

INTRODUCTION TO PARABLES

Jesus' parables are a most brilliant form of teaching. Jesus' parables are one of God's methods of sending messages of salvation and truth to humanity. They are the perfect expression of spiritual truth. Other people have used parables, but none have even approached Jesus' perfection. No parable has ever been found to be flawed. That is because Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus was also man while He was on this earth. Jesus often referred to himself as the Son of Man. Jesus was also man so he could be the perfect atonement on a cruel Roman cross for the sins of other men.

Jesus didn't come as a Roman Emperor, although He had all God's power. Jesus didn't come as a rich person, although the world was His by right of creation. Jesus didn't come as an intellectual, even though His wisdom was infinite.

Jesus did come into lowly circumstances and was born by God into a laborer's family¹. He lived the life of a common ordinary citizen until His final three to four years of salvation ministry.

Jesus' humble family beginnings enabled Him to empathize and sympathize with people like you and me. He knew what it was like to have disappointments, sorrow and joy. He knew what it was to work for a living.

Jesus truly came as the Son of Man. Because of Jesus' understanding of the trials and tribulations in the life of the common man, He was able to formulate parables that were true to life and perfect. Jesus used real-life situations² that his listeners would be familiar with. Jesus did not use vague situations that would confuse people. If His listeners did not understand the parable, it was because they did not try to understand.³

There are powerful messages in these parables worthy of study for both the believer and the unbeliever⁴, with applications to everyday life. Also, there are ties to other teachings of Jesus in Scripture. These parables and teachings complement each other and help us to better understand God's Word.

Jesus' parables usually focus on one or two main spiritual truths. But Jesus is so profound that His parables often convey many truths, like a multi-faceted diamond. I doubt if anyone can know all the truths Jesus conveyed in His parables.

Because of the multi-faceted brilliance of Jesus parables, each of us may come away from studying these parables with somewhat different thoughts.⁵ Yet each

1Jesus earthly "father" was Joseph, a carpenter. See Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3.

2Although the story of the Tortoise and the Hare demonstrates a truth, it is not real life. Imagine trying to get these characters to race each other!

3This is explained in the section, "Why did Jesus use Parables?", pp. 3-7.

4Jesus spoke to believers and unbelievers. See Matthew 13:2

5Maybe that is why there is much controversy in the interpretation of some of Jesus' parables.

person may be receiving Jesus' basic message.

Jesus explained the first two parables which He spoke about seeds, "The Sower", and "The Wheat and the Tares". So we are free only to make applications of these parables, not interpretations. However, there are different opinions as to the meanings of the other parables. In some cases the opinions are nearly unanimous, but in other cases the opinions may differ considerably. This does not mean some opinions are necessarily wrong. The depth of Jesus' wisdom is so infinite that a number of opinions may be right.

Since the parable presents one or more spiritual truths and different people may see different valid spiritual truths, how then can we be sure of the correctness of an opinion? A good test is that the teachings derived from the parables must be consistent with other teachings of Jesus and with Scripture as a whole.

Summary of Contents

There are seven parables that begin with "the kingdom of heaven", or "the kingdom of God". Four of these are the second through the fifth parable in this text, Seeds and the Farmer (pg. 18) through Tares among the Wheat (pg. 24). The fifth, sixth and seventh parables in this group, Workers in the Vineyard (pg. 52), the Ten Virgins (pg. 85) and a Story about Three Servants (pg. 87), begin with "the kingdom of heaven", but have been grouped with other parables. That is because Jesus parables are so versatile and brilliant, that they may cover or touch upon several subjects. That is the case here. The Workers in the Vineyard is grouped with other parables about remembering who we are and who Jesus is, and also about properly honoring Jesus. The parables of the Ten Virgins and Three Servants have been grouped together with another parable, a story about Faithful and Unfaithful Servants. These three deal with Readiness and Faithfulness.

There is nothing sacred about how these parables are grouped. The important thing is to study them and learn from their spiritual lessons, so that we may become more like Jesus.

There are two parables that are embedded in greater teachings. These parables are The Good Samaritan (pg. 58), where the parable is used to define "who is my neighbor", but the teaching is about "what must I do to have eternal life?"; and the other is The Parable of the Tower (pg. 62), where the parable speaks about "planning", but the teaching is about the cost of commitment to Jesus.

The other parables cover a variety of topics, such as The Grace and Patience of God, Mercy, Dependence on The Lord, Loving Jesus, the Folly of Living for Oneself, Appreciation for Jesus, Cost of Commitment to Jesus, Readiness for Eternity, Comparison between the Dedication of Believers and Unbelievers, Evils of Complaining and Comparison, and Change of Heart rather than Salvation through Good Works.

WHY DID JESUS USE PARABLES?

“I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.” Matthew 13:35⁶

Jesus explains why He used parables in Matthew 13:10-15.

vv 10,11: *And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do you speak to them in parables? He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.”*

vs 12: *“For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.”*

vv 13-15: *“Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah⁷ is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed. Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.’”*

This discourse of Jesus may be divided into three sections:

(1) In verses 10 and 11 Jesus tells his disciples that they can understand His teachings because they have Him with them. Jesus can explain everything to them. However, in spite of that, the disciples had the same human weaknesses that we all have. They did not always hear and understand. In John 14:5-14 it is related that Thomas and Philip did not fully recognize who Jesus was or his relationship to the Father in heaven.

- Conclusion: We don't have Jesus with us, but we have God's Word and must hear it and study it diligently to understand it, so that we don't fail to recognize Jesus or fully understand who He is.

(2) In verse 12 Jesus interjects an important warning. Is Jesus' statement in verse 12 arbitrary? Are some people blessed from birth to know God, and grow in the Lord, and are others bound to never understand? Or, more sharply: does God accept some and reject others? To answer this question, let us look at Jesus' parable in Matthew 25:14-30⁸. In this parable verse 29 is identical in thought to Matthew 13:12. Let us list these two verses for comparison.

Matthew 13:12: *“For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from*

⁶Direct quotes from Scripture are in *italics*. Unless otherwise noted, quotes in this document are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

⁷Isaiah 6:9,10

⁸There is an almost identical parable in Luke 19:11-27.

him.”

Matthew 25:29: *“For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.”*

The parable in Mathew 25:14-30 is about stewardship. It could be called, “being the best you can be” or “doing the best with what you have”. Matthew 25:29 applied to “assets” will help us to better understand Matthew 13:12 applied to “understanding.”

In the parable of Matthew 29 a number of servants are given different sums of money. Those who are given larger sums of money earned even more with their sums, but the servant given the smallest sum of money buried it to preserve it, not even earning interest. The servant who buried his money loses it, and the servant who earned the most money was given that servant’s money.

Matthew 25:29 of the parable tells us that we have to make an effort with what “assets” we are given, and if we do, the Lord will give us even more. Conversely, if we don’t try, we will lose what we have.⁹

By comparing “assets” to “understanding”, we may conclude that Matthew 13:10-15 tells us that we have to make an effort to understand Jesus and the Scriptures. If we do, the Lord will increase our understanding. Conversely, if we don’t try, we will lose what understanding we have¹⁰. No one can make the excuse that God determines if they understand or do not understand the Gospel, when it is presented to them.

In Matthew 25, the servant who buried his coins lost them, demonstrating our modern saying, “use it or lose it”. In Matthew 13 not listening could be paraphrased as, “hear it or lose it”.

In related Scriptures, Jesus also tells us in Matthew 7:7-11, in the Sermon on the Mount: *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”* and *“...how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”* This shows that God has not arbitrarily condemned anyone to lose what they have, if they only desire to find Him.

- A conclusion: We have to make an effort to understand. It is not God’s fault if we do not make that effort.

In Matthew 13:12 it says: *“ but whoever does not have, .”* Now, someone may ask: how can you lose what you don’t have? There is an implication here, which is solved by looking at a similar passage in Luke 8:18: *“For whoever has, to him more will be given, and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be*

9A similar teaching is found in the Parable of the Sower, Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23. The first case, where the seed fell on the wayside, tells us that if hearts are not open to the Gospel, the devil will take it away.

10Also, we could say that there is no “standing still” in the Word of God.

taken from him.” The phrase “*seems to have*” is better translated “thinks he has”. Isn’t this an absolute brilliancy? Jesus puts his finger on a very human characteristic. Sometimes we seem to have so much or think we have so much, and we have so little. We think we’re rich, but we’re so poor. When we start to realize how poor in spirit¹¹ we really are, then we’re getting somewhere!

This discussion of Luke 8:18 and the insertion of “*seems to have*” brings to mind another famous statement of Jesus, found in Mark 2:17¹²: “*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.*” Obviously, there are no healthy, sinless people. But some people think they are “healthy”. So we can safely paraphrase this as, “People who think they are healthy don’t think they need a doctor, but people who know they are sick do. I didn’t come to invite people who think they are good to be my followers. I came to invite people who admit they are sinners.”¹³ This verse also shows that not only were there people that did not “hear or see or understand”¹⁴, but there were people who thought they were “healthy”. These are the people who are in danger of “losing it”, because they will not receive it.

- Conclusion: We must not think that that we do not need the Gospel, or devalue the Gospel, because we think we’re “good”.¹⁵ We must study God’s Word diligently at all times.

(3) Vs 13: “*Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.*” In other words, when they should be listening, they’re sitting there staring into space with glazed-over eyes, and closed minds, thinking about something else and hearing nothing. So, Jesus is willing to use another approach to stimulate their interest.

In vv 14 and 15, Jesus goes back to Isaiah’s time, showing that already people were becoming dull. “*And in them the prophesy of Isaiah¹⁶ is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed. Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.’*” The people of Isaiah’s day were stubborn and it was hard to convince them otherwise. They looked and listened but they didn’t see, hear, or

11 In Matthew 5:3 (from the /Sermon on the Mount} Jesus says,: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” “Poor in spirit“ means realizing how spiritually inadequate we are in front of God.

12See also Matthew 9:12,13 and Luke 5:31,32

13The author’s paraphrase, but believed to be valid.

14From Matthew 13:14,15

15See the Parable, “Two Debtors or Loving Jesus”, pg. 61. There are no “good” people.

16Isaiah 6:9,10

understand. This condition got worse with the Jewish people until Jesus' time¹⁷ (*And in them the prophesy of Isaiah is fulfilled...*). Their religion had gotten so bad that Jesus berated the Pharisees in Matthew 15:1-9 and 23:1-36. God had given the Jewish people commands from the days of the Exodus, but they had subverted God's Word to suit their own purposes.

We must be aware that the sin of neglecting or not taking God's Word seriously could happen to us. We may think that we are not like the people in Isaiah's and Jesus' day. We may feel that we put God's Word and Jesus' teachings into action. But do we? My own personal testimony: for years, as a youth and a young man, I sat in church and day-dreamed through the sermon, thinking about other things: such as when do we get out of here, or what am I going to do this afternoon? I thought the pastor was boring. Years later when I was an adult, I heard this same pastor preach, and I thought he delivered an excellent sermon. Did the pastor change, or did my attitude and "hearing" change?

And did I listen to God during the week? I would not like to tell you how long into my adult life this condition persisted. But praise the Lord, God is waking me up.

Do we as Christians in this nation listen to God, or do we go our own merry way, pleasing ourselves, and thinking that we're completely with the Lord?

So, one possible conclusion, after studying Matthew 13:14,15, Matthew 13:35, Mark 2:17, and Luke 8:18 is that Jesus used stories, or parables, to pique the peoples' interest because the usual methods of teaching were failing to interest or gain the attention of the people of that time. Jesus does not force¹⁸ himself on anyone who thinks they have no need for him. Jesus tries to persuade people and get their interest.

- Conclusion: Jesus used parables to pique the hearers' interest. Jesus does not force anyone to listen or understand.

I also believe, and this is only an opinion, that Jesus used parables to convince people who were receptive, by planting thoughts in their minds. They could liken themselves to some character in the parable. This was done without alienating the unreceptive since they did not see themselves in the parable. People would like to think they get ideas by themselves. Confrontation rarely wins an argument.

As an example, look at the Parable of the Sower. If a person sees himself or herself as seed getting choked out, that person may change and develop a love for the Word of God. But if someone refuses to see the light, and thinks the seed is growing in his heart when it isn't, that person will probably go his merry way. Without a confrontation, maybe that person will listen another day!

¹⁷This condition is still with the Jewish people, just as it is with the rest of this world, with the exception of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁸Matthew 7:6: "*Do not... cast your pearls before swine,....*" Don't force the Gospel on anyone.

Jesus Understanding of Human Nature

It was stated in the Introduction that Jesus, as the Son of Man, understood human nature. The verse in Matthew 13:12 proves this. In the discussion of this verse in the previous paragraphs it was seen that some people get more and some people don't. This is because some people "use it" and some people "lose it". Isn't this so true? Don't we see this in everyday life? Some people always seem to succeed and some people always seem to fail. There are expressions for this, such as "success breeds success", "everything he touches turns to gold", or "he just can't miss" and the opposite "he just can't do anything right", "he messes everything up", or "he's doomed to failure". Again we might ask if this is God's will, or a deficiency on the part of the individual. I believe it's attitude dependent. God dooms no one to failure.

Jesus again shows His brilliance and understanding in this teaching.

PARABLE OF THE SOWER or THE PLANTING OF GOD'S WORD

Introduction

This is a parable about the various ways that people receive the *word of the kingdom*¹⁹. The *word of the kingdom*²⁰ is God's message to us about salvation and eternal life through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to earth not only to preach and teach this message, but to demonstrate it through his perfect life and his perfect suffering and death on the cross, in that He proclaimed during that suffering, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"²¹ Jesus Christ was so much the messenger and the message that the apostle John writes in John 1:1, talking about Jesus, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* Jesus also said "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*"²²

This parable is of paramount importance, because Jesus Christ and God's Word are the foundation for our hope and joy, our comfort on this earth, and our future in eternity. It is also a warning to all about the serious consequences of neglecting God's Word.

The Sower is Jesus' first parable about seeds. It is found in Matthew 13:2-9, with Jesus' explanation in Matthew 13:19-23.²³ This and the following parable "The Wheat and Tares" are the only ones that Jesus explains. The question then arises: If Jesus explains the parables, what more is there left to say? The answer is that Jesus explains what the pictures in the parable mean, but we have to make the application to our own lives. For instance, in verse 9 Jesus talks about seeds falling on good ground. In verse 23 Jesus says the seeds falling on good ground represent the people who hear and understand. But what does this mean to us, or require of us? Let us study this parable to find out.

The Parable of the Sower

Jesus relates the parable in Matthew 13:2-9:

vs 2 *And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.*

vs 3,4 *Then He spoke many things to them by using parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the*

19All quotes from Scripture are from the New King James Version (NKJV) and are in italics.

20Matthew 13:19

21Luke 24:34

22John 14:6

23This parable and Jesus' explanation are also found in Mark 4:1-9,14-20 and Luke 8:4-8,11-15. These texts are essentially the same as that in Matthew.

birds came and devoured them.”

vv 5,6 *“Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth, and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.”*

vs 7 *“And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them.”*

vs 8 *“But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”*

vs 9 *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”*

Jesus explains the parable in Matthew 13:18-23:

vs 18 *“Therefore hear the parable of the sower:”*

vs 19 *“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.”*

vv 20,21 *“But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.”*

vs 22 *“Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.”*

vs 23 *“But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”*

Discussion of the Parable

The parable is discussed verse-by-verse with the corresponding verses of Jesus' explanation.

Vs 2 *And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.*

This verse tells us that so many people were there to hear Jesus, that he had to speak from a boat as the crowd stood on the shore. We can conclude from this that both believers and unbelievers were listening. That is only fitting, since God's Word is necessary both for unbelievers and believers. Jesus said *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”*²⁴ And the world includes everyone.

For the unbeliever God's Word shows the way to rescue from eternal damnation: *“He who believes in Him (Jesus) is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten*

24John 3:17

son of God.”²⁵ and “I (Jesus) am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”²⁶

For the believer God’s Word strengthens faith, and is a reminder of how to live in accordance with God’s two great commandments. These are found in Matthew 22:37-39: “*You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” Believers can forget!

Jesus does not use the parables for judgment of individuals. In John 3:17 Jesus says: “*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved!*” Just so, in this parable Jesus outlines the various ways God’s Word is received by the individual. It is up to the individual to decide what action he should take, or where he or she is in the Christian walk.

Seed falling by the wayside

vs 3,4 *Then He spoke many things to them by using parables, saying: “Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them.”*²⁷

vs 18,19 *“Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.”*²⁸

Some of the seeds fell by the wayside (along the road) and were eaten by the birds. The birds are symbolic of the devil snatching the message from these peoples’ hearts, because they didn’t understand the message, and didn’t do anything about it. If a person hears the Word of God and doesn’t act on it, sooner or later, it is removed from that person. Why? Because that is letting a vacuum exist, and the devil (*the wicked one*) will see to it that the vacuum is filled. Don’t we say that nature abhors a vacuum? Let us look at the most outstanding example in the Scripture of this lack of understanding. It is that of Judas. Judas lived next to Jesus Christ during His three-year ministry on this earth. He never got the “word”.

The “word” is *logos* in the Greek. *Logos* is translated in the KJV and NKJV as *Word*. However, *logos* is not just a collection of words. *Logos* is an expression of

25John 3:18

26John 14:6

27The words describing what happens to the seed (God’s Word) are underlined.

28In the parallel telling of the parable in Mark 4:14, it is added that Jesus said, prior to telling about the seeds that fell along the road, “*What the farmer is spreading is really the message about the kingdom.*” The sequence in Mark would place that statement just prior to verse 19 in Matthew 13.

thought, an idea or concept. It is the same word used for Jesus in the first verse and chapter of the Gospel of John. Jesus is the perfect picture of God. Jesus is the expression of God. He embodies God's message. Yet Judas never understood that message. This wasn't because God withheld it from him. Jesus says in Matthew 7:7: *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."*

What happened when Judas didn't get the message? In Luke 22:3 it says: *Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve.* In verses 4-6 it is recorded how Judas was to betray Christ. Later, Judas committed suicide (Matthew 27:3-5).

Judas is an outstanding proof of the lesson of Matthew 13:12²⁹, which may be paraphrased as "hear it or lose it". This is a warning to unbelievers - the danger of complete loss of salvation through failure to act on God's Word.

Do we as believers ever neglect God's Word? Do we ever get a message from God's Word and fail to act on it. We do! The *Word* in vs 19 is not only the full Gospel message, but the whole word of God. Although we have accepted the Gospel message, we don't always grasp its full import. The complete Gospel message is not only bare belief, but obedience to our Lord Jesus (Matthew 7:21-27). Spreading the Gospel is commanded in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Our Lord Jesus also told us to love God and our neighbor, and to help the less fortunate than us.

This genuine belief with obedience to the Lord enables us to be the "salt and light" that Jesus exhorts us to be in Matthew 5:13-16. This is a key to help us spread the Gospel.

Are we ever guilty of wondering why others don't believe the word of God, while we ourselves are unresponsive to its commands?

Seed falling on stony places:

vv 5,6 *"Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth, and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away."*

vv 20,21 *"But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles."*

Some people are very enthusiastic about God's message, and later grow cold, some even finally rejecting it. Jesus says these people stumble spiritually when the "going gets rough", that is, spiritually, they cannot stand up to the evil of the devil. They can endure only for awhile, because they are not rooted in the Word of God.

29 Matthew 13:12 was studied in the section "Why Did Jesus Use Parables", pp. 3-7.

Sometimes we look down on these people. Sometimes we feel sorrow for them, which is what we should do. We should be able to mourn for them, as Jesus exhorts in Matthew 5:4 - *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”*

But, do we ever grow cold, and sometimes get tired of the “battle”? I pray that the Lord will gently remind us when we lose sight of the goal.

Jesus tells a story of Two Sons in Matthew 21:28-32. One son said he will go to work in the vineyard when his father told him to. But then he didn't go. This is extreme. The son never even got started. Maybe we aren't quite that bad, maybe we don't quit, but maybe we slow down, maybe we lose some of our enthusiasm. Let us pray to the Lord for energy in His causes.

Seed falling among thorn bushes:

vv 7 *“And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them.”*

vs 22 *“Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.”*

Now that we are saved, we should depend solely on the Lord. That is what, *“You shall have no other gods before Me”*, means (Exodus 20:3)³⁰. In Matthew 6:25-34 Jesus explains that this means that we shouldn't worry about things of this world. Worry can take our focus off the things of God.

We should also lose our desire to get rich in the things of this world. Jesus said, in Matthew 6:24: *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”* this is another application of the first commandment God gave the children of Israel in the desert, *“You shall have no other God's before Me”*.

In the parable of the Dishonest Steward (Luke 16:1-13) Jesus says that often the children of this world follow mammon better than the children of light follow their God. Do we ever get side-tracked by mammon or riches? Do we ever worship at the same throne as the children of this world?

In Luke 12:15-21, Jesus tells the parable of the Rich Fool. The rich fool is an example of someone who forgot God and his neighbor. He was blinded by his riches. His riches made him feel safe (Luke 12:15). Matthew 13:22 calls it the *“deceitful of riches”*, because the riches make him feel safe. But that night his soul died. This is a caution that we dare not worship mammon, the God of materialism.

Due to our sinful nature, we slip into old habits, and sometimes think and behave as unbelievers do. We must pray to God for His strength to fight worry and

³⁰The First Commandment: *“Thou shalt have no other gods before Me”*. King James Version.

the desire for riches, because these things take our mind from Him.

What is the ultimate result of worry and the desire for riches? That result is found at the end of vs 22, ...“*the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.*” Isn’t this an important part of the lesson Jesus is trying to convey? Don’t we often treat Christianity like a theoretical subject, high in profession, but low in production? We should desire that we will produce much fruit, so as to please the Lord (Matthew 7:15-20).

Seed falling on good ground:

vv 8 “*But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*”

vs 23 “*But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*”

Here we have the final part of the parable. “*Hears the word and understands it...produces...*” Not just an idle allegiance to the Master!

