information in the parable were equally morally pure. Five of them merely had made inadequate preparation, indicative of insufficient watchfulness. On this basis, the ten are styled "wise" and "foolish."

It is not enough to be in the Lord's kingdom. Likewise, this parable does not apply to those in any generation who have made **no preparation** (i.e., who are not in the kingdom). This parable, like the four other illustrations involved in the discourse, encourages watchfulness and faithfulness upon the part of God's people. "In this parable, he continues the solemn declaration of the uncertainty of the time of his return and of the



Chapter 12: The Ten Virgins

necessity of being ready for such an event.”² “Christ’s coming is certain, but the time is uncertain.”³

Conclusion

Clearly, Jesus here taught personal responsibility and the possibility of apostasy. The wise maidens were unable to divide their oil with the foolish ones, lest none would have sufficient oil. Note also that the judgment will be a personal examination. At the judgment bar of God, no one will be able to intercede for the lost and no additional preparation will be possible (2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27). There will be no time for added preparation at the Second Coming of Christ!

Incidentally, in the Matthew 24-25 speech, because no one knows when Christ will return, and therefore watchfulness is urgent, all the date-setters are wrong. The real question of eternal importance is: “. . . Will I be ready when the Bridegroom returns?”⁴

Questions

1. To whom was *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* originally spoken?
2. What prompted questions to be posed to Jesus in this context?
3. How many questions did Jesus answer at this time? What were the questions?
4. What did many early Christians believe concerning the Second Coming of Christ? How does this contrast with or how is it like popular thought today about the Second Coming of Christ?
5. List five illustrations Jesus used in Matthew 24 and 25.
6. When in the ministry of Jesus did he present *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*?
7. What five events characterize the final days of Jesus ministry?
8. Describe the events involving Jerusalem about which Jesus taught.
9. What occurred between the prediction that Jesus uttered and his presentation of this parable?
10. Describe the marriage of a Jewish couple in biblical times.
11. Describe the lamp.
12. How many virgins fell asleep?
13. What do the following represent: bridegroom; 10; virgins; wise; foolish; delay; the shut door?
14. How many of the virgins were morally pure?
15. What is certain; what is uncertain?
16. How does this parable address responsibility and apostasy?
17. Why are date-setters wrong?
18. What question, regarding this parable, is of eternal importance?

Endnotes

¹ Grady Miller, “The Ten Virgins,” *The Parables of Our Saviour*, Garfield Heights church of Christ, p. 315.

² Lockyer, p. 237.

Chapter 12: The Ten Virgins

³ Roy, p. 107.

⁴ Lockyer, p. 241.

Chapter 13: The Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14-30

Introduction

Still on the Mount of Olives and immediately following *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*, Jesus recited *The Parable of the Talents* to his apostles. Whereas in the former parable Jesus emphasized watchfulness, in the latter he stressed that his disciples need to work while they wait with watchfulness.

The Parable

“ For *the kingdom of heaven* is as a man travelling into a far country, *who* called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made *them* other five talents. And likewise he that *had received* two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, *there* thou hast *that is* thine. His lord answered and said unto him, *Thou* wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not

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strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and *then* at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give *it* unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:14-30).

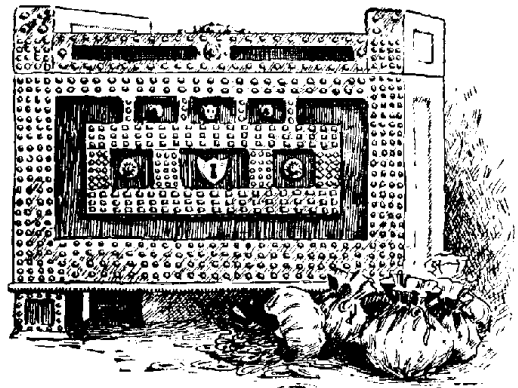
In this parable, three stewards are entrusted with their master’s assets during his protracted absence. Two functioned faithfully without direct supervision, but the third did not function as a steward (1 Corinthians 4:2). He neither squandered the funds left in his custody nor did he covet his master’s possessions. The third steward, though, was unfaithful. *The Parable of the Talents’* message primarily involves to the conduct of this man.

