

The Parables

by Hampton Keathley IV
hamptonk@bible.org

Introduction to the Parables	2
The Parabolic Sayings	6
The Parables of Matthew 13	14
The Parable Of The Unforgiving Servant	20
The Good Samaritan	23
The Friend at Midnight	27
The Parable of the Rich Fool	29
The Faithful Servants	35
The Fig Tree	37
The Seats of Honor	39
The Great Supper	41
Counting the Cost	44
The Lost Sheep, Coins and Sons	46
The Unjust Steward	55
The Rich Man and Lazarus	59
The Unprofitable Servant	62
The Unjust Judge and the Persistent Widow	64
The Pharisee and the Publican	66
The Laborers in the Vinyard	69
The Ten Pounds	72
The Two Sons	74
The Rejected Son	76
The Marriage Feast	79
Parables in the Olivet Discourse	83
The Parable of the Fig Tree	84
The Watchful Doorkeeper	86
The Watchful Owner and the Thief in the Night	87
The Wise Servant	89
The Ten Virgins	90
The Talents	96
The Sheep and the Goats	98

Introduction to the Parables¹

I'm so glad God didn't make the Bible 66 books packed with thesis statements. Instead, He has spoken to us in narrative literature, stories, poetry, prophecy, apocalyptic literature, etc. One of my favorite forms is the parable.

What is a parable? A parable is a fictitious or made up story designed to teach a lesson through comparison. When you hear the story, you can relate it to your own life. It is like an illustration for the points in a sermon. It conveys its message of truth through analogy, through comparison or contrast.

All of you have heard of Aesop's fables. After you tell a child a fable, you point out the moral of the story. A parable is like a fable in that it also has a moral or message behind the story. But parables are true to life. Parables are for adults. Animals and trees don't talk. The power of a parable comes from the fact that you recognize that "that's the way it is in real life."

Parables are great because they tell a story that is easy to remember. How many of you can tell me the story of the three little pigs or Goldie Locks and the three bears? All of you. How many of you studied those stories this morning before you came to church? It is not like a bunch of principles we try to memorize and soon forget.

The Purpose of Parables:

Parables are told so that only those who really care will come to know the truth. Not so much because they understand the parable, but because they care enough to ask what it means after the story is finished and hang around long enough to have it explained to them. The others don't really care and leave. Remember, the disciples didn't understand the parables, but they asked what Jesus meant after the crowds left. They had a soft and open heart. Understanding is an issue of the heart. Those who have a hard heart, also have closed eyes and closed ears and they don't understand.

Chiastic Structure

1. "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.
2. "And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,
3. 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand;
4. And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;
5. For the heart of this people has become dull,
6. And with their ears they scarcely hear,
7. And they have closed their eyes
- 7' Lest they should see with their eyes,
- 6' And hear with their ears,
- 5' And understand with their heart and return, And I should heal them.
- 4' "But blessed are your eyes, because they see;
- 3' and your ears, because they hear.
- 2' "For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men

¹ The overall framework and much of the material for this series is from class notes taken during Dr. Mark Bailey's class on the parables at Dallas Theological Seminary. As I taught this series at my church, I modified it and added to it from other sources like Craig Blomberg's and Dwight Pentecost's books on the parables. Dr. Bailey said we could post it on bible.org, but as I've changed things, I wouldn't want Dr. Bailey to be blamed for something I said that he didn't say or maybe agree with. And as it was intended for a Sunday school class presentation, I wasn't as careful to use footnotes everywhere I should have.

I' desired to see what you see, and did not see [it]; and to hear what you hear, and did not hear [it].

At the center of the chiasm is the reason for the parables. Numbers 5,6 & 7 show that their hard hearts have closed their ears and eyes. Therefore they cannot see the kingdom that has come upon them.

Another purpose for parables was to reveal truths about the kingdom of God. Matt 13:10-13 says:

10 The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" 11 He replied, "*The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.* 12 Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

So, whenever you read a parable, you need to ask yourself, "What does this tell me about the kingdom of God?" What do I mean by kingdom of God? We will come back to this a little later.

Also, notice Matt 13:12. It says, "Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." This is very important for understanding the rest of Matthew and the parables.

Matt 21:43 also talks about this. Matt 21:43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it."

What nation is Matthew talking about in 21:43? The church. The word "nation" is in the singular and therefore does not refer to the Gentiles. 1 Peter 2:9 refers to the church as a "Holy Nation."

The message of Mat 21:43 is repeated over and over again in the parables. What will they lose because of their unbelief? They will lose the kingdom. They had the responsibility of being the custodian of God's message of the kingdom, but missed the Messiah when He came.

Steps in interpreting the Parables:

The Passage

What is the passage? Is this found in only one gospel or is there a parallel account? The reason we check this out is because we need to decide which passage we will use as our main passage (usually the longest). We also need to be aware of the others so we can compare the different accounts. If we see any differences, we have to ask why that detail was left out or included? What does it tell me about the author's intent, the intended audience, the main point of the parable, etc.

I prefer a literary approach which looks at the differences between accounts as clues to each gospel writer's theme. I want to understand the point he is trying to make with this story, miracle, etc. Some prefer to try to recreate the historical event and take all the parts and meld them into one story.

The Parameters

Parables are told in an historical context. Jesus is drawing on culture, historical events, etc. We need to ask what the historical and cultural context are. For example, when Jesus tells the parable about the nobleman giving his servants ten minas and then going away to receive a kingdom, He is alluding to an actual event that took place only a few years before. Archalaeus received the "rulership" Judea from his father Herod, but before he could take over, he had to go to Rome to be confirmed by Caesar.

We also need to look at the immediate literary context. What is going on in the text both before and after the parable? What has just happened or what has just been said? Did Jesus perform a miracle immediately before or after the parable? Did that miracle illustrate the truth in the parable? In Matthew for instance, the pattern is to recount two signs immediately before or after a sermon. The signs illustrate and drive home the point of the sermon. If you check out the context, it will help you understand the main point of the parable.

Understanding the parameters or context will keep you honest and on target with your understanding of the main point of the parable.

The Problem

What is the problem that prompted the parable? When Jesus told a parable, He was dealing with either a Question or an Attitude - Often both at the same time. The question might be spoken or unspoken, after all, He could read their minds. Or He might be dealing with a bad attitude. We have to examine the context to see if a question was asked or implied. And we need to see if there is an attitude that needs to be dealt with, etc.

For example: In the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost sons of Luke 15, the context (15:1-2) reveals that the Pharisees were upset with Jesus for receiving and eating with sinners and taxgatherers. The problem dealt with in the parables that follow are these: The unasked question is: What is God's attitude towards sinners?

The bad attitude is the Pharisees self righteousness and condemnation of others. If you don't understand the question, you can't come up with the right answer.

The Progression

What is the flow of the narrative? Does it center around the characters (biographical)? the sequence of events (chronological)? a logical argument? or an ideological theme?

This is not as important as the other items in the list, but it is helpful to recognize the progression for organizing the story. For example, in the parable about the vineyard owner who went out to hire workers. He hired some at 6:00, 9:00, 12:00, 3:00 and 5:00 and the paid them at 6:00. That story is organized chronologically. You might best analyze the story by comparing what he did at each time. What did he do differently with each group? The parable of the Good Samaritan centers around three main characters. The Robbers, the Religious and the Righteous. The innkeeper is not very important in the story. Its progression is Biographical.

The Presentation

Analyze, organize and outline the events of the story according to the progression you picked.

The Point

Parables are told to make a point. They answer a question, deal with a problem, etc. What is the central truth or truths taught? Craig Blomberg has written a book on the parables and he says that the parable has as many points as it has characters. So, the Good Samaritan would have a main point that we learn from the actions of the Robbers, a main point we learn from the actions of the Religious (priest and Levite) and a main point that we learn from the actions of the Righteous (Samaritan).

The Program of God

How does the parable relate to the *kingdom* program of God? Remember, that we said the parables were told to reveal truths about the kingdom. What kingdom are we talking about? There is much debate about this between and among Reformed and Dispensational theologians. Some say the kingdom is already here. Some say that there is no kingdom program in effect now but that it is all in the millenium kingdom of the future. Others say there is a spiritual aspect of the kingdom in effect now and the aspect of the kingdom program that involves the physical earthly reign of Christ is definitely going to happen in the future. They opt for a both and approach.

Without telling you who is correct in this debate, we will just ask the following types of questions as we study each parable:

- What does this parable reveal about what God is doing to establish his kingdom (either here on earth now and/or in the future?)
- What does it say about who will be in the kingdom?
- about how they will get there?
- about what those who are there or are going to be there look like?

The Particulars

What secondary details of the story need to be understood? How do they relate to the main point or central truth? For example, maybe it would help to know how much a talent is worth in the parable about the talents? Do you need to understand hiring practices in the Middle East to fully understand the parable we mentioned earlier about the man who hired people at 6, 9, 12, etc? It definitely helps to understand marriage feast and banquet customs of that day when we come to the parable of the great banquet.

Some say that a parable is not designed to walk on all fours. In other words, every detail in the story doesn't have to have an analogy. That is probably true. *Every* detail does not, but as I study the parables, I am amazed at how many details do have significance and do have an analogy.

E.g. The Prodigal son was said to have gone to work for a Gentile feeding pigs. Is that just an incidental detail not important to the story? I think it says more than that he was sinning. It links the whole parable back to the first two verses of the chapter. The Pharisees were condemning Jesus for eating with sinners and taxgatherers. Taxgatherers worked for Gentiles and the mention of the prodigal working for a Gentile shows that Jesus is dealing with their attitudes about the taxgatherers.

I think the reason people say that parables do not walk on all fours is because they are over-reacting to the practice of allegorizing scripture that sometimes takes place and which was especially prevalent in the Middle Ages. Back then, they would take a true, historical biblical event and make each part symbolize or mean whatever they wanted. And they came up with some very fanciful interpretations.

Barnabas 4:8

But they lost it by turning unto idols. For thus saith the Lord; *Moses, Moses, come down quickly; for thy people whom thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt hath done unlawfully.* And Moses understood, and threw the two tables from his hands; and their covenant was broken in pieces, that the covenant of the beloved Jesus might be sealed unto our hearts in the hope which springeth from faith in Him.

When we allegorize the historical events of scripture that is bad. But parables *are themselves* allegorical (symbolical) because the events and people in the stories that Jesus told are not real, and they *do* stand for something else in the real world. For example, in the parables involving a vineyard, the vineyard owner obviously stands for God. We know that from OT passages that refer to Israel as God's vineyard, and because Jesus himself interprets the parable of the sower for us.

The point I'm trying to make is this: Although every detail may not have significance, most do. We just need to exercise control and make sure our interpretations are legitimate.

The Principles

Of course when all this analysis is done, the most important thing to ask is "How can we apply this?"

There are three types of Parables

- Similitudes - "The kingdom of heaven is like..." (These are all in Matt 13:)
- Parabolic sayings - these are the one-liners found in Luke 4-7
- Full parables - a story told to make a point.

The Parabolic Sayings

Physician heal Thyself, No one sews a new patch on an old garment, No one puts new wine in an old wineskin. A blind man cannot guide a blind man can he? These are what we call the parabolic sayings. I'm sure you've heard all these sayings before, but do you know what they mean? There are several short parabolic sayings of Jesus found in Luke 4, 5, 6 and 7 which I believe the meanings of each build on each other and parallel the message and ministry of Jesus.

The proper way to study parables is to examine the setting to see what the context of the saying is, then identify the problem that prompts the parable or parabolic saying. And finally, determine what central truth is being taught.

"Physician Heal Yourself" - Luke 4:23

The Setting

In Luke 3 Jesus is baptized and in 4:1-13 He goes into the wilderness and is tempted by Satan. He then returns to civilization to begin His public ministry. He begins in the synagogue in Nazareth, his home town. He asks for the scroll. They give him the scroll, and he reads from it. He reads Isa 61:1-2.

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.

He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,

And recovery of sight to the blind,

To set free those who are downtrodden,

19 To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. " (NASB)

There is a whole lot more we could talk about in this passage, such as why Jesus stopped where he did and didn't even finish the verse. That suggests that the coming of Messiah would be in two phases. But for our purposes, the passage in Isaiah is about the coming of Messiah. In verse 21 Jesus says, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." *Jesus is plainly stating that He is the Messiah!*

What is the response of the people? They say, "Is this not Joseph's son?" Which means, "This can't be the Messiah." This also reveals that they don't believe in the miraculous birth.

Notice the center of the chiasm. It is above giving sight to the blind. Where is Jesus? In Israel. What is going to be the major problem Jesus faces in his ministry? It is blindness to the truth. What was the center of the chiasm in Matt 13? They could not and would not see.

It is in this context that he quotes the proverb/parable: "Physician, heal yourself."

The Problem

Why isn't there a better reception of Jesus in Nazareth? Because they couldn't accept the fact that someone they grew up with was the Messiah.

The Central Truth

The rejection at Nazareth was a failure to believe in Jesus as more than the son of Joseph. When they say "Physician, Heal Thyself," they are saying that Jesus is "sick too." He is no different than the rest of them.

That is the problem today. People do not think that Jesus was anything more than just a good man, a great teacher or something like that. Certainly, they don't believe that He was God.

They had heard about his healings in Capernaum (vs. 23) and expected him to do the same at home. They are blind to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah who can do what Isa 61:1-2 says He will do. But He cannot do that for those who won't believe. His home town wouldn't believe.

He goes on to say, "No prophet is accepted in his home town." Likewise, Jesus was not accepted as the Messiah in his home town. This is in fact further proof that Jesus is a prophet because they are rejecting him. Throughout history prophets were usually rejected.

Why does he go on to discuss Elijah and Elisha? Because Elijah and Elisha were rejected in Israel and ministered to Gentiles outside of Israel. Jesus was better received by Samaritans and Gentiles. This also fits the theme of Luke's theology of Gentile opportunity for salvation.

The people understood the references to Elijah and Elisha because they were enraged (vs. 28).