What is the goal? If these seeds that fall on good ground are the people that hear and understand and they produce more than was planted, then this implies enlarging the kingdom of God. It implies doing the work of the Lord. This is telling others about Jesus and our faith in Him. (There is no better advertisement than a satisfied customer!) Also, helping others and helping those who have needs is a necessity.

Praise the Lord for these insightful teachings of Jesus, and that the Lord enables us to understand them, so that we can use these teachings to guide us in our everyday living. Amen.

Summary

In this, the Parable of the Sower, Jesus tells and explains to us a story that presents some simple but also very profound spiritual truths. Jesus tells us that the seeds are the message of God, and where these seeds are planted is representative of how people respond to the word of God, and the Gospel message.

In its narrowest sense, it is a warning about how acceptance of the word of God effects a person’s eternal destiny. The first three cases are shown in the following chart. These are the cases where the Word of God receives little or no acceptance.

The First Three Cases

Where the seed fell

By the wayside, eaten by birds
On stony places, withered away

Result

Satan takes the Word away from the person.
The person loses enthusiasm, endures only a little while, then stumbles.

Among thorns³¹, were choked.
unfruitful.

Cares of this world and deceitfulness of
riches cause person to become

If this is a permanent condition with a person, and he or she does not change, we can well imagine his or her eternal destiny. But since God wanted all men to change and believe, we may conclude that it was Jesus' fondest hope (remember the song -Jesus loves me) that the people who heard these three messages would come to grips with these issues, and change their ways and come to him. We may regard these three cases as Jesus' heartfelt warnings for these people to come to repentance.

Is there a message in these first three cases for the believer? Yes! Remember, the devil goes around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. The devil tries his best to tempt believers to neglect God's Word, lose enthusiasm, or worship riches. Sometimes the believer succumbs to these temptations.

None of these lapses are good for the spiritual growth of the believer, and the parable may be taken as a warning against these lapses. And believers should heed these warnings. We want to please our Lord, don't we?

Now, how is it that believers at times can fall prey to the errors described in the first three cases, and "get away with it", that is, not lose their salvation. It is because of the believers' commitment. Believers have committed themselves to God's Word and obedience to Jesus Christ. Unbelievers have committed themselves to rejection of God.

Unbelievers³² have deliberately rejected God's Word. Believers neglect God's Word due to their sinful nature. When God makes believers³³ aware of their wayward ways, they are repentant and pray to God to help them. The difference is due to the believers' love of the Lord Jesus Christ and the belief and desire to be obedient. (See Addendum 1 for proof of this statement.)

Also, see Addendum 2 - The Devil, the World, and our Flesh for a discussion of Luther's use of this term and its connection with the first three cases in this parable.

The Fourth Case Result

Seeds

31Some may argue that this represents an inactive believer, but in this paper we won't argue this point (is there such a thing as an inactive believer?) because we believe that Jesus has a message here for believers, and we are interested in pursuing that message.

32Like Judas

33Like David (2 Samuel 12:1-14) and the disciple Peter (Matthew 16:15-17, Matthew 26:69-74, and John 22:15-19).

Fell on good ground
Produced 100, 60, or 30 times

Hears, understands the Word and bears
fruit, 100, 60, or 30 times

In the fourth case, the word **produce** suggests that there is more to belief than an idle reception of the Word of God. True reception of the Word of God translates into obedience and action, doing what the Lord would have us do. These things, found in other studies of God's Word, include expanding the kingdom (spreading the Gospel), loving not only God, but others, and helping them. In short, obeying God's commandments, so that we may be "salt and light" (Matthew 5:13-16).

Addendum 1 - Peter's Confession

Peter had make a confession of faith to Jesus. Peter said, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" This confession sealed Peter for eternity. But later, prior to Jesus crucifixion, Peter denied Jesus three times, saying, "*I do not know the man.*" But later Jesus asked Peter three times if he, Peter, loved Him. And Peter said, "*Lord, ... you know that I love you.*" The Lord forgave Peter, saying, "*Feed My sheep.*"³⁴ Now, how is it that believers at times can fall prey to the errors described in the first three cases, and "get away with it", that is, not lose their salvation. It is because of the believers' commitment.

The believers have committed themselves to God's Word and obedience to Jesus Christ. Unbelievers have committed themselves to rejection of God.

Unbelievers³⁵ have deliberately rejected God's Word. Believers neglect God's Word due to their sinful nature. When God makes believers³⁶ aware of their wayward ways, they are repentant and pray to God to help them.

The difference is due to the believers belief and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Addendum 2 - The Devil, the World, and Our Flesh

Martin Luther used the term "The devil, the world, and our flesh". These were forces that could devour the soul of man. Luther says, "The counsel and will of the devil, the world, and our flesh are opposed to the will of God." Also, "The devil, the world, and our fresh try to deceive us or seduce us into misbelief, despair and other great shame and vice". Also, "We need the forgiveness of sins and the strength to resist the devil, the world, and our flesh."

In the parable the devil was the one who stole the seed away from men's hearts (Case 1), the cares of the world often choked the Word or God out of men's hearts

³⁴Matthew 16:16, Matthew 26:74, and John 21:17

³⁵Like Judas

³⁶Like David (2 Samuel 12:1-14) and the disciple Peter (Matthew 16:15-17, Matthew 26:69-74, and John 22:15-19).

(Case 3), and the Word of God died in men's hearts due to the weakness³⁷ of the flesh (Case 2).

Luther's theology was in perfect tune with this parable. It may be safely assumed that Luther was familiar with this parable.

37(due to man's sinful nature)

PARABLE ABOUT THE SEEDS AND THE FARMER

Introduction

This is a parable about the inability of people to understand how God expands the kingdom of heaven, and, more broadly, how God operates the universe.

This parable is found in Mark 4:26-29. I do not believe this parable has a common name, like the parable of the Good Samaritan, or the parable of the Sower. However, it has at least two important truths, if not more. Jesus parables are so brilliant, that no one can claim to know all the truths in any one parable.

The Parable of the Seeds and the Farmer

Mark 4:26-29:

And He (Jesus) said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

Parables are not like allegories, where every thing in the allegory has a direct one-for-one correspondence to something in real life. It is very difficult (at least for this author) to find this correspondence for a number of items in this parable. The farmer cannot be the Lord, because it says later that "*he himself does not know how*", and certainly the Lord understands everything. Maybe better is to make an equivalence between the ground and the Lord. But it does seem sacrilegious to liken the Lord to an object.

I believe it is better to look at the concepts of this parable. The farmer doesn't understand how the seeds grow, yet the seeds keep on growing. Just so, no one on this earth understands how the kingdom of God grows. We cannot understand God. Can we understand how God created the earth, or can we understand how God created us?

The idea that we cannot understand how God works, is a key principle in Christian theology which enables us to accept, if not understand, why certain things occur, both in the spiritual world and in the secular world.

Here are some perplexing questions relative to the kingdom of God: Why do the poor have an advantage over the rich when it comes to entering the kingdom of heaven? Maybe it's because the poor do not have riches to rely on. This is suggested in Mark 10:24, "*Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God.*" On the other hand, some might argue that the rich should have more to be thankful for, and should be praising God.

Why do the humble have an advantage over the wise (as measured by the world's standards) in entering the kingdom of heaven? The learned, the highly

educated, the wise may let it “go to their heads”. But, on the other hand one might think that the more educated people should be able to see the “hand of God” in everything.

Also, do we understand why we can talk to some people about Jesus and never seem to be able to convince them that Jesus is the son of God, the only way to eternal life? And then, someone else, who one might think would be difficult to convince, gives in quickly to the Lord’s Gospel. Some might say this is due to predestination³⁸, but who can understand predestination? Would we be able to understand why God predestines some to eternity with him, and not others?

This parable also shows that the Lord our God is sovereign. He is in charge. His ideas are different from our ideas. That is why we can’t figure out what God is doing. That is why we sometimes question the Lord. And isn’t it good that God does it His way and not our way? Here we can bring in a related parable, the parable of the Wheat and the Tares. That parable has to do with God’s kingdom. The servants want to weed out those (tares) that they think don’t belong in God’s kingdom. But the Lord says “No!” Wait until the end. That is because the Lord’s servants (us) don’t know what God knows. We don’t know who the “Wheat” are, or who the “Tares” are. Or who will become the “Wheat”³⁹ or who will become the “Tares”.

Further Application of the Parable

Here in The Gospel of Mark the parable is applied to God’s kingdom. But it is applicable to the whole universe. After all, God is the Creator of the universe, and no one has figured out how God has created it yet, and no one will ever do it! When we have come to the point where we accept that we cannot understand the ways of God, life becomes much more fulfilling. When we pray to God to guide us and protect us, rather than trying to figure out everything for ourselves and solve all our problems ourselves, God responds. Life will become more meaningful for us. Rather than uselessly fighting all our battles with our own intellect, we become more in tune with God, and His power will be with us. The Apostles performed many miracles by appealing to God’s power, not by trying to figure it out for themselves.

Some brilliant scientists have tried to understand the universe, but have failed. One famous scientist admitted that there was a God, but he couldn’t believe in the God of the Bible because he couldn’t understand how God created the universe.

³⁸I am not taking sides on the issue of predestination. I am only trying to show that the ways of the Lord are unfathomable to our human understanding.

³⁹Of course, this is before physical death on this earth. After death it is too late to accept Jesus. This is clearly stated in God’s word, and is the subject of the three parables about Readiness, found on pp. 80-87.

Let us be like the farmer who watched the seeds grow, didn't understand it, but harvested the grain. Imagine what the world would come to if all the farmers in the world refused to harvest the grain or even plant the seeds because they did not understand what made them grow. Or what if all the people who didn't understand electricity, refused to use it? The world would come to a stop. And yet some of the people who use all of God's gifts to man, will not believe in their Creator because they can't understand how He created all these things.

Addendum - A Testimony to my Grandfather

In this parable Jesus tells us about the growth of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus tells us that we do not understand how the kingdom of heaven grows. God does. We are not to worry about it, since we are not capable of understanding how God works. This has been discussed in the main body of "A Parable about the Seeds and the Farmer" (pp. 14,15). The point was also made that God is sovereign, and that we are very fortunate for that. So we can rest easy and do not have to be perplexed when things do not go as we wish them to. Also, we do not have to worry when people do not accept the Gospel, or be perplexed when unbelievers are more successful in the riches of this world than faithful believers. Just leave the "driving" to God.

There is some concern about the farmer in the parable. Some people have tried to treat the parable as an allegorical story, where everything has an exact parallel in the spiritual realm. In this parable they have failed. Some say that the farmer is Jesus, but cannot explain the phrase "*...he himself does not know how*" in verse 27. If the farmer were truly Jesus, he would understand. Others say that the farmer changes from Jesus to his followers. But this violates the allegorical principle. So, what is the answer?

It is this. The parable is not an allegory. We must not try to treat it as such. The parable demonstrates a spiritual truth. The farmer believes in the Lord, and puts his faith in the Lord, without trying to explain everything. The spiritual principle that the parable represents is that the farmer accepts God's grace and goodness without question. We should also!

In making this point about the farmer, I am reminded of my grandfather. He was a farmer. He and my grandmother lived on a seven acre farm in Perry, Ohio. They farmed that little farm for 27 years, when my grandfather died. My grandmother died 7 years later. My grandmother and grandfather always spoke about "der liebe Gott"⁴⁰, that is, our loving God. My grandfather had no formal education beyond the eighth grade. He couldn't debate about Scriptural matters. He would have been lost in the subjects of pre-ordination, the millennium, and eternal security. But he had a faith that would have put many students of Scripture to shame. He

⁴⁰My grandfather and grandmother were German.

farmed his little farm with the confidence that God would make his crops grow. He never doubted the Lord, even when it didn't rain for a month. And if a crop failed, he knew the Lord would take care of him. He never said, "I don't know if I can make it". Also, my grandfather knew that the Lord expected him to work for a living, that God's grace didn't entitle him to a "free ride".

My grandfather didn't try to find out how the seed grew. He accepted it, just as the farmer in the parable. He knew that if you put the seed in the ground it would grow. He knew that was God's work. He did have to harvest the grain, just as the parable says. He didn't have to explain the phenomena involved.

This type of faith is what I want. I would rather have this kind of a faith, than try to build a faith by figuring out how God does it. This means that I have to accept the sovereignty of God. When I do that, then I will have a better life, and be better "salt and light" for the Lord.

THE PARABLES OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE and THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Introduction and Summary

These two parables are about the joy and value of finding the Gospel.

These two parables are almost identical in that the central spiritual truth of each is the same. The spiritual truth is that for those who truly believe the Gospel message, that message is of paramount importance and of great value to them.

The parables differ in the way the message came to each of the recipients. One recipient wasn't looking for the Gospel, the other recipient was searching for it. This doesn't shed much light on the subject of God's pre-ordination, but it does explain that there isn't only one process for coming to the Lord Jesus Christ, at least as it appears to mankind. God has His way of working in the hearts of people, which we will never completely comprehend.

This is consistent with the teaching in the previous parable, Seeds and the Farmer, where it was concluded that we can not understand how God increases the kingdom of heaven or how God operates the universe.

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

Matthew 13:44: *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid, and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”*

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price

Matthew 13:45: *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”*

The central truth is identified in each parable by the phrases *“goes and sells all that he has and buys that field”* and *“sold all that he had and bought it (the pearl).”* The hidden treasure and the pearl both represent the full Gospel message. These two people, both the treasure finder and the shop owner, consider this such an important find that they are willing to give up everything they have to obtain it. Are we who are believers always mindful of the value of what we have in Christ?⁴¹ We should seriously meditate on this aspect of these two parables.

What is the other truth that is embodied in these two parables? In the first parable the man finds the hidden treasure, that is, he stumbles over it as he is in the field. In the second parable the shop owner is actively looking for the pearl.

⁴¹ The parable of Two Debtors or Loving Jesus (pg. 61) deals directly with this issue. If we lose sight of our sin, we lose sight of Jesus.

Don't we all know of cases where someone is so enamored with this world, that they pay no attention to spiritual things, and then one day the Lord wakes that person up. For example, there is the derelict who is so captured by alcohol or drugs that he is literally in the gutter, but somehow God wakes that person up, sometimes forcefully. Or the person who is "born into the church", and doesn't really realize what he has. Then God wakes that person up, and that person becomes a real believer.

Then there is the case of the searcher. There are people who have sincerely sought out God, and God has made himself known to them.⁴²

We don't understand the ways of God, but I believe that these two parables indicate that God works in different ways that we don't understand.

In the previous parable, Seeds and the Farmer, the spiritual truth was put forth that we cannot understand how the kingdom of heaven expands, and more broadly how God created this universe and sustains it. These two parables substantiate this spiritual truth, and fit into the picture of the sovereignty of God perfectly.

⁴²Jesus says in Matthew 7:7, "*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.*" Some people are searching for God, but want to understand God before accepting him. I do not believe this is a sincere search, and I believe that it is doomed to failure. That is because they are setting up their own mind as their god. In Matthew 5:3 Jesus says, "*Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" The poor in spirit are those who have given up on themselves and admit they are bankrupt and need God's help.

THE PARABLE OF TARES AMONG THE WHEAT

Introduction

This is a parable about judgment of our fellow man being God's prerogative and not ours.

This parable is the second parable⁴³ of Jesus which He explained. It is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. It is only found in Matthew. We want to understand the basic spiritual truths⁴⁴ that our Lord Jesus is conveying to us.

Jesus used real-life situations that his listeners would be familiar with. Jesus did not use vague situations that would confuse his listeners. This planting of tares in a wheat field was an occurrence Jesus' listeners were familiar with.⁴⁵

Jesus even made it easier to understand this parable, because this was one of the few He explained. Even at that, it takes some spiritual perception to gain the parables full meaning and application. We, at this point in time, can better understand the meaning and application of the parable because we may apply other related teachings of Jesus. This we will attempt to do.

Summary

This parable makes it quite clear that:

- judgment belongs to God.
- believers are not capable of judging, much less is it their job.
- until the judgment day there will be unbelievers among believers, and the believers may not know who they are. This is also true for the visible church of God.
- believers are not to take matters into their own hands by attempting to discern who the unbelievers are and rooting them out. Praise God that he takes that responsibility away from us. And from other teachings of Jesus, we are not to pass judgment on people, but to further the Gospel.

Now let us look at the words of our Lord Jesus. We will repeat the parable (Matthew 13:24-30) and Jesus' explanation (Matthew 13:37-43).

43The first parable is that of "the Sower", Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23.

44See Addendum 1, pg. 27.

45See the section headed "Tares" on pg. 25.

Sowing the Field

Matthew 13:24-30: *Another parable He (Jesus) put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field. How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to Him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But He said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into the barn.” ’ ’*

Matthew 13:37-43: *He (Jesus) answered and said to them: “He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”*

The Enemy, the Devil

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:27) Mankind was perfect as God created them. Man and woman were to think and act as God would think and act. But the devil persuaded Adam and Eve to disobey their Creator (Genesis 3:1-6). In Matthew 13:39 Jesus affirms the truth that there is a devil, and the devil is hard at work to deceive the world. Didn't the devil deceive Adam and Eve? The devil can deceive us!

The enemy in this parable is the devil. Now the enemy has infiltrated God's people (Matthew 13:38,39). This isn't surprising. Scripture warns us often about the devil. Peter says in 1 Peter 5:8: *“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”*

St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15: *“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness,*

whose end will be according to their works.” This is a very pertinent passage, because not only does it warn about the devil, but it touches on some types of tares, such as *false apostles, deceitful workers*. They may even look like *apostles of Christ!*

What is a Tare?

The tare is not recognizable from the wheat while it is growing. It is recognizable only after the seed head sprouts⁴⁶. Then its color is black instead of brown.⁴⁷ It is not good to eat, and can be poisonous if it is mixed in sufficient quantities with real wheat.

Spiritually speaking, wheat are believers, and tares are not believers. But from a human perception standpoint, tares appear to be believers.

Since the time of sprouting is the judgment day, the tares will not be recognizable to us. So, should we try to recognize them, and cast them out? What does the Lord Jesus say?

Jesus calls the tares the sons of the wicked one. They are led by the devil. Not that they will necessarily know it or admit it. Although the devil does have some followers who openly declare their allegiance to him, one doesn't expect to find declared followers of the devil among followers of the Lord Jesus. As noted previously, St. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 that these followers of the devil pretend to be believers of the Lord Jesus.

Then there is another type of tare. It may be the largest group. The Lord only knows! These are people who say they believe but are deceived. The devil has fooled them. The devil controls them, but they may not know it. The devil is a master at that. These people give lip service to the Lord Jesus, but go their merry way doing as they please. *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.’*” How many people in this United States say that they are Christians and do not obey or follow the Lord Jesus Christ, or do not rely on Him for their salvation.

Is there a middle ground, part way between the wheat and the tares. Jesus says emphatically “No!” In Matthew 12:30 Jesus says, *“He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.”* So, there is no in-between, either you are wheat or you are a tare!

46This will be at the judgment day.

47There are records from India and Ireland, that people who disliked someone, poisoned their fields by planting tares, in one case, at night. When the tares sprouted and the seed fell to the ground, it poisoned the ground for generations. Jesus did indeed use real life examples that His listeners could understand! See “Notes on the Miracles and Parables of our Lord”, pg. 88, by Richard Chenevix Trench.

God's Plan

God wanted mankind to maintain his perfection, but mankind rebelled. Jesus wanted to save mankind. In Matthew 13:37,38 the Son of Man⁴⁸ sows the good seed, which is representative of the saving Gospel. That's why in verse 38 the good seeds are called the sons of the kingdom.

So far, everything seems straight-forward. We all acknowledge (at least the true believers) the presence of God's force for good, and the devil's force for evil. So, why the parable? It is because the servants of the owner want to get rid of the tares.

How to Deal with Tares

Who are these servants? They are representative of believers (wheat). These aren't infallible beings, like angels. They are fallible human beings. These are people who are disturbed by the presence of unbelievers (tares), as they might understandably be. The big problem is, however, that they don't know who the tares really are! So, they might just try to eliminate some believers!

The believers (wheat) want to do away with the unbelievers (tares). But the Lord says that they might uproot some of the wheat with the tares, so in His wisdom, He prohibits His over-zealous servants. There are two applications here. One is to the church, where believers have tried to root out supposed unbelievers. In its most brutal form, the Inquisition of past ages tried to do this, killing many believers! And out in the world, God's people (or so they claimed to be) slaughtered people wholesale in the Crusades. Is it possible they killed any Christians or potential Christians?

We want to look at some of the reasons why the servants (believers) have to be restrained. Let us look at two of Jesus' other key teachings.

Why Believers must Exercise Restraint

John 3:17: *"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn⁴⁹ the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."*

Matthew 7:1-5: *"Judge not that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brothers eye."*

The word "judge" as used in the two above passages is used in the sense of

48See Addendum 2, pg. 28.

49Should be "judge", the same Greek word, "krino", as in Matthew 7:1

“don’t be a judge”. In other words, it’s not our job description. It is the Lord’s. This is clearly indicated in Matthew 13:40-42. We are to try to save people, not decide if they are going to heaven or hell.

We can also make a mistake and think someone is a tare because that person doesn’t meet our preconceived notion of a believer. We can be prejudiced by a person’s culture, race or mannerisms.⁵⁰ This is an application of Matthew 13:29, ripping out the wheat with the tares.

We can be “salt” and “light” to tares, even if we don’t know who they are. That is why we must be constant in our testimony, even if we think we are among believers and think we can “relax”. A tare may be potential wheat. Jesus put no restrictions on being “salt and light”, (Matthew 5:13-16). We cannot convert people in our churches if we are trying to root them out or throw them out.

It isn’t any wonder that God has reserved the right of judgment to himself! In Matthew 7:3-5 Jesus discusses our fallibility. Can we judge a person when we are also sinners? Can we judge a person when we have a log in our own eye?

Judging others is a poor witness. It shows others that we are trying to take over God’s job. In our imagination, we consider ourselves superior to those we are trying to bring to the Lord. How can we bring people to a belief in a God we have so diminished? Jesus assures us in this parable that God alone will sort people out on the judgment day! Praise the Lord.