The Greek word translated “servants” in verse 14 is the word for slaves. Slaves sometimes superintended their masters’ estates (e.g., Joseph, Genesis 39:4). In the parable before us, the lord of these servants entrusted to them “his goods” (verse 14) and “talents” (verse 15). The talent here mentioned was a measurement of weight that varied in places and times. Commentators estimate that a talent of silver in the time our Lord was worth not less than \$1,000 and perhaps more than twice that amount. A talent might be of silver or gold.

The Lord of the servants proportioned the distribution of funds and the assignment of duties according to their respective abilities and anticipated opportunities. To one he gave five talents, to another he gave two talents and to the third he gave one talent (verse 15). The stewards with five and two talents prospered, doubling the money entrusted to them (verses 16-17). The one-talent steward hid the single talent he had in the earth (verse 18). Consequently, that man did not practice good stewardship.

The Lord of these servants inventoried the goods and funds upon his return (verses 19-25). With the first two servants their Lord was well pleased and he promoted them. With the unfaithful steward, however, the lord was displeased.

This unprofitable steward attempted to mask his culpability by accusing his lord of unrighteousness (verse 24). He further tried to excuse his dereliction because he was afraid (verse 25). This servant’s master, though, was not intimidated nor was he distracted by such charges from this critical review. Frankly, this slave was in no position to evaluate his master. Further, his effort to transfer his unrighteousness to his lord was unsuccessful. The master did not defend himself but rather critiqued his servant as “wicked and slothful” (verse 26). The folly of the excuse was demonstrated when the master noted that at least the one talent could have been invested with bankers by which



Money Chest

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it would have produced interest (verse 27). That one talent was taken from the lazy steward, after which he was discharged from his post (verses 28-30).

(Another interesting thought explaining why the master did not refute the charges made against him is as follows: The master did not deny the servant's accusations because they were true. However, the master is only attributed with being frugal, that is, harvesting even the corners of the field or even areas next to his field to which wind or water may have displaced the seed.)

The "man traveling into a far country" represents Jesus Christ. The "servants" are the apostles first, and by extension all members of the Lord's church. The "far country" is equivalent to heaven. The "goods" and "talents" represent the Christian's responsibilities toward all that he is and has in the service of Christ. The delayed return corresponds to the interim between the Ascension and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The return of the lord in the parable stands for the Second Coming. The lord's inventory and assessment of his servants' activity is the final judgment. Casting out the servant represents the removal of a Christian from the church at the final judgment and his assignment to hell.

As each servant in *The Parable of the Talents* was a recipient of goods and funds, **each** Christian has some responsibility in the church today. There were not any **no-talent** stewards and there are not any **no-talent** Christians either. However, individual abilities, possessions and opportunities vary between Christians. Therefore, one's degree of responsibility is dependent upon those variables. Opportunity equals responsibility!

The variable distribution of talents and the variable results indicate that Jesus only expects Christians to do what they are able to do (1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:13). "While God does not require me to be great, God does require me to be faithful . . ." ¹

Small ability does not justify a lack of faithfulness. . . . God overlooks no one, regardless of the size of the church . . . God always demands our best. Partial obedience, half-way service and lackadaisical attitudes will not be tolerated at the last great day." ²

". . . the Lord looks for fidelity in little as well as in much." ³

Every Christian is obligated to work for Jesus Christ while awaiting his Second Coming. *The Parable of the Talents* emphasizes individual responsibility in Christian service and individual accountability in judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10-11; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Revelation 20:11-15). It is acutely imperative that each Christian understands that service in this life (or the lack thereof) **will** determine his or her eternal disposition (Matthew 25:31-46). Like the master in this parable, Jesus will deal honestly with Christians in judgment. Faithful Christian workers will rejoice therein, but lazy Christians will dread such a Judge.