After this, Luke records two miracles which illustrate Jesus bringing relief to the downtrodden (remember the quote from Isa). He casts out demons in Luk 4:31-37 which sounds very much like the first part of the quote about freeing captives. Who is more captive than a demon possessed person? He cures disease in Luke 4:38-44 and a person with a disease in that day was certainly downtrodden. They were considered unclean and alienated. He demonstrates very well that He fulfills the Isa 61 passage.

In chapter 5 Luke begins recording three calls by Jesus for disciples.

The Call of Peter	He helps the disciples catch a boatload of fish in 5:1-11.
	He heals a leper in 5:12-16
	He heals a paralytic in 5:17-26. These miracles are designed to confirm His authority to the disciples and contrast him with the religious leaders.
The Call of Levi	5:27-30 Jesus calls Levi, a tax gatherer, and the Pharisees disapprove of Jesus' associations.
The Call of the 12	6:12 ff.

But before we get to the third call, some other things happen....

Fasting and the Bridegroom - Luke 5:33

Also in Matt 9:14f, Mark 2:19

The Setting

In Luke 5:27-32 Jesus was eating with the tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees looked down on this practice because their theology said that God didn't love sinners, and godly people didn't associate with sinners.

The Problem

The Pharisees want to know why Jesus and his disciples are not fasting.

Jesus' answer: "You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you?" It helps to understand the marriage customs of that day. After the wedding, there was a week long marriage feast. As long as the bridegroom was there, there was much celebrating. That was not a time for mourning. This is Kingdom imagery. The one who is bringing in the kingdom, the Messiah, is here!

Pentecost sees an allusion to the day of atonement. If he is correct, then the significance is that this gives us an indication of what a proper motivation for fasting is--mourning. There was only one time in Israel's calendar of events that they were required to fast--the day of atonement. You were supposed to fast and beat your chest in mourning over your sinfulness. All other fasts were instigated by culture or personal choice. Therefore, to demand that someone fast, other than on the day of atonement, was ritualistic legalism. And Jesus goes after that throughout his ministry. When the Messiah/bridegroom shows up, that is not a time to fast.

If the Day of Atonement imagery is not what is being alluded to, another possible connection is Zech 7-8. esp. 8:19 The Jews were fasting for themselves and not for God in Zechariah's time and Zech predicts that all fasts would be turned into feasts. The feast imagery is imagery of the kingdom and that is what Jesus is proclaiming - the presence of the kingdom.

The Central Truth

There is no need for fasting when Messiah is present. He would deal with the issue that was the reason for the day of atonement and for fasting. Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah who eliminates the need to fast.

Jesus goes on to say that there will come a time when the bridegroom will be taken away, then they will fast in those days. The word “taken away” is term of violence and foreshadows His rejection and death.

When Jesus was crucified, the disciples went away beating their breasts... that is a picture of the day of atonement. When every eye sees Him, there will be mourning in Israel (Zech 12:, Olivet Discourse).

SUMMARY: The first parabolic saying revealed that the people needed to recognize that Jesus was more than the Son of Joseph. He was the fulfillment of Isa 61. When Jesus claims to be the bridegroom, it is also a major claim to Messiahship.

The New Patch on an Old Garment - Luke 5:36-39

Also in Matt 9:16f; Mark 2:21

This one will be treated together with the next parable.

The New Wine in Old Wine Skins - Luke 5:37

Also in Matt 9:17; Mark 2:22

The Setting

The setting is the same as above: There is the question about fasting, the presence of the Bridegroom and the Pharisees are clinging to their old rules and regulations.

The Problem

What are the old garment and the new garment symbolizing? What are the new wine and the old wine skins symbolizing? The old garment and old wineskin are Judaism. The new garment and new wine are Christianity.

The problem was that the Pharisees liked the old system. They were at the top and didn't want it to change. They had the power, prestige, praise, etc. It sort of reminds me of our government. Everyone in America knows things are getting worse and worse with government getting bigger and bigger. But those at the top don't want to change it. They are getting rich off of the system.

The Pharisees had written the Talmud and the Mishnah which were huge books filled with rules and their own interpretations of the scriptures. They gave more emphasis to their writings than the Word of God.

Why isn't it possible to make repairs on the old system of Judaism? Time and again, Israel was disciplined and brought back to the land and given another chance. But not this time.

The Central Truth

Christianity is not a patch for Judaism. It is the replacement of *Pharisaic* Judaism because *Pharisaic* Judaism cannot contain Christianity. In what way? There was no place for Gentiles, Samaritans, blind, sick, lame, etc in *Pharisaic* Judaism. The law was no match for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I say *Pharisaic* Judaism because Christ was the fulfillment of Judaism, but it had been twisted into something evil.

This is not teaching a permanent replacement of Israel by the church as the Reformed theologians teach. Remember that the parables say something about a subject but not everything about the subject. We have to look elsewhere to see what the future holds for the Jews.

Application: Jesus did not come into my life to patch up the old man and just give me a new lifestyle. He came to give me a whole new life. He came to give me a new way to approach God.

The first two sayings proclaimed that Messiah is here. The next two sayings reveal what Messiah will do. He will do away with the old system and replace it with something new, something better. The old system cannot contain it.

The Blind Leading the Blind - Luke 6:39

The Setting

After his discussion about Pharisaical Judaism being replaced by Christianity, Jesus *demonstrates* that the old system is over by picking grain on the Sabbath (Luk 6:1-5) and by healing on the Sabbath (Luk 6:6-11). He then gives the sermon on the mount (In Luke I believe the plain is a level place on the mountain) in which he teaches the ethic of love by contrasting the correct practice of love (i.e. the law) with those who do not love (i.e. the Pharisees). His teaching is rejection of the pharisaical legalistic system that Judaism had degenerated into *and a rejection of the Pharisees themselves*

We are also contextually in the midst of the third call of the disciples mentioned earlier. After calling the disciples in 12-19, he teaches the disciples how to love and to lead in verses 20-38. Then he gives another parabolic saying in 39-40.

The Problem

What is the danger of following the leadership and ritualism of the Pharisees?

If the disciples remain “blind,” they will not be able to lead either.

The Central Truth

The religious leaders had so perverted the law and Judaism that they couldn't even recognize the *fulfillment* of the law and Judaism when He came. The Pharisees thought that the mere study of the law would lead to eternal life. But studying the law was the means to the end - knowing Jesus. The danger is this: if they don't know what God is doing, where are they going to lead you? If you follow them, you will follow them to destruction.

A Pupil is not above his Master - Luke 6:40

Also in Matt 10:24

The Setting

Same as above in Luke - the rejection of Pharisaic Judaism and the call to discipleship and leadership. In Matthew it is also in the context of a call to discipleship.

The Problem

There are several problems or questions here: How do the disciples develop as good teachers and leaders? What will happen if they don't? What is the problem of following the Pharisees?

The Central Truth

A disciple cannot advance past his teacher.

Incidentally: There is a danger in just following one teacher - like Bill Gothard, Bob Theme, Larry Crabb, etc. There is a trend in Christianity today to make one guy into a guru and major in him. We need to move around and sit under several teachers so we can take what is good from all of them and hopefully discard what is not so good.

Jesus is calling the disciples to leadership positions in the new kingdom and if they don't mature, their pupils will not mature either. Therefore, they need to develop as teachers and leaders.

How do they do this? I think there are two parts:

- First is self-evaluation. (6:41-42)
- Second is by doing what the Word says. (6:43f)

Verses 41-42 show the self-examination. They need to evaluate their own lives and see the evil in themselves. If we don't see the evil in ourselves we will not feel the need to do what the Bible says. James talks about the natural man who looks in the mirror (and doesn't see any problems) and then goes on his way and does not “do” what the Word of God says.

Indirectly, we can apply this to the Pharisees who did not see their evil. They were self-righteous and saw no need for repentance.

The second part is by doing what the word says. Our James passage is still relevant to this point because that is one of James' main points. Jesus will deal more with this with the parabolic saying about the two builders, so we will come back to that later.

How do you know who is a good leader? He goes on to tell how in the next few sayings.

Good and Bad Fruit and Trees - Luke 6:43ff

Also in Matt 7:16ff

The Setting

The call to discipleship and the Sermon on the Mount

Luke 6:41-42 - The problem of judging others and not looking at your own sin.

The Problem

Whom should you trust? Whom should follow? How can you identify false teachers?

The Central Truth

A fruitful lifestyle is *a* verification or validation of the message and messenger. Look at their fruit. Look at their lives. Good ministers are identified by their lifestyle. You can know their teaching is good if they have a lifestyle to back it up. Why can't you have a bad lifestyle with a good message? If we are sincere, then we will practice what we preach. We will never match the maturity level of the message, but the question is whether or not there is integrity of heart. Is there a sincere desire to have God change me as the teacher in the process or is this message just for the multitudes.

Think about the tele-evangelists of the world. They preach that their congregation is to give until it hurts, but they themselves hoard the donations and live lives of luxury. They build mansions and buy airplanes. Their lifestyles do not match their message.

Wise and Foolish Builders - Luke 6:47ff.

Also in Matt 7:24f

The Setting

We have just seen that the disciples need to grow themselves because they cannot lead people past where they themselves are. The first thing they needed to do is to evaluate themselves and see their own evil. Now we see the second ingredient.

The Problem

What is the danger of hearing but not doing?

We often talk about the wise man and the foolish man who built their houses on the rock and sand. Notice that this comes from the Matthew passage. The concept of the wise man and foolish man was from Hebrew wisdom literature. Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience. Luke is writing to a Gentile audience and leaves that out. Matthew mentions building on the sand, Luke just says ground. Jews would know that the non-rocky ground in Israel was sand. Luke's audience would not have known that.

Same threat to both houses. The difference is in one's response to the truth - one's obedience.

The Central Truth

Who is the audience in the Sermon on the mount? Both believers and unbelievers. The multitudes were around him as well as his disciples. He talks about entering by the narrow gate - which is addressed to unbelievers. He talks

about praying to the Father, giving, not judging, says they are the light of the world, etc. These are addressed to believers. In Luke, the focus is on Jesus' disciples.

There are two applications - one for unbelievers and one for believers.

- For unbelievers: No obedience or application of the truth indicates unbelief. (in Matt)
- For believers (for the disciples who are learning about being good leaders): The application of the truth of God's Word is foundational to a *stable lifestyle*. (in Luke)

Application: I think that this teaches that just reading through the Bible every year in personal devotions without letting the Bible "read through me" is incomplete.

Experience of problems, trials, etc. does not mean you are unsaved or unspiritual. The same winds blow against both. The issue is your response. Are you going to collapse or withstand it.

Luke 7:1-10 Healing of Centurion's slave

Luke 7:11-17 The Raising of Widow's son

Luke 7:18-30 John's question and ministry

Luke records Jesus' miracles in 7:1-17 in preparation for John the Baptist's question in 18-20. Perhaps John is asking: "If you are the Messiah and I'm your forerunner, what am I doing sitting here in jail?" Instead of answering with a yes or no, Jesus points them to the signs which are a fulfillment of old testament prophecy. The answer is "yes," but Jesus wants them to respond in faith by recognizing the fulfillment of scripture. Jesus quotes sections of Isa 35:5 and 61:1. If you will remember, we started in Isa 61:1, so we are still tracking on the same theme.

Children in the Marketplace - Luke 7:31ff

Also in Matt 11:16ff.

The Setting

The role of John the Baptist, the response of the outcasts and common people (vs. 29), and the rejection of John by the Pharisees (vs. 30).

The Problem

Why didn't Israel respond to the ministry of John the Baptist and accept Jesus as Messiah?

The Central Truth

The Jews were unwilling to repent over John's message or rejoice over Christ and accept Him as Messiah. They did not fear the judgment proclaimed by John, nor accept the gracious invitation of Jesus. John came playing the funeral dirge and Jesus came to throw a party. John was thumping his Bible and Jesus was saying "let's go to lunch." John preached judgment and Jesus proclaimed Joy. The religious leaders responded to neither. They said John was crazy and Jesus was a glutton and a drunkard. They rejected both of God's approaches.

The question is why were they unwilling. The next parabolic saying shows us that.

The Two Debtors - Luke 7:41ff

The Setting

The acceptance of Jesus by the sinners and the rejection by the religious leaders. The anointing of Jesus by the sinful woman. The pharisaical self-righteousness of Simon.

The parable is followed by a record of women with questionable background who followed Jesus. (A woman who had been demon possessed. A woman who was the wife of Herod's finance minister and a woman named Susanna. I don't know who she was. We can just call her "O Suzanna.") These women are contributing to Jesus' ministry out of their own personal financial means.

Cultural setting: Jesus and Simon were eating in the center of the courtyard. There were benches around the outside of the courtyard where others could sit and watch and perhaps talk to those eating, but not participate in the meal. This allows for the woman to be a part of audience and come into the center of the courtyard. This was not done.

This woman of the street, is pouring strong smelling perfume on Jesus' feet and making the place smell like her private chambers where illegitimate things go on. This woman lets her hair down in public. Women did not do that. She was touching a man in public. Women did not do that. She is crying in public. Women did not do that. They hired professional criers to cry for them in public. She is kissing his feet and wiping his feet with her hair.

The Problem

Simon is about to have a fit. He makes an assumption. The problem with the assumption is that the premise is wrong. He thinks that Jesus is either not a prophet or He is a bad prophet.

Why is Jesus risking ceremonial defilement in allowing the sinner woman to touch Him?

Jesus tells a parable to answer the unasked question:

In the parable one man owes the equivalent of \$50,000 to a man who makes about \$30,000 per year and the other owes \$5,000. Both are unable to repay. Both are graciously forgiven. Which will love Him more? Simon judged correctly.

Simon did not provide for the customary foot washing that culture demanded. He didn't do it. He didn't have a servant do it. He didn't even provide water for Jesus to do it. Simon didn't greet Jesus with the customary cheek to cheek kiss. Simon did not put oil on Jesus' head. (equivalent of taking someone to the guest bathroom to get cleaned up). The woman on the other hand did all this and more.