Addendum 1 - Spiritual Truth versus Application

Sometimes people confuse the application with the spiritual truth in a parable. For example, in this parable of “The Wheat and the Tares” some would say that this parable describes the church⁵¹ That is not correct. The parable may be applied to the church, but it also may be applied to the whole world. In this document, we are interested in the spiritual truth, and will concentrate on that.

Addendum 2 - The Son of Man

The Son of Man is Jesus. Jesus used this name for himself because while on this earth, Jesus’ humanity was one of his roles. In heaven, in eternity, Jesus will be the Son of God, no doubt about it. Think of this: did Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead? Not directly. Jesus prayed to God the Father to raise Lazarus. God the Father raised Lazarus. In a sense, Jesus raised Lazarus through the agency of his faith in the Father. We could do that also, if only we had sufficient faith, a faith that could move mountains.

⁵⁰We are brothers and sisters in Christ. See Matthew 23:8-12.

⁵¹This could only be the visible church, organizational church, which may have believers and unbelievers. The invisible church, that of only true believers, would have no tares!

PARABLES OF THE LOST SHEEP and THE LOST COIN

This parable tells us that God loves us, and rejoices when we are found.

The Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin are found in Luke 15 just before the Parable of the Prodigal Son. These deal with God's love for us and his desire for us to return to him. These two parables emphasize the Lord's work.

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24), the viewpoint is different. The story focuses on the actions of the wayward son, trading his good home for the ways of the world, his trials, and then his coming back home. Then the father is brought into the picture. And, lastly, the unhappy stay-at-home son comes on the scene.

The addition of these two parables ahead of that of the Prodigal Son, makes the story of God's love for his creation more complete.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

The Parable of the Lost Sheep is found in Luke 15:3-7.

vv 3-6: So He (Jesus) spoke this parable to them, saying: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, calls together his friends, and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'"

vv 7: "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance."

The Parable of the Lost Coin

The Parable of the Lost Coin is found in Luke 15:8-10.

vv 8-10: "Or what woman, having 10 silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me for I have found the piece which I have lost!'"

Jesus tells us two simple, straightforward parables. Jesus tells us the meaning. In Luke 15:7, the lost sheep represents a lost sinner. The shepherd, the Lord Jesus, searches for the lost sheep. Finding the lost sheep represents the repentance of a lost sinner. This analogy may be extended to the parable of the lost coin.

Jesus tells us in these two parables about God's joy when sinners come back to Him. God loves His creations, and wants them to return to Him. Praise God for rescuing us.

PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE or THE GRACE AND PATIENCE OF GOD

This parable is about Jesus pleading with God the Father to give us more time to accept the Gospel, even though we are deserving of immediate judgment. Thank and praise God for that!

This parable is found in Luke 13:6-9. Although sometimes called the parable of the fig tree, the above title avoids confusion with the incident where Jesus curses a fig tree (Matt 21:18-22). Besides, this title about grace and patience better describes the meaning of the parable.

Luke 13:6-9: *He (Jesus) also spoke the parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years⁵² I have come seeking fruit and have found none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.'"*

Some sources say that this parable refers to the time of Jesus ministry on this earth, among the Jewish people. They base that on the *three years*.⁵³ (vs. 7) The principle in this parable could undoubtedly be narrowly applied to that period, but I believe it applies more broadly to sinful mankind in all ages. God the Father could very well condemn mankind to an eternity in hell, that is the meaning of "*Cut it down!*" But Jesus is the gardener and asks for time for Him (Jesus) to save mankind. So, the Father in his mercy sends the Son down to this earth. The "*dig around it and fertilize it.*" (vs 8) is representative of Jesus great ministry on this earth which is continuing to this day.

I believe the fig tree is representative of all people. It is a message of God's patience with mankind. God doesn't give up on us right away, although we may deserve it. I know that God is so patient with me, even though I am so slow about following Jesus. And God is patient with believers and unbelievers.

Jesus not only exhorts believers here but in other parts of Scripture. In John 15:1-8, Jesus says, "*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; ...*". Let us please the Lord Jesus and stay connected so that we may bear much fruit.

⁵² Many fruit trees start to bear abundantly only after three years.

⁵³ If the parable referred only to the time of Jesus ministry on this earth, what does the "*next year*" (vs 9) refer to? And where is mention of Jesus' death on the cross?

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

This parable is about the love of God for us, even when we stray. He wants us back in the fold. Unfortunately, some people resent God's mercy for others.

Webster's College Dictionary defines "parable" as a short allegorical story designed to illustrate or teach some truth, religious principle, or moral lesson. "Allegorical" is defined as "figurative".⁵⁴

Jesus used parables to illustrate basic religious truths. Although some say that each of Jesus' parables has one outstanding central theme, I believe that Jesus is so brilliant that each parable conveys a number of gems of wisdom. This parable is a prime example.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

The parable of "The Prodigal Son" is found in Luke 15:11-32. It is the parable cited to show God's love for His wayward children, His mercy and His forgiveness. But there is much more, so let us examine this parable verse by verse.

In Luke 15:11,12, Jesus says: ... *"A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood"*

We know that there is a parallel between the father and God the Father, our Creator and Sustainer. But who is the younger son? He is a person who is not content to live under the same roof with, and protection of, his father. He wanted his independence. He wanted out.

Although the younger son wanted independence from the father, it is ironic that he wanted his inheritance. Do we start to feel independent of God when we have a lot of wealth? Maybe this is what Jesus meant when he said, in Matthew 19:24, *"And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."*

Luke 15:13: *"And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living."*

So the young son left. He showed his discontent for his life with his father, by embarking on a new way of life. In verse 13 it is called *"prodigal living"*⁵⁵. We would call it wild or riotous living. He wasted all his money. Can we imagine how? In our day and age, he might have gone to the local bar and shouted, "All the drinks are on me." He might have wasted his money on wild women. Or, maybe he would have lived beyond his means with a too luxurious penthouse, expensive food and a big car. But, we do know this, he was going bankrupt.

Independence from God leads us to become dependent on the world. This may

⁵⁴See Appendix, pg. 36.

⁵⁵Prodigal living - One dictionary defines this as "wastefully or recklessly extravagant."

seem like pleasure, but it can only lead to ruin.

Luke 15:14: *“But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.”*

So the young son ran out of resources! He had not been provident. In his love of pleasure, he had saved nothing for a “rainy day”. Believers are cautioned not to worry about the future, or where their next meal is coming from. Jesus tells us in Matt. 6:25-34 not to worry about such things as our life or where we will get our next meal, or our clothing. After all, doesn’t God care more about us than the birds or the flowers?⁵⁶ We must have faith in God! Faith! That is the difference. This young man had no faith in God. He cared only about himself. If we are going to live independently from God we have to provide for ourselves. What a risk! Are we willing to take that risk? Maybe at some time in our life we have. Hopefully we have not been burned too badly. Sometimes God has to deal harshly with us before we wake up.

Luke 15:15,16: *“Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.”*

In the Jewish economy of that day, the pig was an abomination. To be associated with pigs was considered the worst fate that could befall a person. The world can be a great place to live if you are successful by the world’s standards. If you are successful and have much money, you will be admired and looked up to. But stumble once and see what happens. You can be quickly forgotten. The young man found that out! Lose your money and the world doesn’t care about you. He had no real friends. A real friend is one who obeys the second great commandment, that is, *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”*⁵⁷.

Luke 15:17-19: *“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my fathers servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father, and say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’”* ’ ’

Finally, the son figured it out. Wasn’t that fortunate. We can thank God that He helps us to figure it out. When we are in trouble, we must pray to God. We don’t want to wander in the ways of the world. The son figured it out that being a small fish in his father’s pond was better than being a big fish in the world’s ocean! He finally realized that depending on his father wasn’t such a bad deal after all. When we understand this, that Jesus must increase⁵⁸, and we must decrease, then we will

⁵⁶See Matthew 6:25-30.

⁵⁷Matthew 22:39

⁵⁸John the Baptist said about Jesus, *“He must increase, but I must decrease.”* John 3:30

be farther on the road to heaven⁵⁹. Then we will start to enjoy the benefits of our salvation right here on this earth.

Luke 15:20,21: *“And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”*

The father felt sorry for the son. Did he get angry with the son? No! He welcomed him. How different from the world’s thinking, “he had it coming”, or “let him suffer”.

The father had let the son go his own way. He didn’t restrain him from leaving home. He let him make his big mistake. Sometimes people learn better this way. If we learn from this lesson, life will be so much smoother for us! When the son was broken in spirit, then the father could work with him. Repentance is the key here. The Lord won’t be able to work with us unless we have a humble spirit. In Matthew 5:5 Jesus says, *“Blessed are the meek, ...”* And in Matthew 5:3 Jesus says, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit,⁶⁰ ...”* This is it! We must be humble (give up on ourselves) and depend on God, and God will bless us. How do you think God feels about us if we run off to someone or something else for help, or think we can do it ourselves? God forbade this as far back as in Exodus 20:3,5 when He said, *“You shalt have no other gods before Me”,* and *“...For I, the Lord your God am a jealous God, ...”* What is God jealous for, if not our dependence on Him?

Luke 15:22-24: *“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry: for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and was found.’ And they began to be merry.”*

A ring was a sign of a high position in the family. The sandals showed he was a son and not a servant. How good the father was to the son! This was not a grudging, but a whole-hearted acceptance. Now that we believe, have we not tasted of this acceptance? This is God’s grace. We have not deserved it. But if we give up our independence and rely on God, we will be blessed.

Notice that the father considered his son dead until the son came back to him. Just so, we are dead until we give in to the saving grace of Jesus Christ. God is pleased when we return to the fold. He is *“...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”* (2 Peter 3:9)

Luke 15:25-28: *“Now the older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants*

⁵⁹This last statement is figurative, because if we are believers, we are already citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20). The problem is that some of us forget it, and don’t avail ourselves of its privileges and benefits.

⁶⁰The poor in spirit depend on God.

and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.' But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him." The joy ends! The older brother won't participate. Some people enjoy it when other people suffer. Remember Jonah. He was unhappy when God didn't punish the Ninevites for their sins. Are we ever like that? Of course! We don't always have the mind of Jesus. But Jesus says in Matthew 5:7, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*"

Another lesson may be found here. The person who has come up from the depths of depravity often has more enthusiasm for the Lord than the person who has believed for a long time, like a person who was "born into the church". For example, "Why is he or she so enthusiastic? They've only believed a short time!"

We must not lose our "edge" because we have been in the house of the Lord for so long. We must rejoice, just as the Father does, when someone comes back into the fold. Did not God rejoice when we returned to the fold?⁶¹

Luke 15:29,30: "*So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years have I been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time, and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.'*"

This speech of the older son shows that he is only focusing on himself. Don't we often do this? Are we often more concerned with ourselves rather than bringing the Gospel to others, or helping others? What the older son says about the younger son's straying is true, but it shows a bad "heart condition" on his part. Oh, that our hearts would be merry when the lost sheep is found!⁶²

The kingdom of heaven is unlike earthly kingdoms, there are no seniority rights. The important thing is that we get in, not when or where.

Luke 15:31,32: "*And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and now is found.'*"

Isn't that the important thing, that people become alive. Isn't that why Jesus came to this earth, to rescue people? It should be sufficient that we were rescued from our sin. If that happened before or after someone else came to the Lord is immaterial. After all, aren't we in this together for eternity?

Many teachings may be found in this parable. Two major important teachings that are often cited are, (1) The mercy of God, as shown by the father's ready acceptance of the wayward son and, (2) We must not think that we have a better

⁶¹See Luke 15:6,7 and Luke 15:9,10 of the previous two parables, the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin, pg. 29.

⁶²See the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin, pg. 29.

entitlement to the grace of God because of when, where, or how we came to be believers on the Lord Jesus Christ. We must not compare ourselves with others. Our relationship with God is the important thing. God has enough grace for us all.

Other teachings, but certainly not all, that may be found, are, (1) Only when we give up on ourselves and depend on God can God do anything with us. This necessary dependence on God may be as vital a teaching as the commonly cited teachings and, (2) The world's pleasures don't satisfy. Only God can offer that satisfaction. The world will accept us and our contributions as long as we have assets. But it will discard us when we "run out of gas", and, (3) As the old saying goes, "the grass looks greener on the other side of the street." Satan tempts us with worldly pleasures, but when we are absorbed with these distractions, we are losing time with God. We could be productive in spreading the Gospel.

Jesus doesn't tell us if the older son comes back into the father's house, that is, spends eternal life with God. Jesus invites us in. We should enter rejoicing.

Some Conclusions

In this parable, the younger son left the father, and headed down the road to destruction. He was seduced by the world. He squandered everything on himself. He lived the wild life. But when times got tough and he ran out of resources, he saw the error of his ways, and came back to depend on his father. He realized the error of depending on himself and came to rely on the Lord. And he came home to the Lord, that is, he was saved for eternity. God's mercy is abundant!

The older son resented the intrusion of the "faithless" son, and wanted nothing to do with him. He was selfish, and didn't see the whole picture. The father welcomed the wayward son, and had mercy on him. Oh, that we would have the eternal perspective of the father, and welcome all those who come to the Lord, no matter at what time or under what circumstance.

Addendum - The Second (older) Son

One writer feels that the emphasis is not so much on the lost son, lost sheep or coin, as on the love of the Father. We want to learn of the love of the Father. That may be true, but I believe that in the Prodigal Son, we have so much to learn from the lost son, and the stay-at-home son. We do not want to imitate them, even in the smallest way, except for the return home of the youngest son to the father.

Some writers put a lot of emphasis on drawing parallels. For instance, the older son represents the Pharisees, the younger son the bad guys, tax collectors and prostitutes. That is true! But we don't want to keep it that narrow, so that we figure we are exempt. I know that I am convicted by much in this parable.

Can we feel sorrow for the lost, and rejoice when they return, as the Father does? Would we have treated the younger son as the father did, or would we have

done as the older son did?

When the younger son comes home, the father welcomes him with open arms. he doesn't put him on probation. We must also welcome back people who have strayed, with no strings attached!

Appendix

A parable demonstrates a spiritual truth. Each element of a parable need not have a corresponding element in real life. For example, the prodigal son represents a person who has strayed from their creator. Some have likened the father of the parable to God the Father. But this is not so. The father illustrates the love of God the Father, but he is an earthly father. Otherwise, why would the younger son say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you."? (vs 18)

A PARAPHRASE OF THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

Introduction

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son (pp. 35-40), the parable was discussed on a verse-by-verse basis. The Scripture used was the New King James Version.

This same parable is treated here, but in a somewhat different way. First, the Scripture verses used are in italics and are from the CEV.⁶³ These are followed by the author's expanded, modern-day version (paraphrase) of the parable in regular type. The expansions are used to convey some of the same points brought out in the discussions on pp. 35-40.

It must be made clear that this expanded, paraphrased version of this parable of Jesus is **not** an attempt to improve on these parables. No one could do that! This expanded version is an attempt to convey in different language some of the thoughts that were presented in the previous discussion of the parable.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

The parable of "The Prodigal Son" is found in Luke 15:11-32. It is the parable cited to show God's love for His wayward children, His mercy and His forgiveness. But there is much more, so let us examine this parable verse by verse.

In Luke 15:11,12, Jesus says: *Once a man had two sons. His younger son said to his father: "Give me my share of the property." So the father divided his property between his two sons.*

There was a man who had two sons. They both lived at home. The older son was quite content to live at home with the father. But the younger son was discontented, and wanted to leave. He was tired of living at home, where he would have to live by the rules his father had set down. He wanted to be independent and stand on his own two feet. So he asked his father to advance him his inheritance.

There is irony here. The son wanted to be independent, yet had the nerve to ask his father for his inheritance! The father had seen this before. He knew the pitfalls that awaited his young son. But he knew that if he argued with his son, he would only become more adamant. So with a heavy heart, he let the son go, but prayed that he would not be too badly burned, and that he would see the error of his ways and come back.

Luke 15:13: *Not long after that the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a foreign country, where he wasted all his money in wild living.*

So with his money, the young son left. He went to the big city, where the action was. He had every intention of living "right". But the protection and advice of his father were not there, and he succumbed to temptation. This was fun! And he did not reckon on the consequences. He indulged in wild living. He wasted all his

63 CEV - Contemporary English Version by the American Bible Society..

money. He liked parties, and it made him feel good to play the “big wheel”. He shouted “the drinks are on me” at the parties. And he wasted his money on wild women. Also, he lived beyond his means with a too luxurious penthouse, expensive food and a big car. And he was going bankrupt.⁶⁴

Luke 15:14: *He had spent everything when a bad famine spread through that whole land. Soon he had nothing to eat.*

All of a sudden, something happened that he hadn’t figured on. A famine hit. There was no food and there were no good jobs. The economy was bad. He had not been provident. He had saved nothing. He had gambled and lost. He did not have his father’s benefits and protection. And his friends who accepted his generosity were no help. They had disappeared. He was friendless in this great city. And he was hungry.

Luke 15:15,16: *He went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of his pigs. He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating, but no one gave him a thing.*

Well, he did it! He got a job, looking after pigs, an abomination. The pig was a scavenger, and was forbidden to be eaten as far back as the Exodus. But he did what he had to do. So he stole food from the pigs.

Luke 15:17-19: *Finally he came to his senses and said, “My father’s workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death. I will leave and go to my father and say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against God in Heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.’”*

Finally, the son figured it out. Now, he saw things in a different light. Life with his father wasn’t so bad after all. He thought to himself: Why should I suffer and starve here, when my father’s servants have it better than I? So, I’ll go to him and confess that I wronged him and God in heaven. I’m sure he won’t take me back as a son, since I treated him so badly. But maybe I can hire in as one of his servants.

Luke 15:20,21: *The younger son got up and started back to his father. But when he was still a long way off his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to the son and hugged and kissed him. The son said, “Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son.”*

The young son left the big city, and started back for home. He was apprehensive. Would his father receive him, if only as a servant? Would his father turn him away, or at least give him a tongue-lashing? But, No! The father was thinking about him the whole time he was away in the big city. The father cared and worried about him. He was waiting and watching for him to come home. So he saw his son from a distance and ran to meet him. He welcomed him with a

⁶⁴A foolish man and his money are soon parted!

warm welcome, and embraced him. Then the son recited his prepared confession, saying he was not good enough to be his son.

Luke 15:22-24: *But his father said to the servants, "Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. This son of mine was dead, and has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found." And they began to celebrate.*

But his father had a different idea. He shouted to his servants, "Bring him some fine clothes. He looks like he's taken a beating. Let him know that he's wanted and a member of this family. Roast the best meat from the best calf, so we can really have a feast and celebrate my son's homecoming. We thought he was lost, and here he is. We thought he was dead, and he's alive." And so they all celebrated.

Luke 15:25-28: *The older son had been out in the field. But when he came near the house, he heard the music and dancing. So he called one of the servants over and asked, "What's going on here?" The servant answered, "Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father ordered us to kill the best calf." The older brother got so mad that he would not even go into the house. His father come out and begged him to go in.*

They all celebrated the return of the youngest son. All but one, that is! There was one spoilsport. It was the older brother who had stayed with the father all this time that the younger son had strayed. When he heard about his younger brother, he was so angry, he wouldn't even come into the house. He didn't think the same way the father thought. He didn't have much mercy in his soul.

Luke 15:29,30: *But he said to his father, "For years I have worked for you like a slave and have always obeyed you. But you have never even given me a little goat so that I could give a dinner for my friends. This other son of yours wasted your money on bad women. And now that he has come home, you ordered the best calf to be killed for a feast."*

He thought he had "seniority rights", as he recounted to his father how he had worked so hard for years, with no reward. Then he switched from his "plight" to the younger son. "It's bad enough that he wasted your money, but he did it on wild women. And now he has the gall to come home and get you to give him a feast. Why should he be rewarded?"

Luke 15:31,32: *His father replied, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead, but he is now alive. He was lost and has now been found."*

His father calmly told the older son that his focus was on the wrong thing. There were enough rewards for everyone. Seniority had nothing to do with it. The important thing was that the younger son was saved, not when, where, or how.

Rejoice!

PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Introduction

This parable is about translating our love for the Lord into obeying his command to love our neighbor.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is often thought of only as giving Jesus' definition of who our neighbor is. Jesus' definition is certainly much broader than mankind's definition. But there is more to it than that. The parable is part of a much greater teaching. It was related by Jesus as part of a discussion of how to obtain eternal life. In Luke 10:27: it says, *So he (a certain lawyer) answered and said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."* Jesus replied in vs. 28, *"You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."* The man must have thought this was an academic exercise, so he asked Jesus, *"And who is my neighbor?"* (vs 29) Jesus recitation of the parable defined true belief and obedience to God in a more than superficial way. True belief came from the heart, and involved not just words, but also deeds.

Luke 10:25-37:

vv 25,26: *And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?"*

vv 27: *So he answered and said, "You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."*

vv 28,29: *And he said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

vv 30-35: *Then He answered and said, "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, passed by on the other side. Likewise, a Levite, when he arrived at the same place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, when I come back again, I will repay you.'"*

vv 36,37: *"So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus*

said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

This parable of the Good Samaritan is well-known. It has a very simple but important theme, that is, that our neighbor is anyone whom we come in contact with who needs our help. The word neighbor is the same word as that which is used by Jesus in the second most important great commandment.

Matthew 22:37-39: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*”

I believe it will add to our understanding of the parable if we are familiar with the religious practices and customs of the day. It will show just how hard it must have hit at the Jewish conscience of the day. Also, it will help us to avoid making some of the same mistakes that the priest and Levite made, or some other mistakes that are made in our present time because of warped religious practices or bad feelings toward people of other cultures (or people who don't behave as we do).

The Bending of the Law

The Jews of Jesus' day had bent the law of God to suit their own purposes. The Ten Commandments had been expanded and amplified to over 600 commandments. In this process God's intent had been lost and sometimes even changed. For example, God had a commandment about the Sabbath. It is found in the Old Testament book of Exodus.