Conclusion

It cannot be overstated that Christians who perceive that they have limited abilities and opportunities must **not excuse themselves** from Christian service. Those Christians need to accept the abilities, possessions and opportunities that are afforded

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them. They should not bemoan their lot in life, but enthusiastically embrace their Christian responsibilities.

All of us doubtless have wasted opportunities while waiting for even greater and obvious opportunities. May we each earnestly pray for a personal door of great opportunity (1 Corinthians 16:9) and further muster sufficient courage to cross its threshold (Acts 4:29). The apostle Paul repeatedly cultivated opportunities from even the most irregular and diverse circumstances (e.g., in prison, bound to a guard, during court proceedings). Each child of God **must** view the world through the spectacles of opportunity and responsibility. Otherwise, though we are Christians, we will not view heaven first-hand.

The parables of the talents had a profound impression on my life. As a young man working in the world I began to read my Bible during the supper break and was very upset over the truths of this momentous passage. I was concerned over getting to the judgment and seeing lost people who would have been saved if only I had been a preacher and used the talent God had given me! This haunted me until I agreed to try and see if God could use me — the rest is history. Thank God for the parable of the talents. It lays a tremendous responsibility upon each of us.⁴

Questions

1. Where was Jesus when he delivered *The Parable of the Talents*?
2. To whom did Jesus present this parable?
3. The immediately preceding parable emphasizes watchfulness. What does this parable emphasize?
4. List the four characters in the parable.
5. In view of the lack of indictment of the one-talent steward for misappropriation, covetousness or immorality, in what way (if any) could he be thought unfaithful?
6. What significance does the answer to question #5 have to Christians today?
7. What does the Greek word for “servant” in this parable mean?
8. Name a slave who managed his master’s household?
9. What two types of things were entrusted to the three servants in *The Parable of the Talents*?
10. What is meant by the word “talent” in this parable?
11. A single talent was worth about how much money?
12. Why was there not an equal distribution of talents to the servants?
13. How did the unprofitable servant attempt to explain his conduct to his lord?
14. What was the minimum effort the unprofitable steward should have made?
15. What was the consequence in this parable for the unprofitable servant’s conduct?
16. Identify what the following terms in this parable represent: the man or lord, the servants, the far country, goods and talents, delayed return, the return of the lord, the inventory and assessment, casting the servant out.
17. In what way does this parable teach that a Christian can fall from grace and be lost?

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18. How much responsibility for Christian service does a no-talent Christian have?
19. Name three general variables that determine the degree of responsibility a Christian has toward Christian service.
20. What does God expect from a Christian who has small ability?
21. How is one's responsibility for Christian service different between membership in a larger congregation versus membership in a smaller congregation?
22. Name three things that will not be tolerated in the last day.
23. Is it necessary for every Christian to work for the Lord? Explain your answer.
24. What does *The Parable of the Talents* teach about responsibility and accountability?
25. List three passages that teach about judgment.
26. Will Christian service or the lack thereof affect one's eternity? Explain your answer.
27. Why will faithful Christian workers rejoice at the final judgment?
28. What is the great spiritual danger for Christians who perceive that they have limited abilities?
29. What attitude should Christians reflect who acknowledge that they have limited abilities?
30. List several doors of opportunity that the apostle Paul and other New Testament characters seized.
31. List several doors of opportunity for which you personally could pray and which opened you should enter.
32. List several doors of opportunity for which the congregation of which you are a member could pray and which if opened the church could possibly reach the community with the Gospel.
33. What is in store for Christians at judgment who do not recognize that opportunity equals responsibility?
34. Dear fellow student of the Bible, are their abilities given to you by God that you are not using in Christian service? If yes, are you comfortable going into eternity to meet the Great Judge without applying those abilities to Christian service?