Verse 47 should be translated "Because she was forgiven, as a result, she loved much." We know this because the next phrase says, "he who is forgiven little; loves little."

Who is this that forgives sin? This goes unanswered, but it is obvious.

How do you get forgiveness? Verse 50 says "your faith has saved you." Because she was forgiven, she could go in peace. She didn't have the awful debt hanging over her head.

The Central Truth

Love is the evidence of forgiveness which can only be received by faith in Christ. Those who recognize that they have been forgiven much, respond with worship to God and love to others. Those who don't recognize their need for forgiveness are self-righteous.

Simon had a faulty concept of who Jesus was and what he should do. This reveals the basic problem of the religious leaders.

Simon would have recognized that he was the one who owed 50 denarii. The woman would have recognized that she was the one who owed 500 denarii. Who would Jesus have said owed 500 denarii? He would have agreed with Simon. The woman was the bigger sinner. But Simon was a sinner too. He had a debt he could not repay. He showed no love which raised the question of whether or not there was forgiveness of even the smaller debt.

Our tendency is to jump to the question - "How much love should be shown?" But that is not a proper question to ask. If we ask the question, we have missed the point of the parable.

We must be careful not to reverse the process and say that our love results in forgiveness.

Illustration: Some of you were raised in a Christian home. You never got into any serious trouble, never got arrested, never did drugs, never got drunk. Some of you, on the other hand, might have been more rebellious and been in trouble with the law, done drugs.

Analogy: The worst thing some of you ever did might have been to shoot a BB gun and break a window. Others of you threw bricks through the window. The question is this? How much do the windows cost? They cost the same. They both needed to be replaced.

Simon's problem was that he thought she was a worse sinner than he was and that his sin was not as serious. But his sin was just as serious.

I talked with someone in our care group the other night who was raised in a mainstream denominational church. He was a youth leader and very active in the church. He said that he always assumed that he was right with God because he felt that he was better than those who didn't go to church. He didn't even know what it took to get right with God. He was just playing the comparison game. That is the same mentality that Simon had. Is that the same mentality that you have?

The more I understand how much I've been forgiven, the more I will appreciate my forgiveness and the more I will love God and others.

Jesus loves to take the rowdy and the religious to destroy two satanically designed thoughts. One is that there is a level of sinfulness that God cannot accept. It is the attitude that I'm too bad to be saved or loved by God. The other extreme is the idea that there is a level of merit in man for which there is no need for salvation. Or there is a way to merit God's love.

If you have the idea that the flat tire you had was because you skipped your quiet time two days in a row, then you fall into this second category.

If you remember, Jesus healed the Centurion's slave in 7:1-10 and raised the widow's son in 7:11-17. Those were two people who recognized their need. Here we have a Pharisee who does not recognize his need and so Jesus can't "heal" him.

THE MACRO STRUCTURE OF THE PARABOLIC SAYINGS

The Parables	Their Meaning
Physician Heal Thyself Fasting and the Bridegroom	They raise the issue of the identity of the Messiah. He is here!
New Patch on Old Garment New Wine in Old Wineskin	They show the rejection of Judaism as a workable system. The <i>Kingdom</i> is here!
Blind Leading the Blind A Pupil is not above his Teacher	The problem was insufficient leadership A Challenge to the new leadership
Good and Bad Fruit and Trees Wise and Foolish Builders	The reality of righteousness will show up in the character or obedience of the person.
Children in the Marketplace The Two Debtors	These contrast Pharisaical self-righteousness with genuine repentant faith.

APPLICATIONS

- Recognize that Jesus is the Messiah
- Don't be tied to the old legalistic system. We have a new way of life based on forgiveness and grace.
- Choose whom you will follow carefully by examining their fruit.
- Examine yourself more diligently and grow so you can lead others.
- Be a doer of the word (build your house on the rock) not just a hearer.
- Beware of self-righteousness and the attitude that "I'm not so bad." Recognize your forgiveness.

The Parables of Matthew 13

If you were a Jew in the OT, you would draw your time line with a present age and an age to come, separated by Messiah's coming. Prophets did not see but one advent.

We now know that everything promised in OT was not fulfilled when Jesus came the first time and Jesus said that He would be back to do the rest. In the meantime there is something going on that no one in the OT knew about. We now know that there are two advents and we are in the "inter-advent age."

What is going on in between becomes the question.

Remember the initials - EMK= Elijah/Messiah/Kingdom was the expectation. Malachi 4:5 said that Elijah would come, announce the arrival of the Messiah and the Kingdom would begin.

In Matt 11:14 Jesus said that John the Baptist was Elijah "if you care to accept it." What does that mean? If they don't accept it, he's not? How can that be? What Jesus is saying is that for those who believed John the Baptist and repented, and in turn believed in Jesus as the Messiah, then John was Elijah for them and consequently they entered the kingdom.

We also know that the two witnesses in Revelation will have powers like Elijah and Moses (Rev 11:6) so another will come in the power and spirit of Elijah before the second advent. After the Second Advent, the millennial kingdom will be established.

The question becomes, "What kingdom do those who accept JB as Elijah enter?"

Matt 13 is dealing with that.

Rev 10:7 talks about the mystery of God being finished. What mystery? Col 1:26 says the mystery is the church.

Matthew is presenting Jesus as the King and part of Jesus' mission was to proclaim the arrival or imminence of the kingdom.

In Matt 12:24 the religious leaders accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan. This is the climax of the rejection by the leadership. Jesus says this is unpardonable and in turn rejects Israel.

Matt 13 is hinge in the literary structure of the book. It is a turning point in ministry of Jesus. In Matt 13 Jesus begins talking about the mystery form of the kingdom by telling parables. We know that because in 13:10 the disciples asked Jesus why he was speaking in parables. He answers that he is revealing the mysteries of the kingdom.

In Matt 13 we have eight parables. Six begin with the phrase, "The kingdom of heaven is like..." The first one doesn't begin that way, but we know it is about the kingdom from its explanation in 13:19. The last one doesn't begin that way, but it talks about a disciple of the kingdom.

1. The Sower and the Soils (13:1-9)
2. The Reason for Parables (13:10-17)
3. The Explanation of the Sower (13:18-23)
4. The Tares (13:24-30)
5. The Mustard Seed (13:31-32)
6. The Leaven (13:33)
7. The Hidden Treasure (13:44)
8. The Costly Pearl (13:45-46)
9. The Dragnet (13:47-50)
10. The Householder (13:52)

The Sower and the Soils (13:1-9) - The beginning of the Kingdom

Jesus ends this parable with the statement, "He who has ears, let him hear." What does He mean? What is necessary for hearing or better -- understanding the parables? An open and receptive heart. How do we know that? He will tell us in the next section

The Reason for Parables (13:10-17)

Chiastic Structure

1. "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

2. "And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,

3. 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand;

4. And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;

5. For the heart of this people has become dull,

6. And with their ears they scarcely hear,

7. And they have closed their eyes

7' Lest they should see with their eyes,

6' And hear with their ears,

5' And understand with their heart and return, And I should them.

4' "But blessed are your eyes, because they see;

3' and your ears, because they hear.

2' "For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men

1' desired to see what you see, and did not see [it]; and to hear what you hear, and did not hear [it].

This whole section can be outlined as a chiasm. At the center of the chiasm is the most important part - the focus of the passage. Numbers 5,6 & 7 reveal the root problem and give us a progression. Because they had hard hearts, they could not hear Jesus' words. Because they would not listen to His words, they could not see who He was. They could not see that He was the Messiah. Therefore they could not see the kingdom that had come upon them.

When you understand this, the miracles which involved restoring sight to the blind take on new significance. They become physical symbols of the spiritual blindness of Israel.

The reason Jesus told the parables was to hide the truth from those with hard hearts who did not want to hear the truth and did not want Jesus as their Messiah. They were looking for a different type of Messiah. They wanted one who would come in and defeat their earthly enemies right then.

But while He was hiding the truth from the hard hearted, he was also revealing truth to those who had open hearts and were willing to accept the truth, even if it was not what they expected.

What did the prophets and righteous men not see nor hear that the disciples were hearing about and soon to see? (Matt 13:17) The interadvent age. In OT Israel there was the present age and the age to come. The age to come was the kingdom where the Messiah would rule. What the prophets and righteous men did not see or hear about was the church age. They only saw one coming of the Messiah in the OT. They didn't see him coming to die the first time, and returning later to judge. (Isa 61:1-2)

What Jesus is doing is revealing truth about the interadvent age - the church age - a mystery form of the kingdom. Matt 13:12 says, "what they have shall be taken away..." What is it that they don't have? Spiritual insight. What will be taken away? Their responsibility. Because they rejected Jesus, their responsibility to reach the world - bless the world would be taken from them and given to others - the church.

The Explanation of the Sower (13:18-23)

This is one of the few parables that Jesus explains, and there is still much debate about its meaning. The question that I always hear debated is the state of the “soils.” Which soils represent saved or unsaved people? I don’t think we are to try to determine which ones are saved or not. The next parable will tell us why.

But what lessons can we learn from this parable?

- One lesson we can learn is that we need to sow the word. There will be results. Some will reject, some will accept and bear fruit. Our job is to spread the good news.
- Another lesson is that people need to have an open heart to receive the word. We cannot convince them intellectually of the Truth and their need for Jesus. Their hearts must be prepared and ready.
- We also need to have an open heart to hear the word. We need to let it speak to us. We do not want to be like the man in James that looks in the mirror and does not notice the things that need fixing.

The Tares (13:24-30) - Satan's counterfeit.

You can’t tell the difference between tares and wheat until the very end when it is time to harvest the wheat. I think the significance of this is that we can’t tell who is and is not saved. Why? Because we do not know the heart. Only God knows the heart. And only He can separate the wheat from the tares - the saved from the unsaved.

I think it is significant that this one follows the last parable because maybe it tells me we shouldn’t even try to determine who was and wasn’t saved among the soils. Only God knows.

If the parables are about the kingdom, then how does this one relate?

Jesus is teaching that the present form of the Kingdom will be one in which those of genuine faith and counterfeit faith will co-exist in the world until a future harvest (13:24-30).

When asked if he wanted his workers to gather up the tares, the farmer insisted on allowing them to grow together, for the sake of the wheat, until the final harvest when they will be separated unto different destinies (13:28b-30).

What does that say to you and me? What about that never ending Lordship Salvation / Free Grace debate that has raged for centuries and been made more popular by John MacArthur?

The Mustard Seed (13:31-32) - The extent of the growth of the Kingdom

We will treat this one with the next parable.

The Leaven (13:33) - The secret of the growth of the Kingdom

Some think that the growth of the mustard seed into a tree is deliberate overstatement by Jesus to alert his hearers to the fact that something is wrong. And they say that the birds nesting in the branches are Satan’s messengers. They also say that yeast is always bad in the Bible and that the yeast in this passage represents the pervasive nature of evil - i.e. the way it spreads.

I think that is an over reaction to the way the postmillennialists interpret this passage.

Just in case you are not familiar with Postmillennialism - “it is the conservative counterpart to the optimistic, liberal, evolutionary view which expects the world to get better through Christianization. A transformed world will precede the coming of Christ to the earth. Though this view nearly died with the transpiration of two world wars and subsequent events, there seems to be a contemporary resurgence of it in some Christian circles.” (Ramesh Richards, *Elements of a Biblical Philosophy of History*, BibSac, Apr-Jun 1981, p. 116) Postmillennialists typically deny the future millennial kingdom and think that the church is in it.

Therefore, postmillennialists see the rapid growth of the mustard plant and the dominance of the leaven as indicating the millennial kingdom will be brought about by the church dominating society and bringing about world peace so that Jesus can return.

I think Boice's view is an over reaction to the typical postmillennial interpretation. We don't need to over react to the postmillennialists. All we need to do is look at the society around us to see that things are getting worse and not better.

The mustard seed growing into a tree is not overstatement by Jesus. In Palestine, the mustard seed (the smallest seed in that culture) did in fact grow to be ten or twelve feet tall. And birds could and did build nests in mustard tree branches. Jesus' hearers would not have been "alerted" that something was wrong because nothing was wrong with what he was saying. It was true. Jesus is simply saying that what starts out small (with just Him and a few disciples) would grow to great proportions in a very short time. And in fact it did. So, that is the significance of the mustard seed illustration - rapid growth.

The illustration with the leaven may be teaching one of two things:

- First - it may mean that the kingdom is hidden -- like the leaven is invisible in the lump of dough. That would refer to the spiritual aspect of the kingdom that was begun with the arrival of Jesus.
- Second - it may mean that the source of growth would be secret - an internal dynamic -- i.e. the HS, and that it would spread to the whole world (like it spread throughout the dough. That in fact did happen. By the end of Paul's life, only 40 years after Christ spoke these words, the gospel had been taken to the end of the known world. I don't think it has to mean that the whole world would be converted and the millenium brought in by the church.

The birds nesting in the branches are not Satan's messengers. They are Gentiles participating in the Kingdom of God. It is the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that through his seed all the nations would be blessed. Hosea 14:7 talks about Israel as a tree with others being blessed by living in its shadows. Cf. Ez 17:22-23. Also compare Dan 4:12 for the birds benefiting from the tree.

The Hidden Treasure (13:44)

How valuable is this kingdom that Jesus is talking about?

It is so valuable that a man should give up everything necessary to be a part of it.

The Costly Pearl (13:45-46)

Who is the Merchant? God? Christ? Man?

Boice says it is the person who searches his whole life for God? That this is contrasted to the previous parable in which the man accidentally discovered the hidden treasure.

Some say it is Christ. The Kingdom was established through the total sacrifice of Christ. The problem I have with this interpretation is that it gives intrinsic value to humans. We weren't and aren't pearls. God turned the dirt into man, not pearls.