Exodus 20:8-9: “*Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work:...*” And in verse 11: *For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.*”

The Sabbath was set aside to honor God for His work of creation. Nowhere did it say that you could not help an injured or sick person on the Sabbath. But the Pharisees changed God's intent. For example, the Jews had a custom that when a field of grain was harvested that the corners of the field were left untouched so that poor people could pick that grain to avoid hunger. In Mark 2:23-28 it is related that Jesus' disciples were picking that grain on the Sabbath and the Pharisees said it was unlawful to do that. But Jesus chided them. Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man and that He, Jesus, was Lord of the Sabbath. Here the Pharisees were twisting a day to honor God into a show of judgmentalism and a lack of love.

The Pharisees also twisted the Law about honoring parents so they could justify not helping their parents when they were old (Mark 7:10-13).

Does this ever happen to us? Do we ever let man-made ritual or man-made rules preempt or try to change God's commandments?

Dislike for the Samaritans

The Jews of Jesus' day detested the Samaritans for at least two reasons. First the Samaritans worshipped God differently than the Jews did. Their holy place of worship was Mount Gerizim, not the Temple at Jerusalem. Second, their Scriptures were only the Books of Moses, they did not accept later writings, like the Prophets.

In 722 AD, when the Assyrians conquered Samaria, which was a part of Israel, most Jews were taken captive back to Assyria. But some remained behind and mingled with the people that Assyria moved in. So they were considered half-breeds by the Jews who later returned from exile. Also, the Jews resented the fact that this group of people had not shared in the hardship of their captivity. In other words, to the Jew, the Samaritan was not "one of us".

Do we in our time, like the Jews of Jesus' time, ever look down on some people in the church⁶⁵? Do we let that become a feeling of annoyance, or even dislike or hatred, when we have to deal with these people? Sometimes, in looking at these people, we get a feeling of superiority and become complacent. And maybe these other people are more on fire than we are.

When it becomes difficult to bring ourselves to love other people, remember that Jesus died for those other people, too!

Discussion of the Parable

The first person who came along the road and saw this unfortunate man who was robbed and beaten, was a priest. The priest avoided this victim by crossing over to the other side of the road. He was supposed to be a servant of God. Of all people shouldn't he have been most concerned?

Then along came a Levite. He was a helper in the temple. Again, the same comments apply to the Levite as to the priest. Maybe he just viewed his position as a job, forgetting that he was a representative of the Lord's. Do we ever look at ourselves as just a Christian, but forget the work that Jesus has for us? Do we ever cross to the other side of the road to avoid helping someone?

Then along came a Samaritan, the last person anyone would have expected to be concerned. But he was concerned. He stopped for the injured man. He did not cross the street to get away. Not only that, he dressed the man's wounds and took him to an inn.

Then he made a down payment for the man's keep. And in case that wasn't enough, he offered to pay the innkeeper if the bill were higher. He didn't just

⁶⁵Remember that in our day and age, God's church, that is, the body of all believers, has members in many denominations which have many differing practices. Although these practices may not be "salvation issues", sometimes, unfortunately, these practices divide people to the point of isolation from each other. Just like in the case of the Jew and the Samaritan!

dump the injured man off at the inn to ease his conscience, but he was interested enough in the man's welfare to provide for his future.

Notice that Jesus did not tell us of what race or religion the injured man was. Maybe that was so that we would know that Jesus was concerned about all people, and so should we. Maybe Jesus picked the Samaritan as the good person, and two Jewish people who should have been good persons as the people who showed no compassion, to make a point with the Jews, and with us!

The point is that eternal life does not belong to people who have a certain set of rules and rituals, but to people who have a heart for the Lord, those who obey the two great commandments: "*You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.*" (Luke 10:27)

Notice that Jesus' parable was simple, but cut to the heart of the matter. Religion and salvation are not governed by a set of rules or rituals. They are not dependent on a person's race or heritage, but on a person's heart. Praise the Lord for that. And let us pray that we don't forget that we are God's representatives on this earth and should act to help our neighbor.

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

The Parable of the Rich Fool is found in Luke 12:15-21. It is a lesson in “how not to live”. Sometimes what we should do is best taught by showing the consequences of doing the wrong thing.

Luke 12:15: And He (Jesus) said to them, *“Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”* (NKJV)

The CEV⁶⁶ says, *“Don’t be greedy! Owning a lot of things won’t make your life safe.”*

This verse in Jesus’ teaching is so important to us, that I have given both the NKJV and CEV translations. The NKJV is the more literal translation. A modern translation might be, “‘Things’ or ‘toys’ are not what life is all about.” These things or toys can become distractions from the believer’s mission of being “salt” and “light”.

Of course, covetousness was prohibited as far back as the Old Testament in Exodus 20:17: *“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.”*

The CEV translation *“make your life safe”* is the translator’s view of the idea that is being conveyed in the context of the story. The rich fool’s possessions made him feel safe. Both translations are good, leading to “food for thought”. Do we ever feel safe because we have a good bank account, or the mortgage is paid off? Also, do these things make life better? Sometimes it may seem so, but it really isn’t. Often worldly things exact a serious toll from the possessor.

Luke 12:16-19: *Then He (Jesus) spoke a parable to them saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” ’”*

The modern slogan is “Eat, drink, and be merry!” It’s the same thing, isn’t it? But, is it wrong to “eat, drink, and be merry”? Under the right circumstances, “No”. As Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), it’s our heart’s condition that counts with God. But this man, the rich fool, was only thinking about himself. In the process he forgot about God, and his neighbor. (Jesus said our neighbor was anyone who needed our help - The Parable of the Good Samaritan - Luke 10:30-37.)

⁶⁶CEV - Contemporary English Version by the American Bible Society.

When we forget about God it's easy to forget about helping others. What is our mission here on this earth, but to be "salt" and "light", so we can show others the way to God (Matthew 5:13-16). If we are no longer "salt" and "light", we have ceased to be of value to the Lord on this earth. This should be cause for concern on our part.

Luke 12:20,21: *"But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you: then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

This is the consequence for people who are selfish, putting themselves ahead of God and mankind. Then Jesus asks a most brilliant question, *"..then whose will those things be which you have provided?"* This is the punch line, the knockout punch. Jesus is so good at this. It makes us sit back and think, think about the futility of living for ourselves.

Does living for ourselves have any eternal value? Jesus says in Matthew 6:20: *"but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moths nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."* And then in Matthew 6:24 Jesus says, *"No one can serve two masters; ..."* and *"...You cannot serve God and mammon."*⁶⁷ We cannot straddle the fence. We cannot live with one foot in heaven and one foot in the world. Jesus' brilliant logic should drive us to think in terms of eternal values and not following the world system. Again, *"...then whose will those things be which you have provided."*

In the Parable of the Rich Fool, the rich man focused on himself, saved for himself, enjoyed himself, and thought of no one other than himself, not even the Lord. He paid the penalty, eternal damnation. He lived on this earth without God, and he will live in eternity without God.

Some Conclusions

In this parable, the rich fool (fool because he had no understanding of spiritual things, or what was really important) did not think of God or think like God. He cared not for his neighbor, but only for himself. When he suddenly died, others got his possessions, which he thought were solely his. When he was alive, he did not want to associate himself with God, and in death was doomed to spend his life in eternity without God.

This parable was included here following the Parable of the Prodigal Son to try to convince anyone who is following in the footsteps of the Rich Fool to follow in the footsteps of the Prodigal Son and avail themselves of the love of God the Father by returning to the fold.

Addendum 1

⁶⁷Do we control our wealth and use it for the Lord, or does our wealth control us?

Relating the Parable of the Rich Fool to Storing Up Treasures in Heaven

Matthew 6:19,20: *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.”*

Before listing the positive aspects of the “how to” of storing up treasures in heaven, let us look at what not to do, which is storing up treasures on earth.

This is best summarized in the previously discussed parable told by Jesus in Luke 12:15-21, about a certain rich man:

vs 15 *And He (Jesus) said unto them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness: for a one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”*

vs 16 *And He spoke a parable to them, saying, “The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:*

vs 17 *And he thought within himself, saying: ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’*

vs 18 *So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.*

vs 19 *And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.”*

vs 20 *But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will be those things be which you have provided?’*

vs 21 *So is he that lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”*

This person built bigger barns to store his earthly treasures, so he could sit back and enjoy a life of ease for years, or so he thought. God called him a fool and took his life. God asked him before he died who would get his treasure!

Note that Jesus calls him a rich man in vs. 16. Only after this rich man makes these bad moral decisions regarding his riches and future life of ease does God call him, in vs 20, a fool. So the rich man is not a fool for being rich, but for lacking spiritual perception.

This parable has more lessons than are first apparent. The usual lesson emphasized is that *“...the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night,...”*⁶⁸, so always be prepared. But how to be prepared is often not discussed.

We are prepared for death by living for God. This rich man made at least two big mistakes.

- he depended on himself, rather than on God.
- he lived for himself, he helped no one.

He depended on himself. Isn’t that putting himself on a level with God, or higher? God says, in Exodus 20:3: *“You shall have no other gods before Me.”*

682 Peter 3:10, see Addendum 2, pg. 49.

God was his Creator and Sustainer. The rich man's behavior was an act of the worst ingratitude. I pray that we will not fail to depend on God and thank Him for His blessings.

The rich man didn't help anyone else. But Jesus came to earth for the sole purpose of helping others, the otherwise lost sinners. Shouldn't we help others, also?

Who would get this rich man's treasures? His treasures were eaten by "moths", and were stolen by "thieves". We must ponder the question, "Is what we are saving "safe"? **No one but God can guarantee a treasure!**

Now, finally, what are treasures in heaven? There is no collection box in church marked "heaven". Treasures in heaven aren't just about money. We will list a number of them, but there may be more.

- Winning souls for God - Matthew 28:18-20, Matthew 19:29,30
- Helping others - Mark 9:41, Matthew 25:31-46, Luke 6:35,36
- Helping the poor - Luke 14:12-14, Proverbs 19:17
- Obedience - Matthew 5:19
- Perseverance - 2 John 8.9
- Enduring tribulation - Matthew 5:11,12

These are the positive aspects of storing up treasures in heaven. These aspects are worthy of much study and thought. We will leave that for the individual to undertake for himself.

Addendum 2

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night...”⁶⁹

Often this is explained as “don’t be caught sinning when the Lord’s comes”. This is like “don’t get caught with your hand in the cookie jar, when mother comes home”.

I do not believe this is thinking as the Lord would have us think. This is a philosophy of fear. I believe we should always flee from sin, simply because we don’t want to dishonor God, the One who gave us everything we have, our salvation and our daily support. I hope that we all obey our Lord out of a sense of gratitude, not fear. That is my prayer.

In Matthew 24:43,44 Jesus says: *“But know this, if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*

Then Jesus follows this statement with three parables (which are discussed later in this paper under the title Readiness). These three parables talk about three things we should not be doing anytime, because we don’t know when the Lord is coming. For those of us who die before the end of this world as we know it, the Lord is coming for us at our death. Jesus emphasizes that this good behavior is a constant thing, not just when we think no one is looking, or when we think death is not imminent. We should be trying to please Jesus all the time.

⁶⁹ Peter 3:10, NKJV

A PARAPHRASE OF THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

The Parable of the Rich Fool is found in Luke 12:15-21. It is a lesson in “how not to live”, or living without the Lord. This is a paraphrase by the author. Scripture verses are in italics, the paraphrase is in regular type.

Luke 12:15: *And He (Jesus) said unto them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness: for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”* And in the CEV, it is recorded as: *Then He (Jesus) said to the crowd, “Don’t be greedy! Owning a lot of things won’t make your life safe.”*

Jesus said that we shouldn’t want so much. Life isn’t about “toys” and “things”. Material possessions don’t provide for our safety.

Luke 12:16-19: *Then He (Jesus) spoke a parable to them saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” ’”*

So, Jesus told this story. There was a rich man who had a farm. One year his farm produced such a big crop, that he didn’t know what to do with it. (It didn’t occur to him that he might share what the Lord had blessed him with, with the poor.) He complained that he didn’t know what to do, but he didn’t ask God for guidance. Then after some thought he decided to build bigger and better barns. “Then I’ll be in fat city! I’ll have enough for a long time to come! Live it up! Eat, drink, and be merry!”

Luke 12:20,21: *“But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you: then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”*

Then God said. “What you saved has no eternal value.⁷⁰ You’re going to die tonight!” Then a most serious question: “Who will get what you saved up for yourself?”

People who think they’re rich and safe, they are really poor! They are vulnerable when death strikes!

⁷⁰Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-21: *“Don’t store up treasures on earth! Moths and rust can destroy them, and thieves can break in and steal them. Instead, store up your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy them, and thieves cannot break in and steal them. Your heart will always be where your treasure is.”*

PARABLE OF WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

Introduction

Jesus tells this parable about workers who are hired to work in a vineyard, to demonstrate what the kingdom of heaven is like on this earth. Jesus shows that sometimes the workers, or the apparent recipients of salvation, do not understand the nature of salvation. Sometimes they are greedy or do not honor their commitments. They do not know or they forget just who they are, and worse yet, they forget or do not remember who the Lord is. They are often not thankful.

Salvation is not dependent on our status in the earthly church, but on faith in Jesus Christ. God has provided it, not us. There are no degrees of salvation based on the time we have believed, or any works on our part.

We must love all believers as people whom Christ died for. We must not compare ourselves with other believers, but we must always try to be like Christ.

However, this parable shows that often fallible man criticizes God, and doesn't appreciate what God has done for them.

Workers in the Vineyard

Jesus explained only two parables, "The Sower", found in Matthew 13:3-9 and "The Wheat and the Tares", found in Matthew 13:19-23. Jesus does not explain this parable, so, as expected, there are a number of interpretations. Presented here is the one which seems to be most consistent with other parts of Scripture.⁷¹

This interpretation of the parable enhances our understanding of the subject of salvation.

In this parable Jesus is talking about what the kingdom of heaven is like, not in eternity, but right here on this earth. In these parables about the kingdom of heaven, God is perfect, as he always was, is, and always will be.

But the people of the kingdom on this earth aren't always perfect. Even though we are saved and we have made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, we often let bad attitudes, envy, and criticism creep into us. Why is this? Even though we are saved, we still retain some of our old sin nature. As we mature, that is, grow in Christ, we will lose more and more of that old sin nature. We must remember, as St. Paul says, *we are citizens of heaven*. Philippians 3:20.

Also, there are some unbelievers in the kingdom on this earth. They are really not in the kingdom but are apparently so, because we cannot tell who they are.

Remember in the parable of the Wheat and the Tares the devil has infiltrated God's people. That means that we have unbelievers right here among us in our churches. But the Lord tells us that we are not capable of judging who they are. That is a task reserved for Him on the judgement day. For the present we are to

⁷¹See the third paragraph on pg. 2 of the Introduction to Parables .

assume that all people who profess to be believers in our churches are just that. And leave the rest to God.

For the best understanding of the parable, let us start back in chapter 19.

Matthew 19:27, Peter asks, *“Remember, we have left everything to be your followers! What will we get?”* Jesus answers in Matthew 19:28,29, *“Yes, all of you have become my followers. And so in the future world, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, I promise that you will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. All who have given up homes or brothers and sisters or father and mother or children or land for me will be given a hundred times as much. They will also have eternal life. But many who are now first will be last, and many who are last will be first.”*

This is a good answer for Peter. Just what he wanted to hear. Jesus tells Peter that his efforts for the Lord will most certainly be rewarded. Jesus’ statement that Peter will sit on a throne and help judge the tribes of Israel maybe literal or figurative. The Lord hasn’t revealed this to this author. But we know this will be a position of honor - a high honor. Also, I believe that the next part about being given an hundred times as much, promises those who spread the Gospel, both through their efforts and the efforts of others (such as supporting missionaries), will be rewarded in eternity.

They will also have eternal life. This says that spreading the Gospel is not a good work rewarded with salvation. It is a work for the Lord which merits a special reward in heaven. They also have eternal live for their following of the Lord Jesus.

But what did verse 30 mean? Maybe the parable will help Peter find out, maybe it will help the older son of the Parable of the Prodigal Son find out, and last but not least maybe it will help us find out!

“But many who are now first will be last, and many who are last will be first.” I believe that Jesus is telling Peter that the ideal relationship that Peter and the other disciples have with Him, (a relationship which will exist between them in heaven) may not be always present among His followers here on this earth.

Verse 30 is typical language of our Lord Jesus which may be paraphrased to say that people who are, or who want to be prominent of this earth will lose that status in eternity, but those who are not much, or are not striving for preeminence on this earth will get it in eternity. Now if that means loss of reward in heaven, or consignment to hell, will depend on the heart of the individual in each case. Jesus typically in these parables lets each one examine himself.

Let us read the Parable - Matthew 20:1-16

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

The parable of workers in the vineyard is found in Matthew 20:1-16.

vv 1,2: *‘For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.’*”

vv 3-5: *“And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise.”*

vv 6,7: *“And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.’”*

vv 8,9: *“So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.’ And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius.”*

vv 10-12: *“But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more, and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.’”*

vv 13-15: *“But he answered one of them and said, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?’”*

vv 16: *“So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.”*

Possible Interpretations of the Parable

The setting for this parable is a vineyard where the owner goes out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. Later in the morning he goes out to hire more workers, and again later in the afternoon (vv 1-7). In the evening he paid them. But not only did the owner pay the last-hired first, but he paid them the same as the first ones hired early in the morning (vv 8,9). Then the first-hired workers, expecting more than the others, complained to the owner (vv 10-12). The owner justifies his actions based on his ownership (vv 13-15). Then in vs 16, Jesus reveals a great truth about how things will differ in the kingdom of heaven, compared to on this earth.

Starting with the simplest interpretations, the man who hires the workers is the Lord God in heaven. And this parable declares that He is the Overseer. He rules supreme. He decides the “pay scale”. The workers do not. Who are the workers?

They are us, the believers. Here is a lesson for us. The Lord sets the rules, we don't (vv 13-15). We should be glad to follow His rules.

We must not forget who we are and who the Lord is. We must be eternally grateful to the Lord for having provided salvation for us in eternity. We had nothing to do with that. And we must remember who we are, people drowning in our own sin, to whom the Lord has extended the only one possible lifeline, belief in the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Another important facet is that the man (the Lord) finds the workers (vv 1-7), the workers didn't seek the Lord. Our sinful nature precludes us from finding the Lord by ourselves. Luther's Small Catechism states, "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him". Not that we shouldn't state that we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. That is our witness. But we must remember who led us to make this confession and who opened our minds.⁷² And once we acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and Savior, God gives us His Holy Spirit to keep us in His fold, and guide our daily living.

Now what does a day's pay represent?⁷³ (vs 1) A simple interpretation is salvation or eternal life. The Lord paid them all the same! One might say there is no seniority system in heaven. But the lesson here, I believe, is that the Lord deals separately with each of us. He deals with each of us on a one-to-one basis. He does not set different criteria for each of us for our entrance to eternal life. However, He deals with each of us where we are and in the different circumstances in which we live. This parable rules out works salvation, that is, equating the length of service with works.⁷⁴ It is only important that we go when called, that is, equating going into the vineyard when the Lord calls, with belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But what about the complaint of the first-hired workers that the last-hired workers got the same pay. And they didn't even work in the hot sun! The Lord pointed out two important facts. First, an agreement is an agreement. And He broke no promises.

This is a lesson for us. Have we ever promised something, and then found that the cost was too great, or it was inconvenient to live up to our commitment. And we should have asked for better terms! But we must be careful to honor our promise. These workers were not. They complained.

But second, and most important, the Lord is sovereign. He has a right to set the rules. He is the Creator. St. Paul says in Romans 9:20, "*But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it,*

⁷²See Addendum 2, pg. 60.

⁷³The KJV uses penny. The NKJV, more exactly, uses denarius (Greek), a day's pay at that time.

⁷⁴To rule out the penny, or denarius, representing rewards in heaven, see Addendum 1, pg. 58.

‘Why have you made me like this?’ ’

There is an interesting parallel to an incident in another parable which Jesus spoke. It is the parable of The Rich Fool, found in Luke 12:13-21 (pg. 45). Here Jesus told this parable because he sensed that the brother who came to Him for redress had a greedy heart, when he pleaded with Jesus in verse 13, *“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”* Jesus did not say it was wrong to want your inheritance, only make sure that you are not driven by greed. Now in this parable about The Workers in the Vineyard, the early-hired workers were undoubtedly driven by greed, because they didn’t complain until they saw what the last-hired workers were paid! Comparison is a poor basis for our belief system!

Let us look at the Lord’s statement at the end of verse 15: *“Or is your eye evil because I am good?”* Here is an example of how true to life the Lord Jesus’ statements are. Aren’t we often guilty of this? If someone receives something we don’t think he or she deserves, we resent it. Even if it is none of our business. When we read about it here, we probably think it is ridiculous that the workers who worked so much longer were jealous. We think that they should be grateful. But then, when it concerns us, we see it differently.

Are we ever ungrateful to the Lord? I remember when I was recovering from a heart-valve transplant. I was making progress. The Lord was healing me. But someone else would tell me what a super recovery they had from the same type of surgery. Then I started to be depressed. Instead of being grateful to the Lord, I was engaging in “comparison”. Let us get the disease of “comparison” out of our minds!

My own confession is that the Lord chose me to be His own from eternity past.⁷⁵ But I wasn’t smart enough to know it! In fact, sometimes after my confirmation in a denominational church, I got to thinking that maybe I had a little to do with it. I sometimes thought that I didn’t need salvation as much as the other guy because I wasn’t as bad as he was! Praise the Lord that He has straightened me out. I now know the truth, that He is solely responsible and deserves all the credit for making me see the light. The light is that Jesus Christ paid the price for my sins, and he is responsible for my entrance to eternal life.

Discussion of Verse 16

For the believer, thinking and behaving as a possessor of eternal life should start right here on this earth. St. Paul says in Philippians 3:20 that *“...our citizenship is in heaven”*. So we can extend the application of this parable to our actions right here on this earth, particularly in the church.