Endnotes

¹ Connally, pp. 329-330.

² *Ibid.*, p. 333.

³ Trench, p. 97.

⁴ Connally, p. 329.

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God's Redemptive Plan

GOD'S PART

Love (John 3:16)
Grace (Eph. 2:8)
Mercy (Titus 3:5)
Gospel (Rom. 1:16)

CHRIST'S PART

The Blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5)
Our Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5)

Holy Spirit's Part

Revelation (2 Pet. 1:20-21)

MAN'S PART

Bible Faith (John 8:24)
Repentance (Acts 17:30)
Baptism (1 Pet. 3:21)
Obedience (Heb. 5:8, 9)
Purity (Rev. 22:14)
Faithfulness (Rev. 2:10)
Love (1 John 2:10)
Hope (Rom. 8:24)
Works (Jam. 2:24)
Endurance (Matt. 10:22)
Confessing Christ (Rom. 10:9-10)
Being Born Again (John 3:3-5)
Laying Aside Evil (Jam. 1:21)
Preaching (1 Cor. 1:18, 21)
Calling on the Name of the Lord (Rom. 10:14)
Knowledge of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15)

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Gospel Gazette Now a Part of World Evangelism

Upon Bonnie & Louis Rushmore agreeing in June 2007 to join the World Evangelism Team and their subsequent move in October 2007 to Winona, MS, Gospel Gazette Online became simply one more facet of World Evangelism's efforts to proclaim the Gospel to the world through mass media. This Internet venue for evangelism is companion to TV, radio and mass literature distribution already employed by World Evangelism.

In late 1998, *Gospel Gazette Online (GGO)* at www.gospelgazette.com was born of an idea and a desire to extend one's usefulness beyond the local setting, coupled with the (financial) go-ahead by my wife. From time to time in the past and in various locations around the country, *Gospel Gazette* appeared in printed form. First, *Gospel Gazette* was a quarterly, tabloid-size, newsprint magazine, which was distributed through paid insertion in a city newspaper. Years later, *Gospel Gazette* appeared again as a paperback-size booklet which was mailed to community households.

Gospel Gazette Online made its debut in January 1999 as a monthly, religious Internet journal. Today, it is a 20-page, monthly Gospel magazine read by people all over the world (from all seven continents, including Antarctica). Obviously, *GGO* via the Internet is available even in some places in the world to which one cannot easily go physically with the Gospel of Christ (e.g. Saudi Arabia and Antarctica). Each issue sports articles by Christian men and women on a variety of biblical subjects as well as several features (an onscreen, interactive crossword puzzle; youth articles; one or more articles by women especially for women; questions and answers; and an audio message). In addition, thousands of articles from past issues appear in the archives and may be selected with the help of the site search engine.

Dozens of brothers and sisters in Christ have lent their studious pens through the pages of *GGO* to an international readership of both Christians and non-Christians. By design, short, teaching articles populate Gospel Gazette Online. Thereby, *GGO* purposes to edify both Christians and non-Christians with Bible-based lessons. Response from readers reveals a wide array of religious backgrounds, including members of the church of Christ, denominational bodies and world religions. Most fan mail is positive and encouraging, though some of it ranges from critical to hostile, bordering on hate mail. A couple of the more heartening posts include correspondence about baptisms in Saudi Arabia and the request from a Muslim in Pakistan that I pray for his sick wife. Subsequently, after initial contact through the pages of *GGO*, and later studying with Christians in his country, he put Jesus Christ on in baptism.

Any good that *Gospel Gazette Online* has done or continues to do is owing largely to the many Christian writers whose articles comprise each issue. Most of my immediate family has had or continues to have a significant role in any successes that may be attributed to *GGO*. Beyond that, if *GGO* is a useful tool today, it is also because of a number of persons in the Christian family of God. Periodically, the recipient of lauds from around the globe, if there is anything praiseworthy, let the glory be to God.

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