Whatever or whoever the pearls and the merchant are, the point of these last two parables is the value of being a part of the kingdom. We should do everything possible to possess it and to bring others into it.

The Dragnet (13:47-50)

This parable illustrates the believers responsibility to spread the gospel without discrimination. We bring as many as we can into the kingdom and let God sort them out at the end.

Boice points out that the parable of the dragnet is a warning to the wicked that judgment is coming.

The Householder (13:52)

It says the householder "brings forth out of his treasure things new and old." What is the new and old?

- The Old is the OT expectation of a literal earthly Kingdom
- The New is the mystery form of the kingdom that is in existence now in light of Israel's rejection.

As citizens of the kingdom, we are to teach both. Some have thrown out the old teachings and said that the church replaces Israel, that there will be no future millennial kingdom (amillennial).

Others deny the new. We see here that we are to teach both.

If the last parable is about the responsibility of evangelism, then this one is about the responsibility of edification.

Edification is “building others up.” How does edification relate to the Kingdom? Once someone is in the kingdom (the parable of the dragnet) they need to be taught

I think that citizens of the kingdom are to act in such a way that they will cause others to want to be part of that kingdom. If we use an example from secular life, it might be equated with America being the land of opportunity. Despite the bad picture that certain politicians paint about our country, people from Mexico, Haiti, Cuba, Russia, etc. are giving up everything they have back home to try to get here. When they see rich Americans traveling in their country (and all Americans are rich by comparison to them), they are motivated to come here so they can be rich too.

If we live according to the ethic of God - loving God and neighbor (something that can only be done if we have God’s resources as citizens of the kingdom) - building others up (edification) then we will be salt and light. Others will be attracted to what we have. If we relate it back to the first parable, some may receive it with joy, trying to manufacture it on their own, but others will “understand” (receive the word) and ultimately bear fruit.

The Meaning of the Parables in Matt 13		
The Sower and the Soils (1-9) The Tares (13:24-30)	Planting	Planting truth Planting of counterfeit by Satan
The Mustard Seed (13:31-32) The Leaven (13:33)	Growth	Extent of Growth - rapid Cause of Growth - internal dynamic
The Hidden Treasure (13:44) The Costly Pearl (13:45-46)	Value	Not searching Searching
The Dragnet (13:47-50) The Householder (13:52)	Responsibility	Evangelism Edification

Is there a significance to the location?

By the sea...	In the house...
Sower and Soils	Hidden Treasure
Wheat and Weeds	Pearl Merchant
Mustard Seed	Dragnet
Leavening Process	Householder

Possible Chiasm?

The Sower and the Soils (1-9) - no introductory formula

The Tares (24-30) - not mine to discriminate - final judgment with tares burned

The Mustard Seed (31-32) - growth - what’s connection with pearl?

The Leaven (33) - leaven hidden in dough

The Hidden Treasure (44) - hidden kingdom

The Costly Pearl (45-46) - value - what’s connection with mustard seed?

The Dragnet (47-50) - indiscriminate evangelism - final judgment with wicked burned

The Householder (52) - no introductory formula

What is the relationship between the Mustard Seed and the Pearl?

Is it significant that the center of the chiasm is about the hiddenness of the kingdom?

The Parable Of The Unforgiving Servant

The Passage:

Matt 18:21-35

The Parameters

Remote Context

This parable is sandwiched between the broader context of Jesus' teaching on church discipline and the topic of divorce and remarriage. Both issues involve forgiveness.

Immediate Context

Peter asks Jesus how many times he must forgive his brother when he sins against him. (18:21). Jesus' answer is directed to the Peter and the rest of the disciples who believe in Christ, therefore this parable is directed to the saved. Jesus answer basically means - an infinite number. The parable illustrates His answer.

The Problem

How many times must we forgive others? Perhaps the unspoken question and problem is how can we forgive others an infinite number of times? What happens if we don't forgive? So Jesus gives the following illustration:

The Progression

Biographical

The Presentation

The King and Servant

The situation	The king was owed an amount so large the servant could never repay.
The servants' plea	The servant admitted his debt and begged for mercy.
The response	He felt compassion on the servant and released the debt.

The Unforgiving Servant and another servant

The situation	The Unforgiving servant had a fellow servant (one of his peers) who owed him a small amount. The servant grabs his fellow servant and chokes him! No mercy, no compassion.
The servants' plea	The indebted servant begged for mercy
The response	He refused to release the debt and demanded payment, but ironically, he put him in a situation where he would never be able to repay. (This is and important detail.)

The King and the Unforgiving Servant

The situation	The king heard of the ungrateful servants refusal to forgive another servant what was owed him.
The king's response	...to the ungrateful servant - He tortured him until he could repay.

Jesus' Concluding Statement

God will do the same to us if we do not forgive our brother from our heart.

The Point

“Unlimited forgiveness ought to be demonstrated with mercy toward others because it is the reflection of a right relationship with the Father.” Or to state it another way. God’s forgiveness of our sins should motivate us to forgive those who offend us.

The Relationship to the Kingdom Program of God

Since the audience is Peter and his companions, this parable is addressed to believers; therefore, the truth is for present day relationships. The king’s forgiveness for an enormous debt illustrates God’s forgiveness of the believer for his sin. The unforgiving servant’s refusal to release the debt illustrates one who has not appreciated his own forgiveness. The punishment for the unforgiving servant shows God’s efforts to help the believer appreciate his forgiveness. The story illustrates an improper attitude of one who is destined for the kingdom of God.

The Particulars

- 10,000 talents is an impossible amount to repay. This is important because it points out that our debt to God is one we could never repay. That is why hell lasts for eternity.
- The image of being released from a debt is a great illustration of what it is to forgive. You’ve heard the phrase, “Forgive and forget.” People are confused. They think that forgiveness = forgetting. But it doesn’t. You know they owe you, but when you don’t make them pay, you know that it cost you. We don’t forget. We can’t forget, but we don’t hold a grudge. We don’t bring it up again.
- It is interesting to note that the unforgiving servant did not admit his inability to repay. In fact, he said he would pay it off. I think that is significant because it shows that he didn’t really appreciate his own forgiveness. Then he turned around and refused to forgive another servant a debt owed him. We are so much like this servant. We feel like we can’t let another person off the hook. When we do that, we put ourselves in God’s place.
- The unforgiving servant sent his fellow servant to prison where he could not repay the debt. This is important because no one can ever repay you for harm done. You’ve heard the phrase, “I don’t get mad, I get even.” You can’t get even.
- In this parable the unforgiving servant is sent to the torturers by the king (God) for his unwillingness to forgive others. In the broader context of understanding the law of love, and the immediate context of forgiveness, I think this means that if we are unwilling to love well and forgive others, God will “torture” us. I interpret torture as causing us to live and fail by our own efforts, to face our evil, recognize our sin and appreciate God’s forgiveness of us. Then we will in turn forgive others because we will see that we are just as bad as them and capable of doing the same thing they did to us.
- This parable illustrates the principle of Isa 55:8. Isaiah is not talking about God’s infinitude, omnipotence and omniscience. He is talking about forgiveness in the immediate context. In the previous verse he says, God has compassion and will “abundantly pardon.” We are not like that. We are like the unforgiving servant. God’s ways are not our ways.
- Why did Jesus say 70x7 ? What is the significance of that number? It equals 490. That is how many years Israel stayed in the land without obeying the Sabbath year. God forgave Israel 490 times before he finally sent them to Babylon. Also compare Daniel’s prophecy. God is going to forgive Israel for 490 more years - 70 weeks of years... God does not ask us to do anything that He isn’t willing to do.

Principles:

- When we are injured by another, it establishes a debtor relationship.
- We forgive by canceling the debt someone owes us for wrong done. We don’t expect them to pay us back. We don’t try to get even.

- My motivation to forgive is my own forgiveness. I can never repay God what I owe. When someone else does evil to me, they can never repay either. But when I recognize my forgiveness, I won't hold them accountable for their evil. When we refuse to forgive someone else, it is the same as saying. I would never do such a thing. When we realize our own evil, we know that we can and will do the same things to others.
- Misery is assured if I fail to forgive.
- What about the person that does not come seeking forgiveness and repent? Jesus forgave the people while he was on the cross and they had not repented. They did not know what they were doing. Until they repented there could be no remission of sin and no relationship, but what forgiveness does is release the other person from me. It turns the problem over to God. I no longer hold it in my power to judge.

The Good Samaritan

The Passage:

Luke 10:30-37

The Problem

A lawyer approaches Jesus and asks a question. There are really two questions being asked and answered in the parable.

Question 1: What must I do to inherit eternal life?

Jesus answers the first question with a question. What does the law say? The lawyer, a man skilled in the Mosaic law, answered and summed up the teaching of the law by saying one must love God with all one's heart (Deut 6:4) and his neighbor as himself (Lev 19:18).

Some think that Jesus really surprises the Pharisees in Matt 22:37f when He summarizes the law with these two points. This was in fact the conclusion that the Jews had come to concerning the 10 commandments. In Matt 22 Jesus was probably saying that you are not applying the very thing which you understand. (That is a common theme - people are held responsible for what they know! Jesus did not condemn them for what they did not understand. He condemned them for what they did understand, but did not do!)

When Jesus tells the man to "do this and you will live," He is not saying, you can get to heaven by being perfect. He is using the man's statement and saying, "Assuming it is true for the sake of argument, do it and you will live." Jesus is just holding up a mirror so the man can see his sin. He makes an accommodating statement - to accommodate the man's understanding and help him see the truth. Jesus knew the man could never do it. He wanted the man to see it too.

You've heard the statement - "You've got to get them lost before you can get them saved." That is what is going on here. Jesus is trying to make the man see his need for salvation.

Then the man asks a second question:

Question 2: Who is my neighbor?

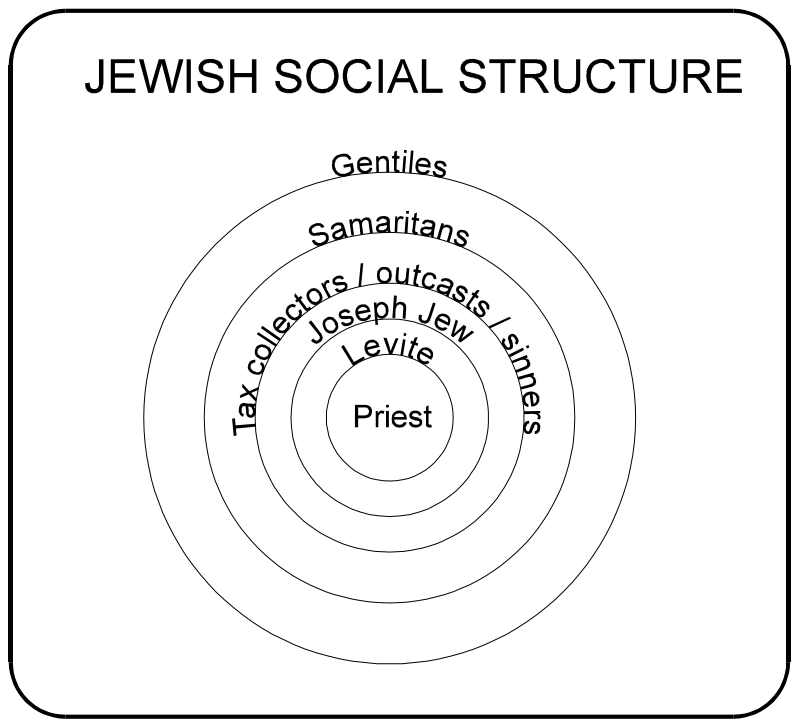
The lawyer asks the question to test him. He is not sincere. That may be the reason Jesus goes along with the assumption that you can earn eternal life. Another thing we see about the lawyer is his self-righteousness. Remember that most parables answer a question and deal with an attitude. The attitude being dealt with in the parable is self-righteousness. The text says the lawyer was "seeking to justify himself." That by the way was the problem with the nation. Of course we don't have that problem in our culture. We just write books titled, *I'm ok, You're ok*.

Verse 30 says, "Jesus replied..." The Greek word means to "take up." The man had thrown down a challenge and Jesus took him up on it. This is not simply, "Jesus answered him."

The parable is primarily answering the question asked by the lawyer "who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29), but Jesus also indicates in a subtle way the true answer to the lawyer's first question.

The Parameters

The historical context is that Samaritans were despised and hated by Jews. The story which follows would have seemed impossible to a Jewish audience.



To the Jew, the above diagram represents the social hierarchy within the society. It was so ingrained in the culture that even in synagogue the priest read first, then the levite and then the regular Jew. It is important to understand this, because the lawyer is asking how far out in that diagram do I have to go? How far do the love priorities of the law extend? We might ask, “Do I have to love street people and boys in the Hood?”

The Progression

The best way to organize the parable is around the major players. In the story there are the robbers, the victim, the priest, the levite, the Samaritan and the innkeeper. Of these, the major players are the victim, the priest and levite (which represent the same attitude) and the Samaritan. Notice that Jesus says, “A certain man, a certain priest, a certain levite.” There are no names; parables are representative of real life.

The Robbers

The road between Jerusalem and Jericho was very steep and it was treacherous because of the many places for robbers to hide. In fact the name for the road was the way of blood. So, *this is a very believable story for those listening*. Although Jesus does not identify the man going down to Jericho, since this was a Jewish lawyer and audience, they more than likely imagined a Jewish person. The man is robbed and wounded and left for dead. He needs help.

The Religious - Priest/Levite

It helps to understand the culture here - anyone who touched a dead man would be unclean. The priests could have used the excuse that they didn't want to touch the man because he might have been dead. That would have kept them from serving God in the temple.

BUT, the priest and Levite were going "down on the road." (Jerusalem is on a hill) They were *leaving* Jerusalem and could not use the excuse that they did not want to touch the man and be unclean for worship. They had already accomplished their duties and were heading home. In fact, the story shows their hypocrisy. They had just been to worship God (love God), but did not help the wounded man (love neighbor). His refusal to love his neighbor casts doubt on his love for God.