Some folks think that there is an order of superiority in the church, with some people better than others because of the number of people they bring in or the

⁷⁵See Ephesians 1:3-6, quoted in Addendum 2, pg. 60.

teaching they do (who is to judge this?), or the elders are better than deacons, or pastors better than elders, or archbishops better than bishops. And some people think they are better than others in the Lord's sight for any number of reasons. But the Lord says there is one way to salvation and only one (they were each paid the same). Jesus said, in John 14:6, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*

Now it may seem far-fetched to think that some people let their position in the church "go to their heads." But is it? Do we ever do it? Certainly! Let us look at a Scripture - Matthew 20:20,21 - where the mother of the sons of Zebedee, James and John, wanted a superior position in heaven for her two sons. Already people were thinking of heaven in terms of earthly position. But look at what Jesus says in Matthew 20:25-27.

Matthew 20:25-27:

... "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to become first among you, let him be your slave - ."

Here is God's logic, the opposite of man's logic. If you want God's approval, it's not by earning it through self-serving (or self-glorification) good works, but by serving others. See also Luke 14:8-11, where a guest at a feast puts himself in the best seat at the table, but is asked to take the lowest place, with much embarrassment to himself.

There is a real powerful message in vs. 16. It is possibly one of the most powerful messages in the parable! *"So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen."*

Although in certain applications this is a literal, true statement, it can also be looked at as a figure of speech applicable to many of the Lord's other teachings. It says that God's thinking is different than man's thinking, or God's ways are different from man's ways. Or, as stated in a previous paragraph, "Here is God's logic, the opposite of man's logic".

For the literal message, *"For many are called, but few chosen."* tells us that we are dealing with eternity, because Christ's mission was to show the people the way to eternal life with God. *"So the last will be first, and the first last."* can be taken to mean that people's position will be switched in eternity. Those who want pre-eminence on this earth will lose it in heaven, but those who do not value earthly position will have a great position with Christ in eternity.

Here is a warning: It is not a good deal to go for pre-eminence on this earth, with loss in eternity. This statement of Jesus should caution us to think, not about what would be beneficial to us in the here and now, but what has eternal value. Jesus said in Matthew 6:1-18, that if you give, pray or fast for the acclaim of men, you

already have your reward here, but not in heaven. To be truly effective, these things should be done for the glory of the Lord. So we should go about the Lord's business quietly with the aim of pleasing the Lord, and not obtaining the praise of men. If the Lord wants our efforts to be made known, he can do it. We should not. Then when we reach eternity with the Lord, He will say, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*"⁷⁶.

Let us look at some figurative applications in the 16th verse.

In 1 Corinthians 3:18,19 it says, "...*If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God....*" The mind can be cluttered up with the wisdom of this world and God's wisdom can be pushed out. A possible message here is that if we only concentrate on the world's wisdom, and not on God's word, we will be foolish in spiritual matters. We have to push out of our minds the world's wisdom, before we can become truly wise in the things of God.

In Matthew 11:25 it says, ... "*Jesus answered and said, "I thank you, Father; Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes."* This is a similar thought to that of the preceding paragraph. When we try to be wise and different from ordinary people, we're in for trouble. We should say to God: "Lord, you are the greatest, I am just an ordinary person"⁷⁷. Then the Lord will start to show us true wisdom.

In John 9:39 Jesus says, ... "*For judgment I have come into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.*" This is a third example of how to receive God's wisdom. It is to admit to God that we are spiritually blind. It is to admit we need help.⁷⁸

These are figurative examples of the literal statement, "*So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.*"

These verses all have to do with mindset. If we decide to be "first" on this earth, either in position, or intelligence, or education, and go about it the world's way, we will suffer loss in God's kingdom. We must subject our will and desires to God. Then we will be truly "first" in eternity, now and forever.

Addendum 1- A Day's Pay, Salvation, Works and Rewards

Some might argue that the day's pay represented the rewards that are promised elsewhere in the Scriptures, and that therefore the earlier-hired workers were entitled to more pay, and were justified in their complaint about the equal pay. In this interpretation the longer time of labor would represent more rewards. I do not agree with this interpretation. I believe the worker's didn't understand the nature

⁷⁶Matthew 25:21

⁷⁷See Matthew 5:5: "*God blesses those people who are humble.*"

⁷⁸See Matthew 5:3 "*Blessed are the poor in spirit.*"

of salvation and thought they should be compensated for good works, the longer time of labor representing more good works. But to make our point we will examine what the Scriptures say about rewards.

The Scriptures talk about a number of types of service for which rewards will be given in heaven.⁷⁹ We will list some of these with Scriptural references.

- Helping to spread the Gospel - Matthew 19:29,30
- Helping other believers - Mark 9:41
- Helping unbelievers - Luke 6:35,36
- Helping the poor or needy - Luke 14:12-14
- Being Obedient - Matthew 5:19
- Being Humble - Matthew 18:3-5
- Persevering - 2 John 6-9
- Enduring tribulation - Matthew 5:11,12

Our Lord Jesus talks about storing up treasures in heaven in Matthew 6:19-21. Aren't the above rewards treasures in heaven? Jesus says these treasures are the only things that will last. Jesus also says that when we give, pray or fast, that these must not be done to gain the acclaim of men. If they are done for the acclaim of men, that will be our reward, and there will be no reward in heaven for these things.

On the basis of the above, let us define a reward as a treasure in heaven. This reward is gained by doing things God has commanded us to do and which we do to please Him. Actually, there is a paradox here. If we do something with the sole motive of gaining a reward, we will lose it. If we forget about the reward, and do it because we want to please the Lord, we gain a reward.⁸⁰

Now for the application to the workers in the vineyard. I believe that the earlier-hired workers did not understand the true nature of salvation, and that they were thinking in terms of earthly good works. The "I worked longer, harder and better syndrome" is indicative of this. I don't believe they thought they were working for rewards, because if they were truly earning rewards, they would not have thought about it, and certainly they would not have confronted their Overseer with a complaint. They would have done the longer time willingly, being so very thankful for their salvation.

Do we ever fall into this trap of feeling under-compensated. Certainly we do.

⁷⁹I believe that the Lord, through his Holy Spirit, sometimes enables us to receive partial payment of these rewards here on this earth, through spiritual satisfaction. For instance, the joy of seeing the Gospel spread or the poor being fed. However, I will not be adamant about this point.

⁸⁰I do not wish to imply that a reward is completely negated by thinking about the reward as we do what the Lord wishes us to do. We still have some of the old sin nature in each of us. But I believe (this is stated as a personal belief, not a doctrine) that as we mature in the Lord (become more like Christ) we think more of what the Lord wants, and less about the reward.

Otherwise why would the Lord Jesus say in Matthew 5:45: “*He (your Father in heaven) makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*” Didn’t Jesus say this so we would understand why a fellow believer seems to get more in this life than we do; and why, even worse, that the evil people get richer in earthly goods than we do! Again, we wish to emphasize the sovereignty of God and the evil of the disease of “comparison”.⁸¹

⁸¹The subjects of “comparison” and “complaining” are dealt with extensively in the Parable of Children at Play on pp. 101-104.

Addendum 2 - Ephesians 1:3-6

Ephesians 1:3-6: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ in Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”*

PARABLE ABOUT TWO DEBTORS or LOVING JESUS

This parable, found in Luke 7:36-50, is about the question of how much do we love and appreciate Jesus. Appreciation is a part of love and like love is not just an idle word, but demands a response on our part.

The parable (vv 41-43) is used by Jesus to teach an important truth. People who are keenly aware of their sin and that they need salvation will love and appreciate Jesus much more than those who feel they are not as sinful as others, or who are trusting in themselves.

In vs. 50 Jesus says that the woman's salvation is a result of her faith. We can only assume that Simon lacks this faith. Only when we understand our sinfulness and acknowledge our inability to save ourselves, can we appreciate Jesus and have that saving faith.

Luke 7:36-50:

vv 36: Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat.

Jesus enters the house of Simon, a Pharisee. Simon invited Jesus in, so he must have had some good feelings about Jesus, either feelings of friendship or curiosity. But Simon didn't like or respect Jesus enough to give him the traditional honors given to a well-liked guest. These honors were kissing the guest, anointing his head with oil and washing his feet. This was left to a sinful woman⁸².

vv 37,38: And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.

She gave Jesus more than traditional honors by washing his feet with her tears and drying his feet with her hair⁸³, and then putting perfume on them. Then she kissed his feet. Her tears showed she was conscious of her sin, and the washing of Jesus' feet and pouring perfume on them showed that she knew who Jesus was!

Simon had invited Jesus in, but by not doing Jesus the honors, snubbed him. Then this lowly woman stepped in and did the honors. That must have made Simon look bad.

vv 39-40: Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching him; for she is a sinner." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you" So he said, "Teacher, say it."

⁸²Sinful woman - undoubtedly a woman who made light of traditional marriage arrangements.

⁸³In that culture for a woman to reveal her hair to a stranger was a gesture of honor.

Contrast the actions of this sinful woman with the thoughts of Simon the Pharisee. Jesus could read Simon's thoughts and could tell what Simon's heart condition was. Simon thought that Jesus should have known that this woman was a sinner and that Jesus should not let this woman touch him. The idea⁸⁴ of Simon was that the holy don't mingle with sinners⁸⁵. Therefore Jesus shouldn't let the woman associate with him, much less touch him. Obviously, Simon thought of himself as one of the holy. Do we ever think of ourselves as one of the holy?⁸⁶

In vs. 39, Simon says that the woman is a sinner, showing that he thinks he has achieved a state of sinlessness, of at least that he is much better than she is. Simon shows also that he believes neither God nor prophets have love for sinners by his comment that Jesus should know that she is a sinner, implying that Jesus should not associate with her.

I believe Simon thinks he has achieved holiness through obeying the laws of the Pharisees, and should not mingle with sinners. No wonder Israel couldn't convert her neighbors.

vv 41-43: (the parable)

“There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him more?”

Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more.” And He said to him, “You have rightly judged.”

But now Jesus tells a parable which should make Simon, and us, think about sin. A money lender forgives the debts of two men who owe him money. One man owed him 500 denarii and the other man owed the moneylender 50 denarii. The moneylender forgave them both their debts. Jesus asks who likes or loves the moneylender most. Simon grudgingly admits it will be the man who owes most.

We know that we are only righteous through the blood of Jesus Christ. but do we ever feel that we are getting just a little bit righteous due to being good or doing good works? I know that in my early days in the Christian walk, I fell for this notion. Probably because I was born and raised in the visible church, I thought I didn't need salvation as much as unbelievers. I thought I only owed the 50 denarii, or only 5! How wrong I was. Praise God that He changed my thinking.

We must always keep in mind **Jesus work on the cross**, not morality or relative “righteousness“. Simon was undoubtedly moral, but it only led to a feeling of superiority on his part. Simon's heart appears to be empty.⁸⁷

84These were also the ideas of the “religious authorities” of the day.

85The holy must mingle with sinners, or else how could we accomplish the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). It is Holiness and sin that do not mingle!

86See Addendum, pg. 65.

87There is a connection here with the Parable of the Seven Evil Spirits (pg. 95-100).

vv 44-46: *Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet from the time I came in. You did not anoint my head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil.”*

Jesus uses this parable because it is a real-life situation, and the people in it react just as real-life people would react. Jesus will get the point about love and appreciation across to Simon. Simon probably thought before he heard the parable that he was pretty good and would be more favored than the woman in the eyes of God. Simon sinned little (owed little) and the woman sinned a lot (owed a lot). But that was wrong thinking. Just because the woman’s sins were more visible than Simon’s (her sins were sins of action and Simon’s were sins of thought), didn’t make her any worse. They were both lost sinners. The woman received Jesus’ approval, not because of her sins, but because she was acutely aware of that sin.

How much do we think we owe? Do we ever think we owe less than some one else? Why should we think this way? Doesn’t this make us less appreciative of Jesus’ work on the cross, and God’s grace?

Simon has incriminated himself, because he has not honored Jesus and the sinful woman has. This incident reminds us of the statement of Jesus, *“So the last will be first, and the first last.”* (Matthew 20:16) Simon thought that the more righteous (by his standards) would be first and the less righteous (by his standards) would be last.

vv 47-50:

“Therefore, I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she has loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little. The he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” Then He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you, go in peace.”

In vs. 50 Jesus clarifies the picture for us. It is **faith** that saves us, not how “good” we are. When we understand that works are not the saving agent, and just how sinful we are, then we can have saving faith. The world’s thinking is try a little harder and be better. If we put our faith in works, we do not understand just how sick and lost we are, and cannot appreciate or love Jesus as much as we should. Simon is an example of this.

Simon could well be a picture of some long-time believers who have become tradition-bound, or people who have lost their first enthusiasm. In Revelation 2:4 Jesus says, in speaking to the church at Ephesus, *“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have lost your first love.”* Their first love and appreciation was for

the Lord Jesus Christ.

The not so well-thought of woman has a parallel today. They are people from the bottom end of society or wayward people who have reached out for the message of Jesus. They have not made a long-term study of Jesus and His teachings, but have been taken over by the urgency of their need for a new life, with eternal values. They have been convicted by the Holy Spirit that Jesus is the only way, and they want to tell others about it.

Today, when we don't value Jesus atoning work on the cross, such as being careless about persistent sin, or not paying attention to Jesus' words, we call it "cheap grace". Simon was an example of that. But the woman valued Jesus.

Notice that Jesus doesn't insult Simon, he just tries to get him to think about the subject of gratitude to God. Confrontation doesn't always win the point.

We don't know if Simon understood and received the lesson of the parable. Just as in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, we don't know if the older son came back into the father's house.

When Jesus tells the woman that her sins are forgiven, the crowd of onlookers to this great event are somewhat shocked. They understand that by giving the woman forgiveness of sins, Jesus is saying that he is God or coequal with God.

Related Scriptures

There are two related Scriptures that are worthy of note here. The first is found in Matthew 5:3, the first verse in the Sermon on the Mount. The other Scripture is found in John 3:30.

Matthew 5:3: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, "*

The CEV⁸⁸ has: *"God blesses those people who depend only on him."*

When we depend only on God we are truly poor in spirit. When we depend on ourselves we are full of pride and are not poor in spirit. The Pharisee's actions in this parable do not show that complete dependence on God. He thought he owed little. On the other hand, the woman, by her abject actions in attending to Jesus, showed whom she depended on. She knew she had no worthiness of her own in the sight of God. By her actions in worshipping Jesus she elevated herself, and Simon's neglect of Jesus lowered himself.

John 3:30: *"He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease."* When people noted to John the Baptist that he was losing his following to Jesus, he made this famous statement. John understood his place in following Jesus. If only we remember that Jesus should become more and more important in our lives, and we should put less and less emphasis on self, we will become better witnesses for the Lord Jesus.

Addendum - My Testimony (Simon and me)

88CEV - Contemporary English Version, by the American Bible Society.

We may get to thinking that we sin less than others, maybe because we were “born” into the church, or maybe we’ve “straightened up” since we got “religion”, that is, accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Beware, lest we become smug and devalue God’s forgiveness and the salvation God provided for us. Salvation is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, not some measurement of sin.

My own personal testimony is that I was born into a church-going family, baptized and confirmed in a denominational church. During confirmation lessons, I studied the Ten Commandments. There I was convinced I shouldn’t lie, cheat, or steal. Not that this isn’t good. But I got to thinking that I didn’t need salvation as much as the next person. I had become like Simon in this parable. I had devalued the salvation that Jesus provided through his agony and death on the cross.

But salvation isn’t relative. I had lost sight of my sinfulness. Maybe I was getting better in action, but my mind was very sinful. And I lost sight of the fact that faith in Jesus is the basis of my salvation.

When we think sin, or lack of it, is a measure of our salvation, we become like Simon the Pharisee and cease to understand or value Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins, and our faith suffers.

Now I understand that I am just as sinful as anyone else, and the only hope of salvation for me is faith in Jesus Christ and that he has died for my sins. Praise the Lord!

A WOMAN'S FAITH - Matthew 15:21-28

This parable is about seeking after God through love and persistence, demonstrating that we have faith in our God.

Matthew 15:21-28: *Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold a woman of Canaan came from that region, and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, son of David. My daughter is severely demon possessed." But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." But He answered and said, "I was not sent, except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me." But he answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table". Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.*

This encounter of Jesus with a Canaanite woman teaches us a lot about faith. Here is a woman who was looked on with disdain by the Jews of that day because she didn't have the "true" religion like they did. But what is true religion? She called him Lord, and Son of David. This shows us that true religion isn't form or ritual or whose family we were born into, but the profession of the heart.

Why did Jesus say to her, "*I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel!*" and apparently try to get rid of her. It is apparent, looking at the whole story, that Jesus was testing her. But she didn't give up. *Then she came and worshipped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"* Then Jesus tested her further by saying, "*It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.*" It is as if Jesus is saying that he can't give her, or her daughter, of his powers to heal. This power, the food, is reserved for the people of Israel.

After twice being rebuffed by Jesus, one may have thought that the woman would have given up. But she came right back with a most amazing answer, "*Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table.*" This answer shows that she understands that Jesus has unlimited power, that just one little crumb, just like the mustard seed, can move mountains. She couldn't have just pulled that answer out of thin air at a moments notice. She really believed!

This woman's faith is a faith to be envied. She was a Canaanite, a person disdained by the Jews, going to a Jew for healing for her daughter. And she recognized who Jesus was. And she persisted even when Jesus tested her. Many of the Jews of that day, who thought they were born into the family of God's people, didn't even recognize Jesus.

We can learn much from this. We can learn to persist⁸⁹ even when it appears that God isn't hearing us. We must have confidence (faith) that God hears us and has the power to solve our problems. I pray that God will give me faith to move mountains.

Of interest also, is the woman's attitude. She knew who Jesus was, the Lord. But she also knew who she was, completely unworthy. When Jesus put her on a level with dogs, feeding on crumbs, she didn't argue with that. She could have made the argument that she was better than some of the children at the table, that is, Jews, Jesus' own people. She could have said that her faith was better than that of Jesus' people, people who rejected him. But she was thinking only about her relationship with her Lord. She knew what was important. When we deal with the Lord, we have to remember who He is, who we are, and that we are not to compare ourselves with others. If we compare ourselves with others, it is like assuming to ourselves a measure of self-worth.

⁸⁹ In Luke 18:1-8 Jesus tells a parable about a widow pleading with a judge for justice. This story is worthy of study. It emphasizes persistence, just as in this story of the Canaanite woman.

PARABLE OF THE DISHONEST STEWARD (MANAGER)

Introduction

This parable compares the dedication of unbelievers to their goals and the dedication of believers to theirs. Sometimes believers come off second best.

This brilliant parable of Jesus is found in Luke 16:1-13. It touches on a number of truths about:

- preparing for eternity
- the people of this world looking out for themselves and following their belief systems better than followers of Christ.
- believers practicing being good managers of what they have on this earth as training for possessing real riches in heaven.

Let us look at the parable to see it explained in Jesus' own words.

The Parable

Luke 16:1-13:

vv 1,2: *He (Jesus) also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'"*

A dishonest manager is fired by his boss. He is fired for waste and mismanagement. A situation we have seen over and over again in our contemporary society. Here the dishonest steward is representative of an unbeliever.

Are we ever guilty of waste and mismanagement of God's resources? God gave us everything we have. Not only are we saved by God's grace, but God's grace provides for us everyday! Therefore, the answer should be, "No". But, often we are carnal, letting the flesh, rather than Jesus, rule us. We do a sloppy job, not looking out for the best interests of our employer or those set over us. We may not do this deliberately, but peer pressure and the cares of the day may cause us to forget just who we are. Often, we lose our witness, or worse yet, are mistaken for unbelievers. Do we want this to happen to us?

vv 3,4: *"Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig. I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their homes.'"*

The manager realizes that he has a problem. How will he survive? He hasn't done physical labor for so long, he would probably break his back if he tried. And he was too proud to beg. Wouldn't this be true for a lot of us today? But he was smart. He would devise a plan so that others would feel obligated to help him.

Are we always that smart? Aren't we often reluctant to ask for help? We're too proud to stoop so low. Rather than turn to the Lord, we want to be known as people who can "stand on their own two feet"!

vv 5-7: *"So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master.' And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe.' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'"*

The former manager was clever. He was decisive. He acted quickly. He took care of himself with his former master's resources. Was this honest? No! But in the circles in which he moved, it was o.k. He was playing by the world's rules. And once he decided on a course of action, he did it quickly. Do we ever play by the world's rules? Are we always decisive for Christ?

vs 8: *"So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light."*

Unfortunately, some people look at this parable and wonder how the master could praise this dishonest manager. But the master is praising the dishonest manager not for his deceit, but for his cleverness in taking care of himself. Don't we often admire people, such as artists or athletes, for certain abilities they possess. This doesn't mean that we necessarily endorse their lifestyle.

On the other hand, the master is bemoaning the fact that his servants (followers) aren't as clever or decisive for themselves as the dishonest manager. Don't we see it in this world, that often unbelievers advance their cause, worshipping money or materialism, better than believers advance their cause, working for the Lord?⁹⁰ Don't we as believers often neglect our best interests, passing up opportunities to store up treasures in heaven?

vs 9: *"And I say to you, make friends to yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home."*

What is wicked wealth? The text doesn't say "use wealth wickedly"! Wicked wealth is the money and goods of this world, often called mammon or materialism.

We are here on this earth. We earn money and acquire wealth. We must use it properly. We don't dissociate ourselves from it. But we don't use it as the people of this world do. We must control wealth and not let it control us.

We should use wealth to make friends for ourselves, friends that can welcome us into an eternal home. Who are these friends? First and foremost is the Lord in heaven. We are to spread his Gospel, we are to bring the salvation message to others. In summary, we are to do things pleasing to the Lord (fulfilling the Great

⁹⁰Jesus said to store up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21), and working for the Lord is one way to store up treasures in heaven.

Commission - Matthew 28:18-20).

Also, we are to help others (Matthew 10:40-42). These people will be our friends in heaven, because they will be able to attest to the fact that we helped them, and that is pleasing to the Lord.

vv 10-12: *“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man’s, who will give you what is your own?”*

Here our Lord Jesus states an important truth. It isn’t how big the task we have to do, or it isn’t how much money we have to handle. It’s our character that counts. If we can handle the small jobs, if we can wisely handle small amounts of money, we can be trusted with greater things. If we cheat in small things, won’t we cheat in important things?