The Priest was an expert in the law and undoubtedly knew of laws like those in Lev 23:4-5 which commanded that you help your enemy's donkey if he was lost or overburdened, but he was unwilling to help a human in distress.

vs 32 The Levite was also from the tribe responsible for spiritual leadership of the nation. He also would “know” the law and what was required of him.

What did they do? Both ignored the wounded man lying in the road.

These two represent people caught up in lifeless religion. They play at church, but it does not affect the way that they live.

The Righteous - the good Samaritan

Who does the hearer of the parable expect to come by next. Look at the circles. They would have expected Joseph Jew to come by. But Jesus as the master story teller, tells a 3 billy goats gruff, 3 little pigs type of story with a surprise ending and skips all the way down to the Samaritan. Samaritans were an inferior mixed race in the Jewish mind. He was considered to be less than human, but look at his actions:

Compassion - In the Greek this stands out because of the prepositions. While the priest and Levite passed by *ajntiparh'lqen*, the Samaritan passed by *proselqwVn*. He doesn't pass by on the other side. He moved *toward* the injured man. This is so significant because you must move toward people in order to love, in order to build relationships. It doesn't just happen. It isn't convenient. The Samaritan is moving toward someone who would despise him, if he were conscious. Someone who would not do the same if the situation were reversed.

When you feel like you have no deep relationships with others, perhaps it is because you are waiting for something to happen. You are waiting for someone to move toward you. Perhaps you need to take the initiative and move toward others. It is a scary thing to do because you might be rejected or hurt, but you can't build relationships unless you do.

Care - He stopped and took care of his wounds (oil and wine were the traveling medicine kit of the day). He put him on his own donkey and the Samaritan walked. He took the wounded man to an inn. It is important to recognize that he *took the time* to take care of him. I think we sometimes make a donation to a worthy cause to pacify our conscience when perhaps we should have gotten *involved*. In our society, we are so busy with the rat race of going to work, taking our children to soccer games, going to Bible studies or care groups, etc. that we don't have time to reach out and help someone else. Even something as small as going out of our way to take someone home would be a Good Samaritan act - a demonstration that we care and love others.

Cost - He gave money to take care of him and put no limit on how much he would spend to see that the wounded man was taken care of. Remember that this is a Samaritan in enemy territory. He has just told one of his enemies (a Jewish landlord), “Here is my VISA card.” Do whatever you need to do to take care of him. Talk about *vulnerability!!!* This is also significant because vulnerability is also essential for loving others. When you move toward someone else, you might be hurt. But you must be willing to sacrifice and be vulnerable, and take the chance of being hurt.

Conclusion

Which of these “proved to be a neighbor?” The obvious answer is that the Samaritan proved to be the “neighbor” to the wounded man. But the lawyer couldn't bring himself to say the good Samaritan. That was an oxymoron. He answered, “The one who showed mercy toward him.”

Notice the significance of the question. What did the man ask? “Who is my neighbor? He was asking who and how much do I *have* to love. Jesus changes the question and makes the neighbor be the subject. Love does not ask how far do I have to go. Love asks, “What can I do?” Love does not just meet the other person half way. The old saying that marriage is a 50/50 relationship is terrible. If you love, you give 100%.

The Samaritan's actions were a true demonstration of love because he had no prior relationship with the wounded man, he would not gain anything materially from his actions. He would instead lose time and money. And the wounded man probably would not have done the same for him if the situation were reversed.

The Point

How you love people shows your relationship with God. And Israel had failed to keep the elementary principle of the law which was to love. I believe this is the main message of the whole Bible.

The Friend at Midnight

The Passage:

Luke 11:5-13

The Parameters:

Framed by teaching on prayer: Lord's prayer in 1-4 and followed in 11-13 with principles on prayer.

The Problem

The question is what do I do when it seems like there are no answers to prayer.

The Progression

Logical

There are four elements dealt with in this parable:

- Timing
 - Motive - What motivates God to answer our prayers
 - Character of Prayer - what should it look like
 - Character of God -
-

The Presentation

The Request (Cause)

In this culture, hospitality is very important. Our character goes to a friend for help in fulfilling the need of another friend. Maybe we should ask the question: Is friendship what motivates prayer? (The answer comes later, but think about it. If you run out of sugar, who are you going to go borrow some from?)

The Rejection (Effect)

The door is shut - In the Jewish household they often slept on an elevated pallet with mom and dad on each edge and the children in the middle. It's like going camping with everyone in the tent. You know what it is like. The lamp is out, it is dark and you hate getting up and going to the bathroom.

The Reversal (8b)

The persistence (Cause) - because the man keeps pounding on the door...

The provision (Effect) - the man will get up and get the bread.

The Point

Be persistent in our prayers to God. If I'm not getting answers to my requests, maybe it is because I'm not being persistent. Persistence results in provision.

The Principles

- After telling the parable Jesus concludes that they must Ask, Seek and Knock. They must be persistent. If I'm not getting answers to my prayers, it may be because I'm not persistent. Does this describe our prayer lives?
-

- In Luk 11:11-13 we move from friendship, to earthly family relationship and finally to a heavenly family relationship. This is a light-heavy argument. If this is true of friends and family, then how much more will it be true of God.
- The reference of asking for the Holy Spirit is pre-cross. The Holy Spirit had not been sent yet, so this was a legitimate prayer. The biggest need for a child of God is the Holy Spirit. Before Pentecost it was having Him. After Pentecost it is submitting to Him.
- Because God is a loving Father and desires to meet the needs of His children, the believer may be confident in persistent prayer, not worrying about the consequences. Ask anytime all the time, Seek me anytime all the time, Knock anytime all the time. The Friend came at midnight - any time. Anytime there is a need.
- What is the motive for God answering? The relationship of father to child which is better than that of a friend. He is a father who wants to meet our needs.

The Parable of the Rich Fool

Introduction

James Boswell in his biography of Samuel Johnson (a famous English writer) says, “he remembers the *one* day he went fishing with his father. He called it the most significant day of his life with his dad. Later he got hold of his father’s diary and read the entry, quote: “Went fishing with Sam, day wasted.”

Why did he think the day was wasted? Maybe it was because he wasn’t at work making more money, getting ahead in his career.

Jesus tells us a parable about a man like that. He is called “the rich fool.”

The Passage:

Luke 12:13-21

The Parameters

In chapter 11 Jesus is condemning the religious leaders for their hypocrisy (vs. 42-43) and for rejecting and killing God’s messengers (47).

In 12:1 Jesus warns the disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees. He defines it as hypocrisy. They placed all their emphasis on externals - on the physical - on the temporal. He condemns them elsewhere for being white-washed tombs (Mat 23:27) because their insides are rotten, but they have covered up the rottenness with nice looking rituals and rules. But, 12:2 says there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed...

In chapter 11 Jesus talked about how the Jewish religious leaders always killed God’s messengers. In 12:4 Jesus teaches his disciples not to be afraid of those who kill the body, which is a physical and temporal issue. Instead, they should be afraid of God who has power over their souls and can send them to hell (12:5). That is a spiritual issue. It is an eternal issue. Then he reminds them that there will be a final accounting in the after-life (12:8-9).

He also tells them not to be anxious for their life when these prophet killers drag them before the courts because the Holy Spirit will guide them.

In vs. 13 Some guy in the crowd says, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” I recently heard someone teach on this parable and he said that this guy comes out of left field with his question - that it was totally unrelated to the context. I disagree. I think it is very related to the context.

What does this question reveal to us? It shows that he has not been paying attention because he worried about a physical temporal thing. Far from being out of context. The man’s question illustrates the very thing that Jesus was speaking about.

The law of primogeniture says (Num 27:1-11 Deut 21:15) that the first born gets a double portion. If you had two brothers, you divided the estate three ways and the oldest got two parts. So guess which son this is. He is the youngest son.

If he is asking this, what does that tell us about his father? His dad has just died. That will set us up for a very significant part of the parable.

This shows that he is greedy. From here on we will refer to him as the greedy brother.

The greedy brother is not following the ideal of living in harmony with his brother. Ps 133:1 says, “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!” I would assume this man knew the Scriptures but did not care. The greedy brother treasured riches more than his relationship with his brother. He did not love people.

In vs. 14 what is Jesus’ response? He says, “Man, who appointed me a judge or arbiter over you?”

The irony is that when Jesus says, “Who made me a judge over you?” it seems to imply that it wasn’t His job, but in reality it was going to be soon. Jesus is asking probing questions to see if the people understand who He really is.

The word arbiter can also be translated “divider.” Jesus could also be saying I am not going to contribute to the division between you and your brother. Although the greedy brother doesn’t care about Psalm 133:1, Jesus remembers. He came to promote relationships.

vs. 15. gives us a big clue as to what the point of the parable is. Jesus condemns greed and warns that even if the man gets a larger share of the inheritance, it will not bring life.

People don’t believe this. They think that if they can only get enough material things these things will produce the abundant life.

Do riches bring the abundant life? Listen to what Andrew Carnegie had to say:

"Millionaires who laugh," said Andrew Carnegie, "are rare. “You may have all the money in the world, and yet be a lonely, sorrowing man.”

Sir Earnest Cassel said, “The light has gone out of my life. I live in this beautiful house, which I have furnished with all the luxury and wonder of art; but, believe me, I no longer value my millions. I sit here for hours every night longing for my beloved daughter.”

And Christina Onassis said, "Happiness is not based on money and the greatest proof of that is our family."

Do you believe these stories? Or do you think it would be different for you if you had lots of money?

The Problem Which Prompts The Parable

Jesus is dealing with the problem of greed and seeking life on earth in temporal possessions.

The Progression

Biographical - There is a comparison and contrast going on between the two characters in the parable and two characters outside the parable.

Characters In the Parable

The Rich man

At first he appears to be a good man who has many riches. He is content with them and going to enjoy them. He is the ultimate couch potato. Why is Christ telling a story about a rich man to a bunch of poor people and to a greedy brother? I think He is setting them up with this story.

God

God is the judge. He thinks the man is a fool. Until verse 20 the rich man doesn’t appear to be too bad. Then we get God’s opinion of him. The problem is not that he has lots of riches. It is his attitude. He thinks this is all there is to life and he is content.

Characters outside the parable:

The Greedy brother

He is a greedy man, and wants riches. His attitude is that more money will bring him life.

Jesus

The Particulars Of The Parable

Vs 16 - Why is Jesus telling this parable about the rich man who had no greed to a greedy man?

Jesus builds up the rich man as a good guy, a content man - something that is very rare. This guy is just the opposite of the greedy man. What do we learn? Both thought that life consisted in stuff. Selfishness and self-satisfaction are two opposite pulls that are both out of balance to God. They are opposite sides of the same coin.

The man in the parable was already rich. He already had enough for himself. But this year, he had a bumper crop. Isn't this the way it always is? The rich get richer and the poor get poorer? One gets the impression that the rich man didn't really work very hard for this. Why does Jesus want us to get that impression? If you get something that you didn't work for, what is it? It is a gift. Who was this gift from? It was a gift from God. Remember that.

So, what does he do with the surplus? Verse 17 says "The rich man began reasoning to himself" This is significant because in that culture everyone went to the city gates to discuss everything. This man doesn't do that. We get the impression that he has no friends, no relationship with anyone.

He says, "What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops? This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods."

Notice the emphasis on "I" and "my" as he reasons with himself. He did not understand that his prosperity was a gift from God. He forgot that he was a steward and thought that he owned it all.

In vs. 19 he assumes that he will live for a long time, and will enjoy his stuff.

But in vs. 20. God enters the scene and says, "You fool!" the word for fool is *a[frwn*. This may be a play on words with the word for "merry" in the preceding verse which is *eujfraivnou*. "The rich man who thinks that his *eujforew* (many things) will produce *eujfrwn* (the good life), is in reality *a[frwn* (without mind, spirit and emotions)." (Kenneth Bailey, p. 67.) He is without life. He is stupid.

God goes on to say, "your soul is required of you." The word "required" has the idea of paying back a loan. This emphasizes the idea that the man was just a steward of his stuff and not the owner.

Then God says, "now who will own what you have prepared?"

What is the connection between the greedy guy's question and the parable?

The greedy guy's question was concerning his inheritance (because his father had died) and the parable ends with a question of inheritance (because the rich man died). "Who will own what you have prepared?"

We know what will happen. We see it happening with the greedy man. The kids are going to fight over it. It reminds me of Howard Hughes. When he died, there was no will and people fought over his inheritance for years.

In vs. 21 Jesus says, "So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

There is a major reversal in the parable - the rich man ends up being poor to God. Notice the poetic justice. Why does Jesus tell a bunch of poor people about a rich man? How does a rich man story go over? Poor people want bad things to happen to rich people, because they are jealous. The Clinton's got elected by playing on that emotion. They said they would tax the rich and give to the poor. To the poor people this is poetic justice. To the rich, this is a tragedy.

Notice how this parable even fits in the context of Jesus' speech to the multitude. 12:11 don't be anxious... 12:22 don't be anxious.... He is telling them not to be anxious about temporal things. The greedy man's question fit right into the context of Jesus' lesson. It's almost like it was staged. It certainly shows that the greedy man wasn't paying any attention to what was being said.

Verse 23. There is more to life than food and clothing, things, stuff.... Verses 15 and 23 introduce and conclude the parable with the same thought. Man's life does not consist of stuff. That is the answer to the materialism of our day.

The Point

Because we cannot take our material possessions with us, we should concentrate on storing up eternal treasures in heaven.

The Relation To The Kingdom Program Of God

Christ is going to be the judge in the kingdom. What started the whole parable? The question by the greedy man. He wanted Jesus to be the judge. Jesus says, "Who made me judge over you?" As if Jesus isn't the one who is judge. Remember what Jesus said in 12:4 and 5. Don't fear the one who kills the body, but fear the one who can cast you into hell. That of course is God. But God is going to hand all judgment over to Christ. But that is not yet known. Luke is hinting at it and will reveal it later.

If God is the king and we are the sons, then we are heirs of the kingdom and if we own the kingdom, then barns, grain and goods are such trivial matters. We don't need to worry about earthly inheritances. That is the right perspective. It is so ironic that we lust for acres while here on the earth and God has kingdoms waiting for us in the future (cf. vs31). What a stupid investment to leave God out of my life and devote my time on earth to build up the very thing that God is going to use for asphalt in heaven - gold. Streets of gold. Get it in perspective. The asphalt of heaven.

The Principles

Don't put your emphasis on material possessions because they don't last. Like the guy who was walking back from the funeral and someone asked him, "How much did the guy leave behind?" And the man smartly replied, "Everything."

Greed is wrong, but at the opposite pole, so is self-sufficiency or self-satisfaction.

If you define life in terms of money, you leave God out of the definition and you end up bankrupt. What counts is your relationship with God. Remember Jesus said in 12:9 just before the parable, "He who denies Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God."

The rich man made at least four mistakes:

1. The rich man made the mistake of thinking he was the owner of his stuff when he was just a steward. We are just stewards of our stuff.
2. He was worried about the present and forgot about eternity.
3. He was concerned only for the physical and forgot about spiritual things.
4. He treasured stuff more than people. He lived an isolated life

This parable tells us how to define life. Most people define life in terms of material possessions, physical fitness or the future. This parable speaks loudly to our generation. Have you been defining life in your career, your house, your stock portfolio, in terms of what you can do physically, or the assumption that you will live much longer? What is going to happen when you lose one or more of those things? What happens when you get laid off? What happens when the stock market crashes? What happens when you get some disease which takes away your physical ability. What happens when you find out you only have six months to live? If you define life in these things, you will be devastated.

Having possessions is not wrong, it is putting your security in them that is wrong. The rich man is not condemned for being rich. He is condemned for being self-centered, for not using his surplus to help others, for leaving God out of his life.

In 12:24-30 Jesus compares them to the birds and the flowers and shows them that since they are more valuable than the birds and flowers, that certainly their heavenly Father will take care of them. It is the Gentiles - the godless - that seek life in stuff.

So, they are to seek His kingdom and then all the stuff that they need will be added. The rich man got all the stuff and stopped seeking.

Vs 33 says we should store up treasure in heaven. How do we do that? by investing in people. People are the only things we can take with us to heaven. So, investing in people is what counts.

In vs. 34 Jesus says "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Whenever you invest your time or money, it moves the heart toward that thing. When you invest in stuff it darkens or hardens the heart. When you come

across the choice between stuff, (like CD players, computers, business, etc.) or spending time with people and you choose stuff, you are rejecting people. Or if you invest in people, then you will reject stuff. Jesus says in the parallel passage in the Sermon on the Mount that you will love one and hate the other.

So the question is, what do you choose? What do you treasure?

I think one of the things that impressed me in this parable is the lack of love and relationship in the lives of the greedy brother and the rich man. They chose stuff instead of God or people. In the story I told at the beginning, we saw a father who chose stuff over his son. And we saw where his heart was.

Let me tell you another story:

Bill Butterfield says, "There is something magical about a birthday when you are a kid." Remember the feeling? In one day, you gain a whole year on your friends. You go to bed 5 one day and the next you are 6. It is a special day and should be carefully planned. These sentiments came through loud and clear with my son Jesse. Formerly 5, now solidly 6. He wanted a birthday party at a certain place with certain friends with a certain menu with a certain type of birthday cake and certainly gifts. Jesse is not the type of kid to spout out a list of gifts a mile long. He always knows exactly what he wants and not only that, exactly where to find it. You see, Jesse has Toys-R-Us memorized. If asked where the Parcheesi game was, he would say it is with the games on aisle 12 between PacMan and Payday.

Wanting to make this a special birthday and wanting to get him exactly what he wanted, I asked him what he wanted for his birthday. However, I did not get the answer I expected. Instead, I was given a lesson in love.

"Dad, I would like a ball to play with for my birthday." was Jesse's carefully planned reply.

"Great!" I responded, "What kind of ball would you like?"

I think I'd like either a football or a soccer ball.

"Ok." I agreed, but pressed him further. "Which one would you like more?" A football or soccer ball?"

"Well," he mused slowly. I should have known by his pause that it was coming.

"Well...., if you had some time to play ball with me this next year, I'd really like a football for you and me to throw around in the back yard. But if you are going to be real busy this next year, maybe you'd better just get me a soccer ball because I can play soccer with the rest of the kids in the neighborhood.

He paused again....., The silence was deafening..... "Ok buddy, ... Uh....I'll make a choice, ... uh...and surprise you for your birthday. How does that sound?"

"Great Daddy,.....I love you."

I grabbed my wife and went into another room to relay the conversation that had just transpired. It was as I was retelling the story that my son's message came through. He wasn't longing for gifts. He was longing for the giver. It took an almost 6 year old to remind me that relationships are more important than things.

By the way, the oddest thing occurred on my son's 6th birthday. It's a moment we will never forget. A grown man and a little boy embracing and sobbing tears of joy over a dumb old football.

Long for the giver and not the gifts. Don't invest in stuff. Invest in people.

The Faithful Servants

The Passage:

Luke 12:35-48

The Parameters

This follows the parable of the rich fool (12:13-21) in which the rich man had an unexpected death and faced the judgment of God.

Jesus has just told them not to be anxious (12:22-34) for earthly things but to seek the kingdom.

The parable is followed by a section dealing with the certainty of coming judgment (12:49-59)

The Problem

What should characterize a steward in light of the certainty of coming accountability?

The Progression - Ideological

The need for Readiness

Be like men waiting

Dressed, lamps burning

Be like slaves who are alert

The picture here is of a master who is returning from a trip. What is the tendency of workers when the boss is away? To slack off. Those that slack off invariably get caught sleeping when the boss shows up. What do these servants who are alert get? - they get to eat at the banquet - This is kingdom imagery. Notice that the master will serve the servants at the banquet.

Be like the head of the house who was awake

Be ready for the Lord will come when you do not expect

Peter's question: Lord are you talking to us?

I don't think Jesus has been talking to the disciples up to this point. He has been talking to the multitudes. The issue has been salvation up to this point. But now he turns to the 12 and deals with the issue of faithfulness. Notice the "Blessed" in vs. 37 compared to the "Blessed" in vs. 43. The one in vs. 43 emphasizes "doing."

The Need for Wisdom and Faithfulness (42-48)

I take it that Wisdom is a symbol for faith and is a warning to unbelievers. The warning of Faithfulness is for believers of whom the faithful will be rewarded and the unfaithful will not.

Three levels of judgment - cutting into pieces, many lashes, few lashes.

There are levels of reward - given much and given more.

The one who is ready and wise (faith) and doing (faithfulness) that faithfulness is rewarded. If I have neither readiness nor activity, it is a sign of deserved judgment.

In the context, who would be more liable for stricter judgment? The Pharisees who had been given much -

How can we be talking about master slave/servant relationships and not necessarily be talking about the saved? Father with two sons and one of the sons represents tax collectors who respond correctly and religious leaders who don't. So even with a father/son imagery you are not necessarily dealing with two believers. Don't take the cultural paradigm and try to make it equivalent to the Christian imagery.

The Point

There is a need for faith and faithfulness in light of the coming judgment and rewards to be given when Christ returns.

The Relation of the Parable to the Kingdom Program of God

The Particulars

Wedding banquets last a long time - days on end. You didn't know when they were coming back.

The Principles

- Though the event is certain the timing of the Lord's return is not known.
- There is a need to be ready and faithful in light of the Lord's return.
- Faithfulness will be proportionately rewarded.
- Lack of faithfulness may indicate lack of faith, making one susceptible to judgment.
- Judgment as well as rewards are proportionate. "It will be more tolerant for Sodom and Gomorrah than for this generation." Mat 11:23

The Fig Tree

The Passage:

Luke 13:1-9

The Parameters

Someone tells Jesus about the Galileans who were killed when Pilate desecrated the temple by sacrificing a pig there.

Jesus asks if these Galileans were more sinful than other Galileans. In the Jewish culture, health and prosperity was a sign of God's blessing. In the same way, poverty, sickness, etc. were signs that one was sinful and disobeying God.

Jesus then asks them about the Judeans killed when the tower of Siloam fell down. Were they more wicked than the rest? They were not.

If you don't want to perish, what do you need to do? Repent.

In the broader context we need to remember that Jesus cursed a fig tree later on in His ministry. The parable of the fig tree and the miracle of the fig tree are related. There were leaves, but no fruit.

The Problem

What is the reason for the impending judgment which is threatening Israel? Why is God's judgment delayed

The Progression - Logical

The progression is logical. It is cause and effect. The cause of judgment is a lack of fruit and the reason for the delay is to give time for repentance.

The desire for fruit (vs. 6)

Why do you have a fruit tree? To get fruit from it.

The decision of fatality (vs. 7)

Fruit trees that do not bear fruit don't deserve to live. They are worthless.

The determination for fertilizer (vs. 8)

The vineyard-keeper wants to wait and fertilize and give the tree a chance.

The delay of fatality (vs. 9)

The Point

In order to motivate people to show forth the fruits of repentance, God graciously delays His judgment.

The Relation of the Parable to the Kingdom Program of God

Jesus extends a "year" of grace to Israel before the cursing of the fig tree in hope that they would respond in repentance as had been preached by John the Baptist.

Remember that Peter preaches repentance in Acts 3 because the kingdom was at hand.

The Particulars

- The historical tragedies.
 - The image of the vineyard - they were often planted in vineyards and would usually produce three crops per year. So this fig tree had missed nine crops.
-

- The cursing of the Fig Tree.
-

The Principles

- Times of suffering are sovereignly allowed by God to bring purpose and truth to light.
- The place of privilege is the place of responsibility (Isa 5:)
- Responsibility brings accountability.
- God's gracious delay of judgment is designed to prompt repentance. (2Pe 3:, 2Co 7:8-10) The repentance is the change of mind that turns from dead works to faith in God.

In our culture who you know is very important. We drop names to make ourselves seem more important. Now that Chuck Swindoll is the president of DTS, I will probably run into him from time to time. If I say, "The other day, when I was talking to Chuck, he said...." then that is name dropping. This is not a new phenomenon. Jesus deals with a similar thing in Luke 14.

The Seats of Honor

The Passage

Luke 14:7-11

The Parameters

Jesus had just healed a man of dropsy on the Sabbath and the religious leaders disapproved.

Perhaps an OT allusion to Proverbs 25:6-7 ⁶ Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence, and do not claim a place among great men; ⁷ it is better for him to say to you, "Come up here," than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman. What you have seen with your eyes (NIV)

The Problem

The Question: What is the proper attitude and response to a gracious invitation?

The Attitude: Pride

The Progression

Ideological: The wrong and right response to grace.

The Message to the Invited

The Wrong Response

The Desire for the place of honor

The Demotion to the place humility

If you don't want to be humbled by someone else, then humble yourself.

The Right Response

The Decision for the place of humility

The Distinction of the place of honor

We see the wrong and right response to grace. The wrong response is to think you are special and deserve to sit in the best place. The right response is to recognize that you are not special and not sit in the place of honor. Let the host move you up if he sees fit.

The Message to the Inviter

The attitude: The desire for reciprocal relationships. Come over to our house - your kids can run through our sprinkler....

The question: Who should they invite? The Poor, Crippled, Lame, Blind, etc. This will tie in with the next section.

The Wrong Invitation

The Recipients

Friends, Brothers, Relatives, Rich neighbors

The Reason

The temptation for reciprocal relationships. Come over to our house - your kids can run through our sprinkler....

The Right Invitation

The Recipients

The Poor, Crippled, Lame, Blind

The Reason

Blessing will come at the resurrection of the righteous

The Point

The First Point: If we try to promote ourselves, God will demote us. Wouldn't you rather humble yourself and let God raise you up, than be put in your proper place?

The Second Point: Believers should act without thoughts of reciprocity being confident that God will reward such grace and humility at the judgment of the righteousness.

The Relation of the Parable to the Kingdom Program of God

The attitudes which will merit reward in the resurrection are the Kingdom attitudes of humility and generosity.

The Particulars

Banquet customs

The statement by one of the attendees of the dinner following the parable will also connect this parable with the following parable in the context.

Also there is a contrast implied with other passages where the teachers of the Law were notorious for taking the best seats in the synagogues (Matt. 23:6; par. in Mk. 12:39; Lk. 20:46)

The Principles

“Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted” (14:11).

One should be humble and gracious knowing that God will exalt or reward such a believer at the proper time.

Matt. 5:46; 18:4; 23:12; Rom. 12:16; I Pet. 5:6

One of the primary things that sets us up for shame is being proud.

The Great Supper

The Passage:

Luke 14:15-24

The Parameters

Remote Context

The Pharisees had just been critical of Jesus' healing on the Sabbath and Jesus had noticed their haughty, self-seeking attitudes at the dinner.

In the OT and other Jewish writings there are several references to dinning at a great banquet with the Messiah in his kingdom.

- Isa 25:6 On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.
- 3 Enoch - says, "At once Israel shall be saved from among the gentiles and the Messiah shall appear to them and bring them up to Jerusalem with great joy. Moreover, the kingdom of Israel, gathered from the four quarters of the world, shall eat with the Messiah, and the gentiles shall eat with them..."
- In Matt 8:11 after commending a gentile for his faith, Jesus says, I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

The Jews looked forward to the day when Messiah would set up his kingdom and part of the festivities would include a great banquet with the Messiah.

So the people hearing this parable about a great banquet would immediately identify what Jesus was talking about. He was talking about the Kingdom.

The host of a banquet sent out two invitations. An original invitation in advance and then a second invitation to notify that "dinner was served."

Immediate Context

In the preceding context to this parable Jesus had noticed the proud, self-seeking attitudes of the guests at the dinner he was attending. He told them not to seat themselves in the places of honor but to leave that to the host, otherwise, they would be shamed when they had to move. Last week we saw the relationship between pride and shame. I think that the principle we learned last week is applicable here.