Some people think that it’s o.k. to “fudge” on small things because they think no one will notice. But Jesus doesn’t think so. Eventually small things will become large things, and character will suffer.

In the work-a-day world, we are tested with small things, before we are assigned greater jobs. Even the world recognizes this in job training programs. It is job progression with maturity.

We can look at our life here on earth as job training for heaven. After all, we are citizens of heaven, aren’t we? (Philippians 3:20)⁹¹ We must be diligent with the assets the Lord gives us, to show that we can be trusted with the Lord’s goods. We will be well rewarded in heaven. We must perform our tasks diligently, even if these appear small. Because, someday (eternity) we will be entrusted with much more. Let us just be good and faithful servants!

vs 13: *“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”*

To properly understand this passage, we must understand the force of the word “servant”. The meaning of “servant” is best explained by Scripture itself in Luke 17:7-10. The servant is in total subjection to his master⁹². The master comes first and the servant comes last. He is not like some servants today who are free to “split” time between two or more employers.

God wants our loyalty, our love, and our dependence on Him. God does not wish to share these things with any other god, such as mammon. Isn’t this what

91Citizens of heaven! Shouldn’t believers practice living here on earth as they expect to live in heaven - in complete harmony with God and their neighbors?

92Because of the “servant” being in total subjection to the master, some versions, such as the CEV, use the term “slave“. See the addendum “Slave or Servant”, pg. 72

God meant when He said in Exodus 20:3: ***“You shall have no other gods before Me.”***

Jesus says if you think you can split loyalties, you are wrong. You can't do it! If you try, it's like sitting on a very narrow fence. Sooner or later you'll fall off on one side or the other. And the chances are it will be on the wrong side! Can we as believers afford to try to serve both God and the god of materialism? Jesus says, “No”. That's why we shouldn't try.

Summary

This parable of our Lord Jesus describes two cultures, the culture of the sons of this world and the culture of the sons of light. The sons of this world are often more diligent in pursuing their self-interests like wealth and security, than the children of light in pursuing Christ's calling.

Our Lord Jesus didn't think that the children of light use their assets wisely in the work of the Lord. And He is so right! Often, we are side-tracked and pursue the very same things that unbelievers do, such as wealth and recognition. And we often use our assets for the pleasures and toys of this world, instead of spreading the Gospel and helping others.

Unfortunately, the world looks at Christians and often sees them worshipping at the same throne that unbelievers do, that of the God of mammon, and we lose our witness. Also, according to the parable we will lose the trust of our Lord. We will not have passed the test of properly handling the assets God gave us on this earth, and we will lose treasures in heaven. We must pray that this does not happen to us!

Just so Christians do not try to worship at the throne of the god of materialism, Jesus issues a strong warning about trying. It can lead down the “slippery slope” to destruction.

Addendum 1 - Slave or Servant - Matthew 6:24

“No one can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other: or else he will be loyal to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (NKJV - New King James Version)

“You cannot be the slave of two masters! You will like one more than the other or be more loyal to one than the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (CEV- Contemporary English Version)

The Greek words for slave and serve are all derived from *doulos*. *Doulos* is most often translated servant, but sometimes slave. To find out the real meaning, Jesus explains what a servant was in those days. Jesus explains the servant-master relationship.

Luke 17:7-10; Jesus says: *“And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat’? But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink’? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’”*

The servant of that day was the property of his master and under the master’s control. The master came first, the servant last. The servant was like a slave. Which is a better term? It depends on the readers perception of servant or slave. Possibly total voluntary allegiance would be a good alternative. The important thing is to place ourselves under the ownership of the Lord, and that we are obedient to His commands.⁹³

The important truth is, *“You cannot serve God and mammon”*. We can’t be under the control of God, and under the control of the god of materialism.

⁹³Jesus says in Matthew 7:21: *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”*

Addendum 2 - Servants of the Lord

Now that we are servants (or slaves) of the Lord, how do we justify statements such as “free⁹⁴ in Christ”? Does this mean that we are free to do as we please, or do our own thing! No! All Scriptural evidence shows that only when we are servants of the Lord are we free from sin. We are free from sin because we are subject to the Lord. Otherwise, we are servants of sin.

In John 8:31-34 Jesus says, *“If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”* They answered Him, *“We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, we will be made free?”* Jesus answered them *“Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave to sin.”*

Also, in Romans 6:16-23, St. Paul explains, *“Don’t you know that you are slaves of anyone you obey? You can be slaves of sin and die, or you can be obedient slaves of God and be acceptable to Him. You used to be slaves of sin. But I thank God that with all your heart you obeyed the teaching you received from me. Now you are set free from sin and are slaves who please God. I am using these everyday examples, because in some ways you are still weak. You used to let the different parts of your body be slaves of your own evil thoughts, but now you must make every part of your body serve God, so that you will belong completely to Him. When you were slaves to sin, you didn’t have to please God. But what good did you receive from the things you did? All you have to show for them is your shame, and they lead to death. Now you have been set free from sin and you are God’s slaves. This will make you holy and lead to eternal life. Sin pays off with death, but God’s gift is eternal life given by Jesus Christ our Lord. (CEV)⁹⁵*

Also, in 1 Corinthians 7:22 St. Paul writes: *When the Lord chooses slaves, they become His free people. And when He chooses free people, they become slaves of Christ. (CEV)* And, in 1 Peter 2:16 it says: *You are free, but still you are God’s servants, and you must not use your freedom as an excuse for doing wrong. (CEV)*

In summary, it seems to me that the modern Christian church too often emphasizes the word “freedom”. Words like commitment or surrender are not used as often. Jesus surrendered his will to that of the Father, saying *“„,not My will, but Yours, be done.”⁹⁶*

St. Paul was not ashamed to be called a servant of Jesus Christ, opening his letters to the Romans and the Philippians, by calling himself a servant of Christ Jesus. And so did James.⁹⁷

I pray that the Lord will help me more and more to surrender myself to His will

94To be meaningful, it must say free from what or from whom.

95CEV - Contemporary English Version, from the American Bible Society.

96Luke 22:42

97James 1:1

and be His obedient servant.

Addendum 3 - Either/Or, not Both

Jesus makes definite statements, either we serve Him or mammon, not both. There are at least three other similar “either/or” teachings.

Jesus said, in Matthew 7:13,14: *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way to destruction, and there are many that go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”*

Jesus states that there are only two roads to eternity, either the narrow road to life, or the wide road to destruction. For salvation all roads do not “lead to Rome”.

In John 14:6 Jesus says: *“I am the way, the truth, and the life! No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*

Just as Adam and Eve went their own way and were ejected from the garden of Eden, we can not enter heaven, unless we go through Jesus. Jesus is the only way.

Jesus said in Matthew 12:30: *“He who is not with Me, is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.”*

There is no middle ground.

We are all slaves of someone or something. I believe that we may draw this conclusion from examining this parable and the whole of Scripture. Let us be servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we are not, we are slaves of sin (John 8:34).

PARABLE OF THE COST OF BUILDING A TOWER or THE COST OF COMMITMENT TO JESUS

Introduction

This is a parable about the Cost of Commitment to Jesus. The process of commitment to Jesus takes thought and planning.

The elements used to demonstrate the spiritual truth in this discussion are building a tower and going to war. Many authors think that Jesus was unhappy because many people of his time deserted Him when the going got “tough”. If Jesus was unhappy or just noticed that some people were deserting Him, is not stated. But, I believe Jesus had a message about commitment for everyone of every age who reads it. We will try to find out what the lesson is that our Lord Jesus has for us.

The Parable of the Tower

The Parable of the Tower is found in Luke 14:26-33. Jesus is speaking.

Vv 26-27: *“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”*

Vv 28-30: *“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it - lest after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’”*

Vv 31-32: *“Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.”*

Vs 33: *“So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”*

Introduction to the Interpretation of the Parable

In this parable, Jesus treats of the question of commitment. One might even title it the Parable of Priorities. In structure this parable is similar to some other parables. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus has just been asked the question: Who is my neighbor? And the parable answers that question. In the Parable of the Rich Fool, the question of greed comes up. Jesus demonstrates the folly of greed by means of the parable.

This parable is put in the middle of a discussion of following Jesus, or being His disciple. The discussion begins in vv 26,27 and ends in vs 33. The parable is

interjected between vv 26,27 and 33, in order to demonstrate from everyday life how we calculate what it costs to get a job done. The parable is particularly instructive since often, but not always, we count the cost in practical, everyday matters, but fail to do so in spiritual matters. This will be demonstrated later with an example from the life of Peter.

The Message of Luke 14:26,27 and 33

In vv 26,27 Jesus talks about hating our family members, and our own life also. What does Jesus mean by this? Does Jesus really want us to hate, after telling us to love our enemies? No! This is a figure of speech. It was a common Hebrew expression of the time, meant to emphasize the comparison or difference of our love for Him with our love for our families and others.

The words of Jesus in vv. 26,27 are repeated in Matthew 10:37,38, in a slightly different way, but in essence the same. In Matthew 10:37,38 it says, *“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of Me.”*

The CEV⁹⁸ puts Luke 14:26,27 in this way, *“You cannot be My disciple, unless you love Me more than you love your father and mother, your wife and children, and your brothers and sisters. You cannot come with Me unless you love Me more than you love your own life.”* The CEV has paraphrased the Hebrew figure of speech just as Matthew put it in literal terms, not figurative.

The “hate” expression of Luke 14:26,27 means that we must love Jesus so much compared to our families that our love for Jesus so overshadows our love for our families that we equate the love for our families with “hate”, to emphasize the difference.

This is a question of priorities, or commitment. There is nothing wrong with loving family members, friends, or enemies. But if this pushes Jesus into second place, it is denying our Creator and Savior His rightful place in our lives. Have we ever put Jesus in second place? Undoubtedly we have! We may not think we have, but our old sinful nature sometimes takes over. This parable reminds us to beware of putting Jesus in second place.

What does “second place” mean? Does it mean that Jesus is first, but we have some things in a close second place. No! Jesus must be totally in first place, and second place, and third place, etc. Now this leads to a paradox. One may ask the question, “Is there no place for loving my spouse, my children, my father or my mother?” Amazingly enough, we can only truly love our spouse, parents, friends or enemies, we can only love them perfectly if we love Jesus and put Him first in our lives. We can only love these people perfectly if we can see them through

98CEV - The American Bible Society’s “Contemporary English Version”

God's eyes. We can only love our family members, friends and enemies if we view them as someone for whom Jesus was willing to die!

Jesus summarizes this thought of priorities in vs. 33, using the word, "...forsake..." Here I believe a good translation of the thought is that we put the old behind us and we move forward following Jesus. Just as stated before, Jesus is first, second, and third. It is He whom we follow.

It is impossible for the world to understand this loving others with the love of God. In fact, believers could not understand this were it not for the Holy Spirit leading them. The world does not understand this, so they try to deride Jesus by saying Jesus requires us to literally hate others. But we must still love them, because God has commanded us to.

Before we leave the discussion of Luke 14:26,27, let us note that Matthew has equivalent verses in Matthew 10:37,38. But in Matthew 10:39 is added that Jesus says, "*He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.*"

This type of expression occurs quite often in the Scriptures. It is discussed at length in the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, Matthew 20:1-16, where it is recorded in vs 16 that Jesus said, "*So the last will be first, and the first last.*" To reword it: The last on this earth will be the first in eternity, and the first on this earth will be last in eternity. Just so Matthew 10:39 is interpreted in this way. He who lives on this earth placing himself ahead of the Lord, will lose his life in eternity. But he who puts Jesus first (*loses his life for My sake*) here on this earth, will find his life with Jesus in eternity.⁹⁹

Discussion of the Parable

In vv. 28-30, Jesus discusses building a tower. If this is not properly planned, a person might run out of funds before he is finished. Then people will mock him, or laugh at him. Today one might go bankrupt, in addition to people making fun of him or her. In another modern example, carrying too much debt on a credit card could be a tremendous burden. The examples could go on-and-on. Certainly, we plan in order to avoid these things.

In vv. 31,32 another example is given by Jesus. It is that of a king who has to defend himself against an army twice the size of his. Maybe the king should plan in order to avoid a defeat. Maybe he should negotiate.

Jesus makes it clear, with His perfect logic, that in crucial situations, there is no substitute for planning! Especially about the cost of commitment, or accomplishing a goal. But, do we always? Whereas it seems natural to apply the planning principle to everyday, material problems, it isn't always so in spiritual

⁹⁹And life for the believer will assume a new dimension of joy on this earth. As St. Paul says, in Philippians 3:20, "*For our citizenship is in heaven,...*"

matters. Peter will be used as an example.

The Lord Jesus' disciple Peter had made a confession of faith to Jesus. In Matthew 16:15-17, it says: *He (Jesus) said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to Him, "Blessed are you, Simon BarJonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."*

Note that Peter had made a confession that sealed him for eternity. But he had not yet counted the cost, he had not yet "completely costed out the tower". How do we know this? In Matthew 26:69-74, it says (at Jesus trial): *Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl come to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee." But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are saying." And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth." But again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the Man." And a little while later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, "Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you."¹⁰⁰ Then he began to curse and swear, saying, "I do not know the man!"*

We know that Peter was saved, and that Jesus Christ forgave him and called him His own, because of the conversation between them in the book of John.

John 21:14-18: *This is now the third time Jesus showed himself to the disciples after He was raised from the dead. So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord, You know that I love You." He said to Him, "Feed My lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep." Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish."*

Also, the history in the book of Acts shows us that from that time on Peter was a fully committed, "on-fire" disciple.

What is the lesson for us here. An important lesson is that we should talk to the Lord about our commitment. We must pray that the Lord will strengthen our commitment as only He can do, because at some time we could be put to the severest of tests as was Simon Peter. By thinking about it and planning ahead we will not be surprised as Peter was. We will not be thrown into a panic. I pray that all believers, and myself in particular, will stand up and deliver that vital

100A fisherman from Galilee would have a peculiar accent.

confession of our faith in Jesus Christ, when the “chips are down”. I pray that we will not give in, but stand firm for Jesus when the time of tribulation comes.

I pray also that our commitment to Jesus will include obedience, so that we will be an effective witness not only during times of tribulation, but during every day of our lives.

We can learn much from this. We can learn to persist¹⁰¹ even when it appears that God isn't hearing us. We must have confidence (faith) that God hears us and has the power to solve our problems. I pray that God will give me faith to move mountains.

Of interest also, is the woman's attitude. She knew who Jesus was, the Lord. But she also knew who she was, completely unworthy. When Jesus put her on a level with dogs, feeding on crumbs, she didn't argue with that. She could have made the argument that she was better than some of the children at the table, that is, Jews, Jesus' own people. She could have said that her faith was better than that of Jesus' people, people who rejected him. But she was thinking only about her relationship with her Lord. She knew what was important. When we deal with the Lord, we have to remember who He is, who we are, and that we are not to compare ourselves with others. If we compare ourselves with others, it is like assuming to ourselves a measure of self-worth.

101 In Luke 18:1-8 Jesus tells a parable about a widow pleading with a judge for justice. This story is worthy of study. It emphasizes persistence, just as in this story of the Canaanite woman.

THREE PARABLES ABOUT READINESS AND FAITHFULNESS

In the Gospel of Matthew, in the 24th and 25th chapter, Jesus tells three stories, or parables. These are sometimes named “Faithful and Unfaithful Servants”, “A Story about Ten Virgins”, and “A Story about Three Servants”.

The three parables are told following a discourse by Jesus about tribulation, destruction, and false messiahs and false prophets before the end of this world. This discussion is very interesting and worthy of much thought. But for the purposes of studying these parables it has been relegated to the Addendum titled “Prophecy”¹⁰².

After the discussion by Jesus in Matthew 24:1-42 about tribulation and destruction at the end of the world, Jesus gives us a Warning in vv 43,44¹⁰³. This warning is the opening for these three parables.

In Matthew 24:43,44, Jesus says, *“But know this, if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*

This apparently simple statement is brilliant. If the odds of getting broken into are slight, why not lock the door only occasionally? It is because we don’t know what time of the night or day it will happen. If that is so, then why aren’t we more diligent about being always ready for eternity?

The most important thing is that we understand the concepts Jesus is putting forth in these parables about how to live our lives so we will be ready for our earthly end, for our entrance into eternity with Him and the Father. Jesus wants us to be ready for this event. He doesn’t want us to be caught unawares. Look at Peter. Jesus warned Peter that he would stumble, and yet Peter denied Jesus three times prior to the trial that led to Jesus’ crucifixion.¹⁰⁴

Interpretation of the Parables

We must be very careful that we interpret each parable as a whole, looking for the dominant spiritual idea. If we try to treat each parable as an allegory, where every symbol has to have a corresponding biblical counterpart, we will get into conflicting interpretations, and mired down in the details. Then we may miss the whole point of the parable.

For example, in the parable of the ten virgins, some would try to define the

102Pg. 86

103There is an identical passage to this warning in Luke 12:39,40. It is discussed further in the next parable about Faithful and Unfaithful Servants. (pg; 81)

104See the discussion about Peter in the Parable about Commitment, from the third para. pg.78 to the second para. Pp.79. It tells about Peter’s denial of Christ and Peter’s “return to the fold”.

lamps and the oil. The lamps and the oil represent the way to salvation. But to define each element as to what is the lamp and what is the oil is not necessary. When we are relieved of the obligation to define each element of the parable in great detail, we are able to focus on the main spiritual thought.

First Parable: A Story about Faithful and Unfaithful Servants

Matthew 24:45,46: *“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his master when he comes, will find so doing.”*

vs 47: *“Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods.”*

vv 48-50: *“But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour he is not aware of”*

vs 51: *“and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

In this parable Jesus tells us what not to do. But, there are other related topics here. Let us take some time to examine them. Jesus is going to discuss the behavior of good and evil servants. He starts out with the good servants. Jesus calls them faithful and wise. These servants will be promoted to the job of feeding the other servants. This is a necessary job, because hungry servants aren't as productive. Then Jesus says, *“Blessed is that servant, whom his master when he comes, will find so doing.”* Why are these servants blessed? They are blessed because of their faithfulness. They are “caught” doing their job. And they will be rewarded.

To draw a human parallel from modern day experience, look at this example. A person who always drives within the speed limit, passes a hidden policeman. Is he fortunate for not getting a speeding ticket? No! He is fortunate that he was driving circumspectly at all times. Another person who is always pressing the limits, will say when he gets a ticket that he is unfortunate. But is he really?

Then Jesus tells what the reward is. *“Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods.”* Although this passage is not the main point of the parable from a standpoint of what not to do, or readiness for the end of this world, it has a strong lesson. Instead of saying *“ruler over all his goods”*, Jesus could have said just a promotion to the “next step on the ladder”.

But Jesus didn't say that. Jesus said *“ruler over all his goods.”* Is this far-fetched? Certainly not. In the Book of Genesis, when Joseph was taken captive to Egypt, he at first was a servant of Potiphar. Potiphar then promoted Joseph to be in charge of everything he owned. Due to Joseph's faithful work, he became the head

man in all Egypt, except for Pharaoh.¹⁰⁵ The Lord made it happen.

God said in Genesis 1:28, “*Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it;*” God the Creator wanted to share his creation with man and woman. Adam and Eve lost that place of perfection when they disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. Now through the gift of his Son Jesus Christ, God makes it possible for us to share in that perfection again. So when Jesus says “*ruler over all his goods*”, He is not exaggerating. We must praise our Lord for His generosity to us!

After talking about the faithful and wise servant, Jesus talks about another servant, the evil servant. The evil servant waits until the master isn't looking. Then the evil servant beats the other servants. This shows his lack of love for his fellow man. He does not obey the second great commandment: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” (Matthew 22:39) We can assume that this isn't just a one-time slip or error. We can assume this is deliberate because he eats and drinks with other people who are drunk. This is the company he keeps. He doesn't eat with the other servants. We say a person is known by “the company he keeps.”

If the earthly master suspects something is wrong, such as a fall off in production or discontent among his workers, he will devise a course of action designed to find the problem. He will act in great secrecy so as not to reveal his plan. He will come when least expected. Jesus says don't fool yourself, “*the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour he is not aware of.*” (vs 50) Nobody will have a chance to change his behavior or hide his actions once the master comes. So, if anyone thinks he can wait until later in life to make a change, it may be too late!

In verse 51 Jesus discusses the fate of this evil servant. Jesus doesn't come out and pronounce a judgment of hell on this evil servant in just those words. Some people would like a definite statement as to what the judgment means, if it means consignment to hell or loss of reward in heaven. Since the parable is somewhat figurative in nature, it may use other language. I believe Jesus uses other language to pique the listeners curiosity.

Sometimes we can look elsewhere in Scripture to help us form an opinion. However, I don't think an opinion is necessary for everyone. I know that I personally don't want to displease my Lord Jesus. So I accept this message of love your neighbor as yourself and treat others fairly, unconditionally.¹⁰⁶

Jesus uses the word “hypocrites” to describe others in this place where the evil servant eventually is cast. Hypocrites pretend to be something or someone that they aren't. This means that the evil servant is not a believer. Also, Jesus says that the second great commandment is: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*”

105See Genesis 39-41.

106Not that I obey this message perfectly. My sinful nature sometimes takes over. Help me, Lord Jesus, so that I don't violate Your commandments.

This evil servant is not a believer and certainly doesn't love his neighbor. Therefore, I believe this evil servant will end up in hell, where, "*There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" (vs 51)

However, let us pray that all people in the category of the evil servant will repent and change their ways before the master comes back.