He also tells them, that when they themselves give a banquet, they should only invite those guests who cannot repay. I've heard Dr. Pentecost say numerous times in his class on the life of Christ that hospitality was a sign of righteousness. When you invite those who can repay, your motives are wrong and it is not righteousness. So, I'm sure that is related to our discussion.

The Problem

Someone comments that those who eat bread in the kingdom will be blessed. Who is it that will eat bread in the kingdom of God? The Pharisees thought that only they would make it into the kingdom and certainly not the outcasts of society. The outcasts were not at this dinner, nor would they be at the dinner table of the kingdom.

The Progression: Biographical

The Host

He was giving a big dinner which indicated he was wealthy. He had an original "dinner list" of people whom he invited.

What you may not realize is one of the cultural practices of that time, when a man was going to give a banquet, he sent out an invitation weeks or months in advance. If it was a marriage banquet, the invitations went out soon after the betrothal - almost a year in advance. The events in the parable assume that the advance invitation has been given and the 1st invitation we read about is really not the first.

The Original Guests

The original guests all made lame excuses and could not / or would not come to the dinner.

Excuse #1

This man was concerned with financial investments.

Excuse #2

This man was preoccupied with his business.

Excuse #3

This man was preoccupied with family matters.

The Replacement Guests

The host invited anyone who wanted to come and filled his house so that there was no room for the original guests.

The Point

God graciously invites all to come to Him (1)², but many are self-satisfied and preoccupied with their own lives and miss out on the invitation (2), and only those who are aware of their inadequacy will accept the invitation (3).

The Relation of the Parable to the Kingdom of God

The original guests represent the nation Israel, and the poor, lame, etc. represent the Gentiles and those outside “the system.” The Host (God) offered the kingdom to Israel, but they rejected the offer. So the kingdom was given to the Gentiles and the outcasts of Israel who would accept it.

The Particulars

The self-seeking guests of the preceding section (14:7-11) would not even be allowed to attend the dinner by the end of the parable.

The class distinctions made in Israel (discussed in parable of good Samaritan) are appropriate here. The original guests would be the inner three circles - Priests, Levites and “Joseph Jew.” The outer circles would be the replacement guests.

The traditional double invitation would refer to the OT prophets prediction of Messiah and the Kingdom and Jesus’ claim to be Messiah and announcement of the kingdom.

References to poor and crippled and blind and lame sound like Isa 61:1-2.

There was more than enough room for all the outcasts, but no room for the original guests who refused the invitation.

The dinner went ahead as scheduled. It was not postponed. Could this mean that the kingdom was not postponed?

Dispensational Explanation

- The prophets gave advance invitation to the Jewish nation. They predicted the coming Messiah and his kingdom. Isa 40:3

²The numbers correspond to the three character types in the parable and the three parts of the central truth.

- John the Baptist's announcement of the arrival of Messiah and Jesus' claim to be Messiah and His announcement that the kingdom was at hand was the 1st invitation. Both John and Jesus quote from Isa 40:3 What was the Jewish response? - They rejected the Messiah and his offer to come into the kingdom (i.e. banquet)
- The Disciples gave 2nd/3rd invitation- Acts 3: Only the outcast Jews and Gentiles responded. References to poor and crippled and blind and lame sound like Isa 61:1-2.
- Banquet in the Millenium.

The Principles

For Unbelievers:

- The original guests missed out because they were preoccupied with their own lives. The things they were concerned with were legitimate, but should not have dominated their lives. We need to be sure we are not doing the same thing.
- What is your response to the invitation? What might happen if we put off accepting the invitation? What happened to the ones who made excuses in the parable? They didn't get to go to the banquet at all. Principle: Those who reject God in this life will not get a second chance.
- If you haven't responded, what is hindering you? What are some reasons people put off accepting the invitation?
 - ◇ Pride - like the 1st group of invitees?
 - ◇ New Field = Materialism
 - ◇ New Oxen = Business
 - ◇ New Wife = Family

For Believers:

- If you have responded, what is your attitude towards those less fortunate than you? Don't be proud if you are on the inside. You are only inside because others refused the invitation. This is not denying the sovereignty of God, but Paul himself says this in Rom 11:11&18.
- What is God's attitude towards sinners? --towards us, even in our sin? God is pursuing us. What was the attitude of the host? What should your attitude be towards the social outcasts? In the parable just before ours, Jesus said that when we throw a party, we should not invite those who can reciprocate. Instead, invite only those who cannot pay you back. Who are the ones who attend the banquet? They are the poor, lame, blind, etc.
- If God invites you and me to dinner, what does that say about us? What does this say about you if you have responded? What is our "social" status? Could we return the favor? We are outcasts. We don't need to worry about being good enough to be there. No one is. Principle: Just as the replacement guests could not reciprocate and were the recipients of grace, so we also are recipients of the grace of God.

Counting the Cost

The Passage:

Luke 14:25-33

The Parameters

The lame excuses of Israel's rejection in the parable of the Great Supper.

The acceptance of the invitation by the outcasts.

Those who want to accept the gracious invitation need to know that there will be a cost in following God/Jesus.

The context of discipleship.

Luk 14:33 says, "So, therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions." This shows the point of the previous verses. Verse 31 begins with "or" which takes me back to vs. 29 which begins with "otherwise" and takes me back to vs. 28.

The Problem

What kind of dedication is required to be a committed disciple of Jesus Christ

The Progression

Ideological: The need to count the cost

The Commitment (25-27)

Love Christ

Love Hate concept - cf. Gen 29:31f, Deut 21:15-17, Judges 14:16, Eccl 3:8, Mal 1:2-3, Rom 9:13, Luke 16:13. All these passages show a priority choice. It is the greatness of the love that makes everything else seem like hate. You forsake all others when you marry your wife.

Carry the Cross

What does carrying a cross mean to this audience before Christ was crucified? It means being willing to be despised and even killed. Carrying the cross was an act of submitting to the state.

The Construction (28-30)

What kind of tower? A watch tower. What would your neighbor's think if you began to build a watchtower and only laid the stones in a circle and quit. You wouldn't have much of a tower and everyone would laugh at you. Underestimation of the cost could result in embarrassment.

The Conflict (31-32)

Underestimation of the cost or the power of the enemy could result in death. Saddam Hussein principle.

The Cost (33)

What is the cost? Everything I have. It is the recognition of the true ownership of one's possessions.

In Acts 2 and 4 it says no one claimed that what he owned was his own. They didn't put all their stuff in a big pile, they just recognized that they were stewards, not owners. Same message as the parable of the rich fool. This was not communism. Communism is Satan's substitute for this.

The Conclusion (34-35)

How do you lose the saltiness in salt? Only by diluting it in lots of water. Only by compromise. When I fail to give up my possessions, I compromise my self and lose my witness.

The Point

The true disciple of Jesus Christ is one who has counted the cost of commitment and recognizes that all that he is and has is a stewardship from God which is to be used as a means of outreach in this world.

The Relation of the Parable to the Kingdom Program of God

A disciple of the kingdom is one who lets nothing stand in the way of his dedication to Christ.

The Particulars

Love/Hate relationship

Watchtower imagery

The Principles

- Loving Christ above all other relationships is the priority of discipleship.
- The cross becomes the focal point of identification with Christ. His death is key. Gal 6:14
- Discipleship is not a free expedition.
- I need to recognize the true owner of all my possessions.
- The failure in my stewardship from God will cost me my effectiveness for God.

The Lost Sheep, Coins and Sons

Introduction

Life is full of surprises. There are the fun surprises like birthday parties and Christmas gifts. And then there are the surprises that you experience that reveal something about who you are and who your God is. Those are the kinds of surprises that Jesus gave to people in His parables. When he told a parable, it was to answer a question or to deal with an attitude, and most of the parables had surprise endings that drove right to the heart of the issue and to the heart of the individuals listening.

Jesus is dealing with a question and an attitude in the three parables we are going to study today. So turn in your Bibles to Luke 15.

The Talmud said, “All the prophets prophesied only for repentant sinners, but as for the perfectly righteous, who had never sinned at all, the eye has not seen, what God has prepared for him.”

The Talmud taught that a person *could* live a sinless life. The Pharisees believed that they were perfectly righteous, that they had not sinned. Therefore, they really despised the sinners and the tax-gatherers. What was wrong with being a tax-gatherer? A tax-gatherer was a Jew working for Gentiles and that was bad. In that culture, the word tax-gatherer was synonymous with sinner because tax-gatherers were Jews who had sold out to the Romans and collected taxes for them. In the eyes of the community, a tax-gatherer was a thief.

Jesus habitually ministered to the sinners, and it bothered the Pharisees. They concluded that Jesus could not be from God because God did not like sinners. The unspoken question is this: “What is God’s attitude towards sinners?”³

So Jesus tells three parables to show why He eats with outcasts. In them He will answer the question about God’s attitude towards sinners. And he will deal with the Pharisees self-righteous attitude and their condemnation of others.

The Lost Sheep

- He is saying this tongue in cheek.
- He is assuming it is true for the sake of the illustration or argument.
- When He says righteous, He really means self-righteous.
- And He is setting them up for later.

The Lost Coin

These two parables deal with the question of God’s attitude towards sinners. *God’s attitude towards the sinners and tax gatherers is that they are very valuable to Him and He is searching diligently to find those who are lost.*

Now Jesus tells another parable that is directed right at the Pharisees self-righteous attitude. Let me read this parable from a different translation:

The Rebellious Son In The Key Of F

Feeling footloose and frisky, a foolish fellow forced his father to fork over his fourth of the family farthings and flew far to a foreign field where he fast frittered his fathers fortune feasting foolishly with faithless friends. Fleeced by his fellows and folly, and facing famine he found himself a feed flinger in a filthy farm. Flushed and fairly famished he fain would have filled his frame with foraged food from farm fodder.

³Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 100.

“My father’s flunkies fair far finer.” The frazzled fugitive forlornly fumbled. Frustrated and filled with forboding, he fled forthwith to his father. Falling to his father’s feet he forlornly fumbled, “Father, I have flunked and frugalessly forfeited family favor.” The fugitive’s, faultfinding brother frowned on fickle forgiveness, but the faithful father figure filled with fidelity, cried, “The fugitive is found. What forbids further festivities. Let the flags unfurl and the fanfares flare.” Father flagged a flunky who fetched a fatling from the flock and fixed a feast.

The moral of the story is: The father’s forgiveness formed a foundation for the fugitive’s future fortitude.

The Lost Son

The Lost son

Vs 12 - We probably don’t appreciate the gravity of the request that this son makes when he asks his father to divide the inheritance. He as much as tells his father that he wishes he were dead. What does the father do? He divides his possessions between his two sons giving 1/3 to the younger and 2/3 to the older son. The younger son leaves.

Why does the son do this? Because he doubts the capability and goodness of his father. He thinks he can do a better job of managing his own life than the father can. This is a perfect picture of our natural heart which resists the rule of God in our life. We want to be independent. The questions we need to ask ourselves are:

- How am I being independent? Is it with my finances? A sinful habit? Looking for happiness in other things, etc. We cling to things that we do well or things that we think are meeting our needs or make life work and refuse to depend on God and let Him meet our needs.
- Why am I being independent? I think it is because we doubt the goodness of God. I think that is the reason the son left. He doubted the goodness of his father, and he thought he could handle life better on his own.

Vs 13 - The son squandered his father’s possessions. He couldn’t manage his life better than his father. This is a good picture of the fact that life lived outside of God’s will is a wasted life.

Vs 15 - The son ended up working for a Gentile and feeding some pigs. Remember that this parable is dealing with the Pharisees attitude about tax-gatherers (Jews working for Gentiles). So Jesus brings details into the story which show us that he is still dealing with the issue in 15:1-2. This is also a good picture of how we end up serving other things when we refuse to serve God. We can never be independent. We will always serve something - either God or money (Jesus says in the Sermon on the mount).

Vs 17 - The son comes to his senses and realizes that he was wrong. He will go back home and see if his father will at least let him work as a servant.

The Father

Vs 12 - The father let him go - knowing he would fail and hoping that he would come back. This shows the graciousness and patience of the father.

I’ve heard that if he did come back, in that culture the father would have been expected to do one of three things: (1) stone the son, (2) turn him away or (3) make him a slave. This was a bad Jewish boy and he needed to be made an example of. If this is true, then the son is hoping for the last option - make him a slave.

Vs 20 - Instead, this father diligently watches for and anticipates the return of his lost son. When he sees his son coming, he runs to meet him. In this culture it was undignified for a man to run. But this father was not concerned with losing face.

Jesus came to earth to find us and was willing to lose face. He suffered the most humiliating death known to man.

When the son is found, he rejoices. Notice there is no comparison with heaven because this is the Father that he is talking about.

Notice in verse 22 that the father interrupts the son before the son can pledge his service. All that is required is repentance and return, not works. Lordship Salvation focuses on verse 19.

The younger son may not have had full repentance when he was in the pig farm. He wanted to come back and work for his father - maybe with the hopes that he might be able to earn enough money to buy back his part of the land. But when

- he sees his father's humiliating sprint down the road towards him,
- sees what he has done to his father,
- sees his father's unconditional acceptance,
- sees the lavish gifts his father bestows on him,

Then *he recognizes his father's goodness* and realizes that he could never "earn" his father's favor or inheritance. It was already his. He just needed to accept it.

Let me read a Song by Michael Kelly Blanchard. It is a good, modern day picture of a prodigal daughter

THE PICTURE

By Michael Kelly Blanchard (*The Maze*)

Now I've been a problem since Momma died, angry and restless and sad.
She was instantly killed on the passenger's side, with barely a scratch for Dad.
We'd yell and yell till he'd hit me good,
And the lights would go on in the neighborhood.
It got so bad I wished that I could . . . but then Daddy did. . .
Now Gramma was a lot like Mom, heart of gold in a tiny frame.
She took me in when there weren't no one, and when I got in trouble she shared the blame.
Never cared much for my looks...
The kind of girl for bums and crooks...
Fish around till I'd get hooked ... what a life to live.