Second Parable: A Story about Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13: "*Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding, and the door was shut. Afterward, the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.*"

In the previous parable the evil servant was obviously not a follower of the Lord. If he were, he would have obeyed the Lord's commandments. He may have thought there was a God, but he thought he could hide his actions from him. But here we have a different case. All ten virgins thought there was a Lord. They all responded to the wedding invitation. But what was the difference? One possible answer is that five of the girls, those with oil in their lamps, had an active belief. They were sure about the Lord, and they made sure they were ready. Their lamps were full of oil. But what about the other five, with lamps low on oil? They weren't serious. Maybe they thought tomorrow would be soon enough to come to grips with the issue of when the Lord was returning.¹⁰⁷

Many people in our present day and age have some sort of vague belief about Jesus, but don't want to become involved with living for him. They think there is yet time to put more "oil in their lamps". They don't beat their fellowman, or try to hide their actions. They may think they are good people, or they may think the Lord is so loving that he wouldn't consign them to outer darkness. But the Lord

¹⁰⁷There is a similarity here between the second group of five virgins and people in the second case in the Parable of the Sower. The second group of virgins ran out of oil, and the people in the second case in the Parable of the Sower ran out of enthusiasm. See pg. 12, Seed falling on stony places.

cautions us about that sort of thinking.

A related truth is that belief in the Lord Jesus and salvation is an individual matter. Association with the physical church on this earth, or being born into the right family, or associating with the right people, doesn't count. The unprepared virgins asked the other girls for some of their oil, but they were refused. In the end, each person has to stand before God, and there is only one advocate, Jesus Christ, where he will identify those who are his own. At that time it will be too late to get "oil for your lamp" from anyone else.

The five virgins who were prepared were admitted into the wedding right away. But what happened when the other five came back later? I believe they were lost for eternity. Some have argued otherwise. They cite the fact that Jesus called five of them wise and five of them foolish, not good or bad. Others cite the fact that they all had oil in their lamps, meaning some had more good works than others, but really, the only important thing was that they had lamps, which represented faith. Again, we want to emphasize the danger when we try too hard to explain details and neglect the important spiritual truth.

The important thing in determining what happened to the foolish girls is found in vv 11,12: "*Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you!'*" They were not admitted.

Also, in vs 13, Jesus says: "*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.*" Would Jesus issue such an important warning if the matter were not of eternal importance?

Addendum

Relating the Parable of the Ten Virgins to the Parable of the Sower

There is a possible connection between the second group of five virgins who were caught unprepared with insufficient oil in their lamps and the first of the four cases of seeds in the Parable of the Sower. This first case is that the seeds fell on the wayside. These seeds were devoured by birds. Jesus says that these seeds represent the word which is sown in the hearts of people. The birds represent the wicked one (devil) snatching it from their hearts. The implication is that there was neglect on the part of the people. They didn't care to grasp the word. Jesus says in Matthew 7:7, "*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*" Just as we have to make an effort to understand the parables, we have to make an effort to grasp God's word. Also, the second group of five virgins had to make an effort to have oil for their lamps. This was negligence on their part.

Third Parable: A Story about Three Servants

Matthew 25:14-18: "*For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who received two gained two more also. But the who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his Lord's money.*"

vv 19-21: "*After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.'* His Lord said to him, '*Well done, good and faithful servant, you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'*"

vv 22-23: "*He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.'* His lord said to him, '*Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'*"

vv 24-30: "*Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.'* But his lord answered and said to him, '*You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gathered where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have*

deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ”

In vv 14-19 the master is going away and is going to test his servants, to see what they can produce with what they're given. He knows their capabilities, so he is going to be able to fairly judge each of them. The Lord doesn't expect us to produce more than we are able. But we must try.

The first two servants have produced exactly what they have been given, and the master has rewarded them. We might have expected the third servant to do likewise. The master knew he could not do as well as the others, so he had given him less. But, alas, he produced nothing. Not that he couldn't have. He didn't even try. He buried the money. So the master threw him *into outer darkness*, which is undoubtedly hell. He had disobeyed the master, and the Lord Jesus said obedience is essential to faith. In Matthew 7:21 Jesus says, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall get into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”*

Addendum 1- Prophecy
Jesus' Discourse Leading up to the Parables
Matthew 24:1-44

In vv 1-14, Jesus describes in general terms the future of this world. Jesus prophesies wars and rumors of wars, starvation and earthquakes. Also, followers of the Lord Jesus will suffer tribulation, hatred and even death. And there will be false prophets who will fool a lot of people. Evil will spread and many people will stop loving others. But then Jesus said that if you are faithful to the end, you will be saved. What a wonderful promise!

Then, to be more specific, in vv 15-22 Jesus foretells what is apparently the destruction of Jerusalem about 69,70 AD and some other conditions of turmoil which apparently will keep occurring until the world's end. In vv 23-31 Jesus warns against false messiahs and false prophets, and makes it clear that all will know when He has returned. There will be no doubt in anyone's mind, because of the supernatural phenomena which will occur on his return. So don't be fooled!

Reading the Signs
Jesus points out the fig tree (vv 32-35). When the fig tree puts out its leaves,

you know that summer is coming. Jesus says that He has told us the signs, so that when we see them we will know what is happening.

I believe that Jesus is implying this great truth, that we cannot see what is right before our eyes. We can see the fig tree. Then why can't we see other signs? Like the destruction that is coming.

Not only don't people read the obvious signs, there is other evidence people won't know when the end is coming. The Scriptures tell us of Noah's time (vv 36-39), when people were carrying on having their usual fun. People were getting married, and eating and drinking as usual. But nevertheless, the flood wiped them out.

See Addendum 2 for a short discussion of vv 40,41

Jesus cautions us in Matthew 24:42-44, *“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*

The obvious conclusion that Jesus is leading up to is this: If you are always on your guard against the thief, why aren't you ready for the end of the world? And then Jesus gave us the three parables to help us be ready for this end.

Addendum 2 - About the “Rapture” - Matthew 24:40,41

No one can be adamant that he understands this discourse completely. There are various interpretations about certain elements of this discourse in Matthew 24. For instance, Matthew 24:40,41, is often called the “rapture”, but we can't be sure if it is literal or figurative. But it is not the purpose of this study to resolve various ideas about prophecy or the end times. We want to look at these prophecies so we can better understand why Jesus told the three parables treated in the main text.

PARABLE ABOUT FAITHFUL AND UNFAITHFUL SERVANTS

This parable is found in Luke 12:39-48. It is quite similar to the parable of the same name, found in Matthew 24:43-51. The first two verses of each parable, Matthew 24:43,44 and Luke 12:39,40, are identical. They are the truths that Jesus states about readiness. They are a prelude to these parables. The parable seeks to emphasize the importance of these truths. The main part of these two parables, Matthew 24:45-51 and Luke 12:41-46 is essentially the same, with the version found in Luke 12 having an addition in verses 47 and 48. This addition is of great importance to the believer.

Matthew 24:43,44 and Luke 12:39,40:

vv 39,40: *“But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*

These verses state the reason for the parable. It is a warning. It has a message for both unbelievers and believers. In modern language it could be, “take action, time is running short”.

vs 41: *Then Peter said to him; “Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?”*

It seems that Peter must have thought that the *master of the house* was a representation of Jesus, and the servants were Jesus’ disciples. Maybe Peter thought that Jesus was warning them about dissension in their ranks, or lack of effort. Maybe this was part of Jesus’ message, but I believe that Jesus didn’t mean only the disciples. Jesus proceeds in the rest of the parable.

vv 42,43: *And the Lord said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.”*

vs 44: *“Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.”*

I believe that this is an expansion of the thought in the previous verses in Luke:12: 35-38. Jesus in describing dedicated believers in vs 42,43. They are not only professing the Lord, but serving Him. Note an important statement in vs 44. *“Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.”* God is fair. He will not expect followers of the Lord Jesus Christ to labor fruitlessly. At the same time this is not a salvation by good works principle. This is about a good and faithful servant. Servants who are only interested in rewards cannot be classified as faithful. Faithful implies sticking with the master through thick and thin. The earthly principle derived from this is promotion for the producers.

vv 45,46: *“But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his*

coming, and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint his portion with the unbelievers.” ’

In verses 45 and 46 Jesus describes the thinking and actions of unbelievers and people who pretend to be believers.

Maybe in the church today we don't see people being beaten. But we may see some try to gain position or influence over others. How often do pastors aspire to be bishops or heads of districts more than spreading the Gospel? How often do lay persons seek to promote their name rather than edifying others? And how often do people lose their sense of the brotherhood of the saints over building programs or the order of service? I believe these verses of the parable caution against these sorts of things.

vv 47,48: *“And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For to everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required, and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”*

These two verses are similar to the parable, A Story about Three Servants, found in Matthew 25:14-30.¹⁰⁸ In that parable the Lord gives to each of three servants a certain amount of money, according to their abilities. That is, the Lord knows what each servant is capable of accomplishing. Then the servants who produced what they were capable of, received the master's favor, and the one who didn't produce anything was in disfavor.

In this parable of Faithful and Unfaithful Servants, Jesus is not talking about abilities the Lord has blessed us with, but about the knowledge or understanding of the Lord's will that each servant has.

I believe that Jesus is talking here about believers, but I will not be adamant about that. Here is the reasoning behind this statement. In the parable of the Three Servants (Matthew 25:14-30), the servant who produced nothing with the money given him, was thrown into outer darkness, with weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is standard terminology for hell in biblical language.

But in this parable those servants who did not always do God's will according to their knowledge, were beaten with the appropriate number of stripes. This, I believe is talking about God's discipline. An example could be David's adultery with Bathsheba. David knew God's will very well (see vs 47) and qualified for many stripes. David knew the seriousness of adultery. David received stripes through the death of his son by Bathsheba, and the rebellion by Absalom and Absalom's subsequent death. Another could be Jonah who received stripes by

108A discussion of the parable, A Story About Three Servants, is found on pp. 85,86.

spending 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of a fish. Jonah violated a direct order from God to go to Nineveh. Which was worse, adultery or violating a direct order from God? Only God knows, but both were serious sins, and both David and Jonah received many stripes.

In summary, I believe the stripes are God's discipline. If we know God's will, and I believe we do, let us not do contrary to His will. It will save us much unhappiness.

Jesus was so dedicated to being a servant and doing the Father's will, that He had a right to talk about it. After all, didn't Jesus take on the excruciating task of going to the cross for mankind? Just so, Jesus requires his followers to be servants of others. How much does Jesus require? Jesus doesn't put that in absolute terms, but Jesus puts it into relative terms. I believe that every believer should search God's word and his or her conscience and do God's will to the best of their ability..

An example to us could be St. Paul. God gave St. Paul some marvelous gifts, and St. Paul used these wonderfully well.

Besides the fact that the Lord has outlined this principle, what other reason can we give for doing our best and giving our will over to the Lord? It is that the Lord created this fruitful earth for man to enjoy. Also, the Lord has given man other marvelous gifts so that we could enjoy His creation and spend eternity with Him.

Addendum - What is a Servant?

But now a question arises. How does this fit in with Jesus explanation in Luke 17:7-10 of what a servant is?

Luke 17:7-10, Jesus says: *“And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat’. But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink’? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servant. We have done what was our duty to do.’”*

The servant is like an abject slave. But here Jesus is talking about an earthly situation. Jesus is talking about how the world looks at the master-servant relationship. Obviously, in the world situation the master reigns supreme. The servant is completely subject to the master.

But in the parable under consideration, Jesus is talking about the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is anywhere that Jesus reigns, even on this earth. If Jesus reigns in your heart, that is, Jesus is your Lord, then you are in the kingdom of heaven. And remember, that Jesus served his disciples by washing their feet. In John 13 Jesus washed the feet of His disciples.

In Matthew 20 Jesus says:

vs 25-28: *“But Jesus called them to himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”*

So we see that the heavenly order is that Jesus *“...did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”* the opposite of the earthly order. It is like that statement of Jesus, comparing eternity with the present: *“But many who are first will be last, and the last first”* (Matthew 19:30). God’s thinking is not like man’s thinking, as it says in Isaiah 55:8, *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord.*

PARABLE OF PATCHES AND WINESKINS or REPAIR vs REGENERATION

This Parable of Jesus is found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. The account as told in Luke 5:30-39 will be used here because it has an extra statement not found in the other Gospels. That statement is in verse 39.

Luke 5:30: *And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against the disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"*

vv 31,32: *Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."*

This may not be considered part of the parable, but I believe it should be included to show the critical mood of the scribes and Pharisees. Luke 5:31 was discussed in the section "Why Did Jesus Use Parables", pg. 6. It was concluded that there were no "healthy people", but that some people considered themselves healthy. Jesus let each individual decide for themselves where they stood. Jesus was not about to argue with people. "*Do not... cast your pearls before swine*"¹⁰⁹.

We can see from this that the scribes and Pharisees had developed a different concept of religion. It was not the idea of salvation through faith in a Messiah, but a religion of just how "good" you could be. In other words, a religion of works.

Luke 5:33-39:

vs 33: *Then said they to Him (Jesus), "Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?"*

Notice how these people are looking at external behavior. How can they know what is in the hearts of the Pharisees or the disciples? Jesus said it wasn't a good idea to pray or fast for the praise of men (Matthew 6:5-18). Doing things for the praise of men is indicative of man-made religions.

The important thing here is the motive in the hearts of people. A better thing to do would have been for the people to ask the Pharisees and John's disciples what their motives were, what was the purpose of their prayers and fasting. I believe it would be safe to assume that many of John's followers had godly motives, but many of the Pharisees had show-off or hypocritical motives. Jesus even talks about these in the story of the Pharisee and the Publican in Luke 18:9-14.¹¹⁰

But the Pharisees measured the worth of a person by external behavior. How different from Jesus' criteria for blessedness in the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount.¹¹¹ How often do we do this, that is, measure the worth or quality of another

¹⁰⁹Matthew 7:6

¹¹⁰The Pharisees had developed a religion of rote, ritual and good works. This type of religion would appeal to men, but not to God.

¹¹¹See Matthew 5:3-12. The rest of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:13-8:3 is also

Christian brother or sister by their behavior? Without being able to read the hearts of others, we should refrain questioning external behavior. This is the prelude to the parable. Many parables were told by Jesus in response to a specific question which was brought to Him. We can only surmise that this question was brought to Jesus to trap Him, or make Him look “bad”. In many cases, and this is one of them, he turned the “tables” on them with a parable.

Verse 33 is a question which you would expect from many of the people of that day. The Pharisees were propagating a religion of laws and ritual. Keep these and you will be saved. Or, stated otherwise, do these and save yourselves.

If you were one of those who subscribed to the idea that salvation was a works issue, then you would naturally be interested in the correct works. Was it fasting or denial, like that of the Pharisees, or was it one of joy like Jesus’ disciples?

A life of joy would be nice, but how can you save yourself through being joyful? Typically, joy doesn’t save you in the works’ economy. It has to be blood, sweat and tears, and sacrifice. Little did they conceive that joy in following Jesus was not a good work, but a God-given thing when he changes hearts.

vs 34: *And He said to them, “Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days.”*

Jesus explains this in verse 34. Jesus presence and message bring joy. Later His absence will lead to fasting, certainly not a joyful event. But rather than being a good work, fasting will, in this case, be due to a sorrowing heart.

Jesus changes a work’s issue to one of the heart.

vs 36: *Then He spoke a parable to them: “No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old.”*

Verse 36 is only part of the parable. Some people would say that there are two parables here. Verses 36 and verses 37 and 38. I think of them as one parable because both parts are necessary for a complete explanation of the situation.

Verse 36 means different things to different people. Some try to find meaning in each item, like an allegory. For example, the different materials have different meanings and the mismatch of materials has a meaning. These may all be correct. But I would like to find the important spiritual meaning or truth.

To me the spiritual truth of verse 36 is this: Sometimes, and in this particular case, it is that piecemeal repairs will fail. The issue is way beyond small repairs. Routine maintenance is not enough. The whole system is broken. It needs a total overhaul.

Obedience to God’s original 10 commandments given in Exodus and His basic two most important commandments in Deuteronomy 6:5, *“You shall love the Lord*

superb.

your God with all your heart, all your soul, and with all your strength.”, and in Leviticus 19:18, “...*you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” had degenerated into a system of rote, ritual and good works.

Superficial smiling by the Pharisees was not the answer. Quitting the fast was also not enough. Something else was needed. Jesus tells us all about it in verses 37 and 38. Jesus expounds on one of the most important facets of believing, or being born again.

vs 37: “*And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved.*”

A total radical change is needed. A new religion has to be adopted. One must be “born again”. This is the new wine. But it can’t be a routine ritual. There has to be a change of heart. This is the new wineskins. It has to be done for love of God and Jesus and neighbor. Not for the admiration of men.

vs 39: “*And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, ‘The old is better.’*” This is a passage which may have several meanings. Some say it means that there may be some good in the old system, or the following of it. This is possible, but it would have to be the old system before it was so corrupted. There is also at least one other possible meaning. Maybe Jesus was looking around wistfully as some people did not want to change. Old wine seems so smooth and mellow, it may be hard to give it up.

In either case, let us be careful that we do not scrap old things, just because they are old, but that we make reasoned judgments when new things are proposed. And, in the second case, let us be sure that we don’t hang on the old just because it’s old, even if that seems so comfortable.

PARABLE OF THE EVIL SPIRITS

Introduction and Outline

This is another magnificent parable spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is just as applicable today as it was in Jesus' day and age. It cuts to the heart of our theology, that is, our thinking about who God is, and what he wants us to be. It deals with the difference between religion or morality by rote and ritual, and a changed heart given over to God. It is also applicable to our whole way of life.

This is a short, but powerful parable and has many applications. It is Jesus warning to the people of His day, and of every other age. The parable also brings to mind several modern expressions, or ideas, such as "nature abhors a vacuum", and "be positive", "don't be negative", or "look on the brighter side of life".

Jesus discusses these things in Matthew 12:43-45¹¹²:

vs 43: *"When an unclean spirit¹¹³ goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none."*

vs 44: *"Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order."*

vs 45: *"Then he goes and takes with him seven¹¹⁴ other evil spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation."*

A brief verse-by-verse outline is given here. Vs 43: The effects of morality and rote religion on a person; vs 44: The failure of this type of religion; and vs 45: The eventual end of this person if there is no change of heart, that is, acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

The Evil Spirit Leaves a Person

In verse 43, Jesus talks about the unclean spirit, an evil influence, going out from a man. This unclean spirit is an agent of the devil. Some would call it a demon. The unclean spirit does not own Jesus Christ as his master.¹¹⁵ After all, Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, *"No one can serve two masters;..."*. So, why has the evil spirit left the man?

Does it matter that this unclean spirit, an evil influence, has left the man? A

112This text is found also in Luke 11:24-26, but the text in Matthew was chosen because there is one extra statement at the end, *"So shall it also be with this wicked generation"*.

113Unclean spirit or demon. An agent of the devil. Spirits are under the control either of God or of the devil. There is no middle ground. Also, in the parable of the Wheat and the Tares, Jesus talks of the devil placing unbelievers among believers, but nobody can be sure who they are.

114Seven evil spirits is the ultimate in evil. That is because seven was the number of completion, like seven days make a week. So here the number seven represents the highest evil.

115God, because He is all-powerful, can make the evil spirit do what He wants, but the evil spirit obeys God only if and when it is forced to.

temporary victory has been won. We might be tempted, if we wrote the story, to say “end of story”. We might wonder why the evil spirit left, but what does that matter? The story has a happy ending. Isn’t that sufficient? In our modern world, there may be a temptation to consider the war ended after the first battle is won.

For the evil spirit to go out from a person, something has to make it leave. The adoption of a code of morality can drive out the evil spirit. One example could be the case of the Pharisees. Jesus often talked to the Pharisees. The Pharisees chased out the evil spirit with a moral code, basically a religion of “do”s and “don’t”s. Now the house was *empty, swept, and put in order*.

The Evil Spirit Returns with Seven Others

In verse 44, the evil spirit comes back. It not only comes back, but it comes back with a vengeance, bringing along seven other more evil spirits. Jesus tells us why. Jesus says, in vs 44 that the person (or house) is ‘...*empty, swept, and put in order*.’ Why is the house empty and what does this mean?

Obedience to God’s original 10 commandments given in Exodus and His basic two most important commandments in Deuteronomy 6:5, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and with all your strength.*”, and in Leviticus 19:18, “...*you shall love your neighbor as yourself*:...” should have been sufficient to sweep out the evil spirit and prevent its return with the seven other worse spirits.

What had happened to the religion of the Pharisees? The Pharisees had changed their religion to one of ritual and rote. In an effort to make salvation possible through man’s effort, or so they thought, the Pharisees had expanded God’s ten commandments from 10 to over 600, some of them trivial ritual. They also had forgotten about the two most important commandments about loving God and your neighbor. They also put in place man-made rules designed to make themselves look good, while cheating their parents in their old age.¹¹⁶ They had made a farce of God’s commands. The house was empty!

They failed to provide anything to stop the spirit’s return. Their hearts were empty. They should have invited Jesus into their hearts.

Jesus is talking about a heart that is empty when it is not filled with belief in himself as the Son of God. We might also say that the person is not “born again” When we talk of heart here, we mean the inner spirit of man that motivates his every action and thought and his very being. This is the heart which Jesus talks about in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, when he speaks about dependence on the Lord (5:3), sensitivity to sin and other peoples pain (5:4), humbleness (5:5), obedience (5:6), mercy (5:7), purity of heart (5:8), and

¹¹⁶See Mark 7:11, the practice of Corban, failing to help aging parents by saying all your assets have been given to God. Jesus condemns the practice.

peacefulness (5:9). These things are lacking in an empty heart.

The Devil Doesn't Give Up

No positive influence has entered his heart. So the evil spirit comes back in full force, reinforced by seven more wicked evil spirits, and he takes back possession of the man. Notice, that once the evil spirit is ejected or leaves the man, it doesn't give up. The devil puts forth little effort with the people he possesses. He doesn't have to. But the devil never quits on those he seeks to possess. Only with Jesus Christ as our shield, can we hold the devil off. Verses 44 and 45 should be warning enough that we cannot relax in our resistance to the devil.

In verse 45 Jesus said, "*So shall it also be with this wicked generation.*" Jesus is saying to the people of His day that they have succumbed to the seven evil spirits. That seems harsh, doesn't it? But we have the same problem today. A large part of the world, and that includes our own country, think of Christianity as only a moral code. They think they will be saved because they are moral or good. So they sweep the bad out of their hearts, or they think, by obeying certain commandments. Even some people who are not believers think they have swept out their hearts of all evil. Haven't you heard it said, "I think I'm just as good as those 'holier than thou' Christians."

True Religion, or a Heart for God

Only Jesus can inspire us to be truly moral people. We can only be truly moral if we have a desire to please Jesus. Things that are accomplished through the power of Jesus are at a higher level than those done solely by human effort or morality.

An example of this is found in Luke 14:26, when Jesus said, "*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.*" Some people have rebelled at the idea of loving Jesus more than parents, spouse, or children. How can this be? Does this mean our families get an inferior type of love. No! Only by loving Jesus can we love family members at the highest level. Only when we realize that Jesus died for family and friends, just like for us, can we love them to the highest level.

Now if people sweep evil out of their hearts, but don't replace it with the Lordship of Jesus Christ, they will plan to pursue evil while looking good. That is because they will not have had a change of heart. This is worse than letting evil show, because it is hypocrisy and deception. This is what I believe is meant when Jesus says the evil spirit brings along seven more evil spirits. These are evils of the heart and mind, hypocrisy, deception, and pretense. Does this seem far-fetched? What about the little old lady who served at the bank for 30 years, and was looked up to as a pillar of society? She had embezzled millions from the bank over many years. And people asked why she did it. It didn't seem possible. It was because

she hadn't filled the vacancy when she chased out the first evil spirit. And then worse evil spirits came in.

Extension to our Age, the Age of False Religions

The Pharisees had set up a religion of works, claiming to be followers of the God of Israel. But they didn't recognize Jesus, the Son of God. That is because they considered themselves to be the leaders of God's people. And Jesus tore down their religion of works. Jesus tried to teach them, but that only infuriated them more. Jesus wanted the Pharisees (and everyone else) to have a change of heart, to be "born again". Jesus received much resistance in His day, as He does today.

We still have, in our day and age, people like the Pharisees. They are even in our churches. They think they are key to the operation of the church. It is called self-importance. John the Baptist said in John 3:30, "*He (Jesus) must increase, while I must decrease.*" Here is a mark of a believer growing in Jesus Christ, or we may say maturing in the Lord. The growing Christian is seeing himself as less important as time goes by, and Jesus as more important. This, I believe, is because the believer realizes the following, as he studies God's Word to us: that Jesus' love for us was so great, that He endured for us excruciating pain as he died on the cross. The magnitude of that love He showed, and the pain He endured, we will probably not be able to fully comprehend or appreciate until we get to heaven for eternity.

Some people claim to follow the Lordship of Jesus Christ, but are not obedient to him. Their hearts have not changed, but they say otherwise. In effect, they also have swept out the evil spirit but have not put Jesus Christ in the spirit's place. There are many religions that emphasize rules, rituals and works, but not a change of heart. Let us pray that we have changed hearts, and are not side-tracked by the ways of the world. The best way to be sure evil spirits stay away is to have a desire to please the Lord God.

Love for Jesus and Positive Religion

Another application of this parable is the "yes" over "no" in religious training. People have been "turned off" by being constantly told what they must not do to qualify for God's kingdom. But they have not been told sufficiently of the love of Jesus for them. Consequently, they view religion as a series of "do's" and "don'ts", instead of the joy of pleasing Jesus.

In the parable of the two debtors, the woman who worshipped at Jesus' feet loved him and had a desire to honor him, because she recognized her sin. This was no ritual on her part. It was an act of love.

Salt and Light

This Parable also tells us to emphasize the positive, and de-emphasize the negative. Good sales people recognize this. Don't tell people so much what they shouldn't do, but give them a positive approach.

To be "salt" and "light", we must be positive people. Telling people that they can't smoke, drink, play cards, or enjoy themselves will not push the cause of Jesus Christ. But showing them how to have love in their hearts and do good for their neighbor, is the equivalent of replacing the evil spirit. Once that evil spirit is replaced with a changed heart and the love of Jesus Christ, the Lord will send them His Holy Spirit, who will take care of all the changes and corrections we think they need. And He won't make any mistakes about these things!

Nature Abhors a Vacuum

Another lesson we derive from this parable is that, "Nature abhors a vacuum". In recognition of this, in some industrial processes, where a container must be kept clean before next use, it is cleansed and then filled with a gas under pressure to keep contaminants out. Here using the gas is like keeping out the "evil spirits".

The minds of children and young people are like a vacuum, ready to accept anything that they see or hear. Parents can discipline their children, with a strict code of morality, but if their hearts aren't changed and the love of Jesus put in them, their hearts will later be assaulted by the seven more evil spirits. Parents who don't train their children in the Word of God, or take them to church and places of Christian fellowship, often lose them to the seven more evil spirits. Not uncommon are statements like, "I don't know what happened to my child, we always taught him (or her) right from wrong", or "I don't know why they choose the friends they do, we always warned them about that". Positive teaching and active guidance with warnings are far better than just warnings.

Another Positive Approach

Earlier mention was made of the Sermon on the Mount. It was stated that the Sermon on the Mount dealt with "affairs of the heart". It was Jesus encouraging approach to turn our hearts from evil, by saying: blessed are they who depend on God, blessed are the humble, blessed are the pure in heart, and more. To stay in this blessed state and keep the evil spirits away, we must be positive. St. Paul says something about how to do this in Philippians 4:8,9 *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you."* This, I believe, is the positive approach, the antithesis of ritual "do" and "don't" religion.

Addendum - My Friend

When I was about 12 years old, my mother warned me about a friend I had whom she didn't approve of. She used to tell me, "Paul, you are known by the company you keep, do you want people to know you associate with him"? And, "Paul, do you want to be picked up by the police when he gets in trouble."?

My mother also encouraged me to get into the church young folks group, and go to church and study the Word of God. She also prayed for my safety when I was in the Navy. She was working to fend off those evil spirits that might move into my heart. That's showing real love for a person.

This is an example of love and teaching, not just negative warnings, from my early family life.

THE PARABLE OF CHILDREN AT PLAY

Introduction

This is a simple, straightforward parable. But it is important, because it is about criticism. And criticism runs rampant in human nature. It could be called the disease of criticism. Sometimes we even find fault with someone or something we don't like, even if we have to make it up. The parable is also about contrariness. Contrariness also runs rampant in human nature. Jesus has something to say about criticism and contrariness.

This Parable of Jesus is found in both Luke 7:31-35 and Matthew 11:16-19. These are almost word-for-word the same. Matthew is used here.

The Contrariness of Human Nature

Matthew 11:16,17: *“But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to their companions, and saying: ‘We played the flute for you and you did not dance, we mourned to you, and you did not lament.’”*

Here we have two groups of children at play. One group wants to do one thing, but the other group wants to do something else. The other group is always contrary.

In modern times (or what was modern at the time the author was a child) we could have had this situation. The first group wants to play tag and the other group wants to play hide-and-seek. But if the first group wants to play hide-and-seek, the other group wants to play tag. The second group is always contrary to the first group.

This is the message of the parable. People are contrary. But Jesus is saying that this is not good.

The People Reject John The Baptist's Stern Message

vs.18,19: *“For John came neither eating or drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a wine bibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But wisdom is justified by her children.”*

So here in this parable are groups of people who will not accept either John the Baptist's preaching or Jesus' teaching. These people are always contrary.

What had happened here? John had come to pave the way for our Lord Jesus. The nation of Israel had a corrupted religion, especially the Pharisees. They had turned their worship of God into rules and rituals, and good works. They even twisted their religion to justify sin when it suited their purposes.¹¹⁷ And John had

¹¹⁷See Mark 7:11. Corban was a custom where children could withhold support for needy

come to make this clear to them in no uncertain terms. He minced no words. In Matthew 3:7 John calls them “*brood of vipers*”.¹¹⁸ Today John would be called a “hell-fire and damnation” preacher.

Even today people twist religion to suit themselves. People commit murder and say they do it for love. People lie to spare other people pain, or so they say. People say they don’t go to church or mingle with believers, because they say that churchgoers are hypocrites.

Jesus had just finished talking about John’s ministry, in Matthew 11:7-15. Jesus asked in vv 7 and 8 if they came out to see a weakling. Jesus knew that John the Baptist had a stern message. The people knew it too. So why did they criticize John? He was trying to prepare their hearts. That was his mission from God. The people were to acknowledge their sinfulness, so they could accept Jesus’ message of repentance and salvation, if only they believed.

Jesus points out in verse 18 that people didn’t like John’s austere lifestyle, so they accused John of having a demon. They didn’t present any rational critique of John’s preaching. “He has a demon”, they said. Isn’t this typical? If these people had criticized John the Baptist’s message they would have revealed the corrupt state of their hearts, so they called John a “demon”. A demon is an agent of the devil.

It is easy to understand this feeling about John the Baptist. Do we like to hear a preacher deliver a threatening message of “hell-fire and damnation”? Wouldn’t we rather hear a persuasive message of salvation and acceptance?

People Reject Jesus’ Message of Reconciliation

Now that people hadn’t accepted John the Baptist’s message pointing out their perverted hearts, wouldn’t you have thought they would have gladly accepted Jesus’ message of returning to God? But “No”. They did not! In verse 19 it relates that they accused Jesus of gluttony and drunkenness, and also befriending tax collectors (cheats) and sinners.

This is a prime example of the perverseness of human nature, that is, the sinful nature. This is an example to us as we try to bring the Gospel message to others. We must not be discouraged by rejection. We must pray that the Holy Spirit will open their hearts to the salvation message. We must not say, “Why can we understand the message and they cannot?” We must remember that it is only by the grace of God and through the Work of His Holy Spirit that we have accepted the Gospel message, that we have been *born again*.¹¹⁹

parents by saying that this support had been dedicated to God.

118For the full text of John the Baptist’s scathing message to the Pharisees, see Mathew 3:7-12.

119John 3:3, “*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*”

Jesus' message was one of reconciliation. He tried to persuade. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tries to get people to change their hearts. Jesus says "*Blessed are the poor in spirit..., blessed are the meek..., blessed are the pure in heart...*"¹²⁰ and much more. Jesus did get angry with hypocrites, that is, people who tried to hide behind a mask of righteousness. He chastises the Pharisees in Mathew 23:1-36. But, his own people still criticized and rejected him.

Here again, instead of criticizing Jesus' message, which was truth, they didn't want to expose their heart condition, so they shifted their focus to Jesus' behavior. Only they lied about Jesus' behavior. Jesus was no glutton or drunkard.

Jesus, Friend and Savior of Sinners

And in Matthew 11:19 the accusation that Jesus was a friend of sinners shows to what depths their religion of ritual had carried them. Wasn't it good that Jesus was a friend of sinners? Didn't Jesus say, in Luke 5:32, "*I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*"

Sinners! Aren't we all sinners? Wouldn't one have thought that they would have reached for the greatest bargain in human history. Maybe they had bought into the idea that they had to work their way out of their damnation and into their salvation. If they did, they were lost.

We must beware that we do not shun sinners, just because of a preconceived notion that we are better than they are. We are all sinners. Our heavenly mission is to be "salt" and "light". There have been sects that have tried to separate themselves from people whom they call "sinners". This will not further the spreading of the Gospel. Neither will criticism or contrariness.

The Children at Play

We do not want to be like the children at play. The children were always contrary-minded. And the people of Jesus' day were contrary-minded. Whatever form God's message came to them in, they were against it. They didn't like John the Baptist's message of "get right with God" and they didn't like Jesus' message of, "*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.*"

Let us pray that we will be not be critical or contrary in our thinking as we go about the work of our Lord.

Jesus is the Ultimate Wisdom.

"*But wisdom is justified by her children.*" (Matthew 11:19) What does this mean? Jesus is the ultimate *Wisdom*. His "*children*" are His works. Jesus every Word and Work are a testimony as to what is right. Jesus doesn't need the approval of people. His miracles in healing and his teaching to put our hearts on

¹²⁰Matthew 5:3,5,and 8

the right path show us that He is Lord. Jesus is saying that if you are reluctant to believe Him, look at His works. What more can Jesus do if people refuse to believe? He will only twist their arms so far!

This parable applies not only to Jesus' teachings, but to everyday life. Followers of Jesus Christ must be positive in their lives, not negative like the Pharisees. Who can sell a belief system of gloom and doom? A system of works leads to despair. Who can know if he or she has worked enough, or if he or she is good enough? The Christian religion is the only religion on earth that frees us from the bondage of working for salvation. Isn't that great!

Christians are to have a joyous, positive outlook. After all, their sins are forgiven and they are on the road to eternal life. Praise the Lord!

THE PARABLE OF THE RENTERS OF A VINEYARD

This parable is found in Matthew 21:33-46, Mark 12:1-12 and Luke 20:9-19. These three accounts are essentially the same, but the account in Luke will be used in this discussion, because it has one added statement in verse 16, that is, “*And when they heard it they said “Certainly not!*” This statement does not change the account in any way, it only adds to it.

Luke 20:9-19:

vs 9: *Then He (Jesus) began to tell the people this parable: “A certain man planted a vineyard, leased it to vinedressers, and went into a far country for a long time.”*

vv 10-12: *“Now at vintage time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the vinedressers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent a second servant: and they beat him also, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. And again he sent a third, and they wounded him also and cast him out.”¹²¹*

vv 13-16: *“Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him.’ But when the vinedressers saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.’ So they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others.” ...*

vs 16: *...And when they heard it they said, “Certainly not!”*

vv 17,18: *Then he looked at them and said, “What then is this that is written: ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone’¹²²? Whoever falls on that stone will be broken, but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”*

vs 19: *And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the people - for they knew he had spoken this parable against them.*

This parable of Jesus points to his death on the cross, and the loss of Israel’s

¹²¹In Matthew 21:35, it says: *And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one and stoned another.* This verse and Luke 20:10-12 undoubtedly refer to prophets the Lord sent to his people Israel. Luke is less condemnatory. But the parable is not necessarily a one-for-one correspondence in every detail. The message of both is that God’s people mistreated God’s prophets. Let us make sure that we give due respect to God’s messengers to us, lest we suffer Israel’s fate.

¹²²This statement, “*The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.*” is an exact quote from Psalm 118:22.

lampstand¹²³, that is, her place in the spreading of the Gospel to all nations. Jesus refers to Old Testament prophesy to point to himself as the one rejected by Israel.

In this parable Jesus tells about the sins of the religious rulers of his day, how they usurped the authority God had given them, setting themselves up as little gods for their own glory. This led to a conflict and the rejection of Jesus by the religious rulers of his day, which led to his death on the cross. Because of this rejection of Jesus, Israel lost her position in God's plan for the spreading of the Gospel. God would give this mission to other peoples.

This parable seems relatively straightforward. Often the only two points that are made are about Jesus' death and Israel's loss of her role in spreading the Gospel, but there is more to it than that. There are some valuable lessons for believers and the church today.

Jesus starts the parable out with an interesting story about vinedressers and a vineyard. A vineyard is a common symbol for God's people Israel. Because the vineyard represents God's people Israel, the vinedressers are their religious leaders: the scribes, the Pharisees, and the high priests.

In verse 9 the "*certain man*" is a representation of God the Father, although this may not have been recognized by some listeners this early in the story. The vinedressers, or Pharisees, should have been subservient to God the Father. But over the years, they had forgotten what their role really was: to be servants of God. Instead, self-importance had captured their thinking. They were not like John the Baptist, who said, in John 3:30, "*He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease.*"

In verses 10-12 the people sent to collect the fruits of the vineyard, who were so brutally treated, were a representation of the prophets God sent to Israel to get them back on His side, rather than straying to false and foreign gods. At this point undoubtedly many of Jesus' listeners were perking up their ears and starting to recognize what Jesus was saying. It wasn't exactly complementary to Israel's religious leaders. It was the beginning of a warning.

In verses 13-15, the owner of the vineyard decides on the ultimate step, that is, to send his son to the vinedressers. This is a representation of God the Father sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to bring His people back to Him. But the vinedressers resented the Son, because they wanted to keep their power.

In verse 15 it says, "*So they cast Him out of the vineyard and killed Him.*" At this point some people may have recognized where the parable was heading, but it is probable that most of them did not. Many of these people were undoubtedly not yet convinced, or simply did not understand who Jesus was. They did not recognize Him as the Son of God. Remember that even the disciples were slow to

¹²³In Revelation 2:5 the church of Ephesus is warned "*to repent and do the first works*", or else their lampstand will be removed. The lampstand is symbolic of the mission of the church in spreading God's Word.

recognize Jesus for who He was.

Supporting this idea that Jesus was not yet universally recognized by His own, look at the last part of vs 15. Jesus asks, “*Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do to them?*” Jesus then answers his own question in the first part of vs 16 by saying, “*He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others.*”. And the people’s response is recorded in the last part of vs 16: *And when they heard it they said, “Certainly not”*.

The people’s response of vs 16 indicates that either they didn’t understand the parallelism of the vineyard and the vine dressers to Israel and the religious leaders, or they simply refused to believe that God would take away a privilege that was theirs because of their status of being His chosen people.

Some of the people did not understand the Scriptures or who Jesus was. They still thought, I believe, that at this point Jesus was just telling a story about a vineyard and a vineyard owner’s son. They did not yet connect the story with Israel and Jesus, the Son of God. If they thought it pointed to the loss of favor of Israel in the sight of God, they did not take it seriously. So, Jesus had to take them back to Old Testament prophesy.

In vs 17, Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22, “*The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.*” And then Jesus continues in Luke 20:18, “*Whoever falls on that stone will be broken, but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.*” This is a paraphrase on Isaiah 8:14,15: *He (the Lord of hosts) will be as a sanctuary. But a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, as a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken, be snared and taken.*

Jesus is now claiming to be *The stone which the builders rejected and the chief cornerstone*. And to reject Him, the cornerstone, is to invite disaster. In Luke 20:18, *Whoever falls on that stone.....grind him to powder*, is a poetic way of saying the “worst of fates”. Jesus never defines that “worst of fates” in terms of salvation or heaven and hell. He leaves it to the conscience of the listener. But if we compare this “worst of fates” with God being a sanctuary, as stated in Isaiah 8:14, we can imagine it is eternal damnation.

And in addition to this fate of *broken and grind him...to powder*, the breakup of the nation of Israel is predicted by the words in Isaiah 8:15, *snared and taken*.

This last part of Jesus speech in Luke 20:17,18 did not go down too well with the religious leaders of that day. In vs 19 it says, *And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the people-for they knew He had spoken this parable against them*. Notice that it does not include the people in the dissenting group, the group that said “*Certainly not!*” when Jesus mentioned Israel’s future loss of the vineyard, her position with God. It says in vs 19 that they feared the people. In Matthew 21:46 it adds that: *they (the multitudes)*

took Him (Jesus) for a prophet.

The difference in the way the religious leaders and the people received Jesus' message may be explained in this way. The religious leaders were probably more familiar with and learned in the Scriptures, and saw these pointing at themselves, like those in Psalms and Isaiah. But they were not getting Jesus' main message. They were worried about their loss of power. They were only listening to what they wanted to hear. But the people were less concerned at that moment with the Old Testament teachings than with what Jesus had to say. They were probably enthralled with the new messages that Jesus had for them, messages of life, joy and eternal life. Here is a good lesson for us. Don't get off into work's religion, but receive the messages of Jesus leading to joy and eternal life with Him.

The Scripture says the religious leaders knew that Jesus was pointing this message directly at them. Instead of taking it as a warning to "get right with the Lord", they looked at it as a threat to their power. Did they realize the implications of this choice? We don't know. Maybe some of them didn't believe that Jesus was the Son of God. Maybe some of them were blinded by the devil and lust for worldly power. It seems only logical that with the background of all the Old Testament prophesies, the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus' brilliant teaching, that they should have recognized Jesus. Lest we think these events are not probable, look at mankind today. With all the proofs of Jesus death on the cross and His ascension into heaven, and the miraculous spreading of the Gospel after His death, we would think that there would be many more believers than there are today. Yet many people are resistant to the Message.

A strong message for believers is that we shouldn't allow ourselves to be blinded, even temporarily, to Jesus words for us. Words like Matthew 28:18-20, *"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*

Some other lessons that we can gather from this parable are that entrenched powers don't give up easily. They have a position to maintain. People who get in their way are apt to get run over. However, when these entrenched powers take over, there can be disastrous results. Look at what happened at Jesus' time. The children of Israel lost their lampstand, or mission. Do we want to lose God's blessing because we want to go our own way, and not God's way?

We want to be clear about this: God can bring good results out of bad events. In this process of going against God and Jesus, the religious leaders of that day planned and executed Jesus' crucifixion. The crucifixion was necessary for the salvation of all mankind who accepted Jesus. One might say that is a good result. However, would we want to be Judas or someone who contributes to someone else's destruction? Instead, let us be used of God in furthering His kingdom!

Let us be true to God's Word. We must not add or subtract from it. We like to neglect the parts of God's Word that inhibit things we like to do or think about, even if we know better. And we like to add things that we would like to feel make us a better person. This finally becomes adding things that we think contribute to our salvation. This may include putting certain days ahead of other days for special observation, or putting certain foods above others to get an edge in obedience to God. The Pharisees of Jesus' day expanded God's Ten commandments, which were given during the Exodus from Egypt, to over 600. Thus they had more than 600 ways to make points with God! But Jesus said, "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.*" Work's religion is an affront to our Lord Jesus Christ.

We must also be careful that we don't take for granted or abuse our position in God's kingdom. Jesus spoke a parable about this. It is often called Workers in the Vineyard¹²⁴. The workers in this vineyard assumed they merited special status in God's kingdom because of the length of time (seniority) they labored in the vineyard, or the more difficult conditions under which they labored (hot sun). This is taking away from the work of Jesus when we think we have an entitlement in, or to the kingdom of heaven. Jesus did it all, we did nothing. Praise God. We can be sure of our salvation.

Some additional lessons brought out in this parable are: (1) Entrenched powers don't give up easily, and (2) We must be on guard not to inject our ideas into God's Word. This often leads to work's religion, and (3) We must not take for granted that we have certain entitlements just because we are believers.

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¹²⁴The Parable "Workers in the Vineyard" is studied on pp. 51-60.