Chorus

There's a picture of Jesus on my wall.
It's been there since I was very small.
He looks like He just saw a little girl fall.
And you know He don't look angry at all.
I work swing shift in a bearing plant, got my friends and I got my foes.
I'd like to leave but I know I can't, and that's just the way it goes.
Got pregnant by a married man...
Broke my heart and trashed my plans...
But when I hold that tiny hand ... it don't seem so bad.
Gramma watched for the first three years, till she got a killing flu.
He got real close so she could hear, "Gramma I love you"
Maybe 'cause we missed her so...
Maybe 'cause . . . I don't know...
I let another baby grow ... never told his Dad.

Repeat Chorus

There's this man at work I see every night, says God gonna judge me for my sins.
And I believe he's probably right. Yes I know that I've disappointed Him.
But every now and then I'll stare...
At that picture of Jesus hanging there...
And a kind of hope fills up the air,...like He loves me anyway.
When I was little I used to play down by a meadow pond.
A big blue heron would fly away, whenever I would come.
Kind of thought that's like God and I...
I Show up He starts to fly...

But now when I look in Jesus' eyes ... almost think that He would stay ...
I almost feel like I could pray.

Repeat Chorus

Those of us who are in trouble can approach the Father.

This parable of the Lost Son not only shows what kind of repentance the Father responds to, but *it also shows the way the Father responds to repentance.*

A writer named Kenneth Bailey pointed out that this parable is told on two giant chiasms. The first one deals with the younger son and the second deals with the older son.

The Younger Son

- 12 A Son is Lost
- 13 A Wild Party
- 14 Desperate Need
- 15 Sin
- 16 Total Rejection
- 17 Recognition of Need
- 18 Return
- 20 Total Acceptance
- 21 Confession
- 22 Total Provision
- 23 A Planned Party
- 24 A Son is Found

In a chiasm the emphasis is in the center. Notice what is in the center of this one. The repentance of the son. He first recognizes his sin and then returns to the father. In the first two parables, Jesus talked about the repentance of sinners, and there was no repentance. Now we see the repentance.

Repentance is:

- recognition of one's need
- return to the father
- revelation of sin (confession)
- response of humility

Heb 6:1-2 Repentance from dead works and Faith toward God. It is the attitude that I can't, but He can. Repentance and Faith are two sides of the same coin.

Now we come to the last half of the parable:

The Older Son

We talked about the chiasm in the section dealing with the younger son. Let's go ahead and study the dialog between the father and older son with the help of the chiasm:

The Older Son

- 26 Suspicious
 - 27 Safe and Sound
 - 28 The Father's Effort
 - 29 Self-righteous (Me)
 - 30 Judgmental (Him)
 - 31 The Father's Effort
 - 32 Alive and Found
-

In verse 26 we see the older son comes home and asks what is going on. A servant tells him that his brother has returned and everyone is celebrating. The older son is angry so the father goes out to him to plead with him to come inside.

Let's look at the older son's response in detail:

Vs 29 He says, "Look!" which is disrespectful of his father.

His attitude was that he was "slaving." This is not just the word for work. It is the term *doulos* which means to slave. He didn't understand what it meant to be a son. He didn't understand grace. He was trying to earn his inheritance or something.

He claims to have never disobeyed a command of the father's. This was undoubtedly not true. He did not recognize his own sin. It is also very indicative of the Pharisees' self-righteous attitude that they were above reproach. And this ties us back to the 99 righteous in 15:7.

He claims that the father never gave him anything. In essence, the older son is saying the same thing that the younger son said. He wishes the father were dead so he could have his stuff. But remember that the father had already divided the inheritance between the two sons. This son actually had a double portion.

He says "that I might be merry" - this shows that he wants to have joy without repentance.

And who does he want to be merry with? With his "friends," not his father or family.

Vs 30 He is resentful of the good treatment that the father is giving the younger son.

The center of the chiasm points us to the most important point of the parable. The center of each focuses on the responses of the sons.

- In the first chiasm the center was the repentance of the younger son. He recognized his sin and returned to the father.
- In the second chiasm the center was the self-righteous, self-justification of the older son and his criticism of the younger son.

Vs 31 The father reminds him that he had already given him everything.

Vs 32 The father explains why he is celebrating and then there is no response from the older brother. The absent response of older son leaves you hanging. God is waiting to bring the religious leader in.

The last chiasm is incomplete you are left hanging with a question in your mind. "What is the older son going to do?" *It is part of the surprise ending.*

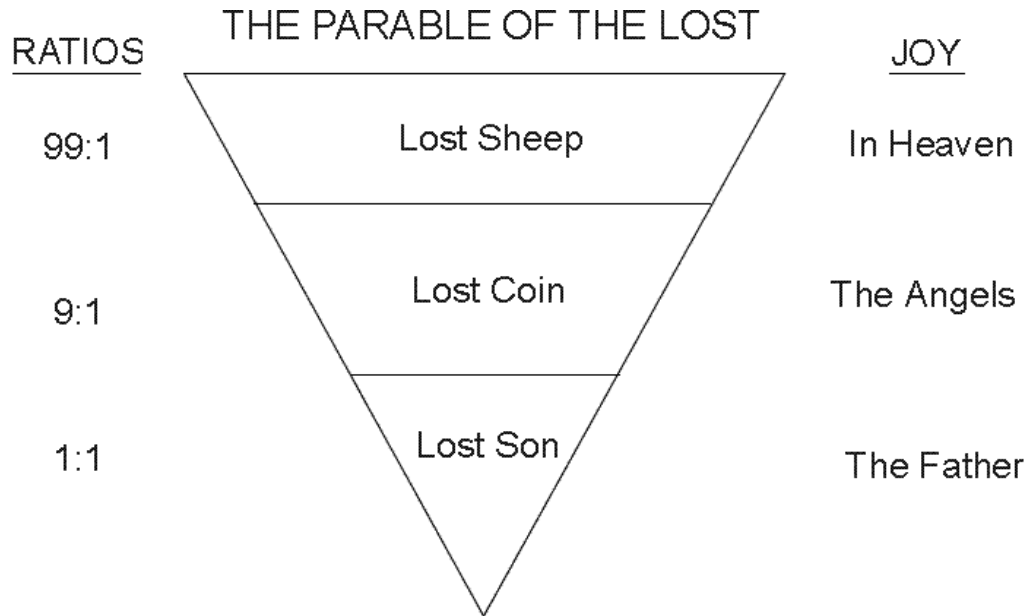
Jesus uses several other devices to bring in the element of surprise.

A pattern is developed and then changed in the end:

- lost, found, rejoicing
- lost, found, rejoicing

- lost, found, rejoicing, resentment

The older son resents his father's acceptance of the prodigal son. He does not rejoice like the shepherds in the first parable, nor the woman and her neighbors in the second parable, nor does he rejoice with the father and the rest of the family in the end. The parallelism breaks down. *And we are surprised.*



Christ receives sinners because

He knows the perspective of heaven

He joins the chorus of the angels

He shares the Father's heart and rejoices when one sinner repents,

In the first parable the ratio is 99:1. Only one is lost.

In the second parable the ratio is 9:1. Only one is lost.

In the last parable, you think the ratio is 1:1 until you get to the end and find out that it is 0:2. Both sons were actually lost. What does that say about the 99 righteous? And we are surprised again.

What is your attitude towards the older brother? If this were a play, what would your reaction be? I think there are three responses that a person might have:

- *You could cheer!* You might agree with the older son and think he is right. It is not fair that his faithless brother gets a big party when he, himself, had worked so hard for his father. If we agree with him, then our hearts are revealed. We are just like him. We do not understand our own sin and we do not understand grace.
- *You could boo and hiss.* You might condemn the older son. When you really analyze his statement in verses 29-30, you see he is evil too. But if we condemn him, our hearts are revealed again. We have the same self-righteous and judgmental attitude that he had.
- *You could cry.* The proper response is sadness for the older son. We should want him to come inside too. If we don't have that attitude, we don't share the perspective of the father who rejoices when one is saved.

The Point

God actively seeks to bring all into His kingdom, but only those who recognize they are lost will enter the kingdom of God. And we need to remember that the kingdom will be composed of a community of repentant sinners.

The Principles

- We must be careful that we do not despise nor neglect those with socially unacceptable lifestyles because they are valuable to God.
- We should expend great effort to bring the lost to salvation. This parable should make us want to share the gospel. If we were really concerned for the lost, we would.
- We should be excited when a sinner repents.

Paul says, “In the same way you received Christ, so walk in Him.” The Christian life is a series of “salvation-like” experiences. I don’t mean you lose your salvation and get saved again. I mean that the growth process involves repeated recognition of need, recognition of our independent spirit and returning to the Father in faith that He is good and will provide for us.

Sometimes we are like the prodigal son. We doubt the goodness of God and take our gifts and leave God and go out to try to find life and happiness through some other means -- it could be our work, our family, legitimate or illegitimate relationships, substance abuse, etc. We need to come to our senses, recognize that it is not working, that we are in need and turn back to God. When we do, he will accept us with open arms. He will take us back. Remember this: I am a prodigal son every time I search for love and happiness apart from the Father.

Sometimes we are like the older son. Maybe our sins are not as obvious as the younger son’s. Ours are on the inside. They are sins of attitude. We think that we are doing a good job, but we are comparing ourselves to really bad people. We can always find someone else whom we think is worse than us, and we think we are ok. But the conversation between the older son and the father revealed that the older son had the exact same attitude as the younger son. He just didn’t carry out his innermost desires. But just having the attitude left him on the outside. We need to evaluate our attitudes. Maybe there are some we need to repent of. There is a danger in becoming proud and self righteousness which blinds one to the need of repentance.

Conclusion:

The point of the first two parables in which a lost sheep was found and a lost coin was found emphasized the effort of God in finding the lost. In the third parable, the Father finds the prodigal son, who repents, but the father also goes outside to find the older son and the question we are left with is Will the older son repent? Repentance is not just about being found. It is only the context in which the heart can move. The Pharisees needed to examine their own hearts. We need to examine our hearts. And that is the surprise ending.

Miscellaneous details

The banquet imagery as the father celebrates the return of the younger son parallels the banquet imagery of the messianic kingdom. Link to previous parable about the great banquet and refusal of the invitation.

THE YOUNGER SON

¹¹ Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons.

He sets us up when he only deals with the younger son first.

¹² The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.	A son is lost
¹⁴ After he had spent everything,	A wild party
there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. (Josephus records 19 famines between 169 BC and 70 AD.)	Need
¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.	Sin - gentile subservience, uncleanness of pigs.

16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.	Total rejection
17 “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!’	Recognizes need
18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: (1)Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 (2)I am no longer worthy to be called your son; (3) make me like one of your hired men.’	Decides to get help Note the three things he wants to say.
20 So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.	Total acceptance His father has been looking for him.
21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’	Repentance
22 “But (father interrupts him before #3) the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. (Note that the father interrupts before the son can add the part about working. The father is not going to treat him like a servant. Does God treat us like servants? No. The ring on finger was a signet ring showing family membership. Sandals - only a servant put on sandals for someone else. Remember John the Baptist said he was not even worthy to put on Jesus’ sandals.)	Total provision
	A Planned Party
24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate. (When he says the son was lost - in that culture, what the son did would result in a declaration by the family that the son was “dead” but now he is back and “alive.”)	A son is found

25 “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field.

When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.	Suspicious
28 “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. (notice the effort expended by the father to go find the older son)	The father’s effort
29 But he answered his father, ‘ <u>Look!</u> (disrespectful) All these years I’ve been <u>slaving</u> (not joyful obedience) for you and <u>never disobeyed</u> (oblivious to own sin) your orders. Yet <u>you never gave me</u> (self-centered) even a young goat so I could <u>celebrate</u> (enjoyment w/o repentance) <u>with my friends</u> (not with family).	Self-righteous proud “Me”
30 But when this son <u>of yours</u> (distancing himself) who has squandered your property with prostitutes (how did he know?) comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’	Judgmental “Him”

31 “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. (covenant status of Israel - remember that the father divided the inheritance earlier in the parable)	The father’s effort
	What is the older brother’s response going to be?

The Unjust Steward

Somebody defined money as, “an article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven and as a universal provider of everything except happiness.”⁴ People think that if they just had more money, life would be better because then they could buy all the things they wanted and that would make them happy. Do you know anybody who doesn’t want to win the Lotto? Do you know anybody that thinks winning \$10 million would make them miserable? Luke 16 gives us two parables that deal with money and tells us the proper way to spend it if we have it.

The Passage:

Luke 16:1-13

The Parameters

- A steward is one who manages another’s wealth. He does not own it, he uses it for the profit of his master. As Christians we are stewards of what God has given us. We do not own it.
- The audience is the disciples. Therefore, this applies primarily to saved people.
- The younger son squandered the family inheritance and I think there may be a link to the word squandered in 15:13.
- This follows the parable of the lost sons where the younger one “wasted” his life and inheritance and the older son “spent” his life slaving for his father. In our parable we will see the importance of “investing” your money.
- There is a warning to the Pharisees concerning their love of money following this parable in 16:14-17.
- The parable of the rich man and Lazarus follows with its emphasis on eternity.
- The danger of squandering money, loving it too much and eternity are the backdrops to the parable.

The Problem

Some people say that the problem is that the steward forgot he was a steward and began using the money as his own. I don’t think that is what the passage is really about. It doesn’t say he was using it for his own. It just says he wasted it. Perhaps one of the ways he wasted the money was by spending it on himself, so the idea might be included in the parable, but that is not the emphasis. If the emphasis is not on using the money for himself, then what is it?

I think the main problem is related to the emphasis on eternity following the parable. The main problem is that the steward did not work with a view to the future. He assumed he would always have that job and was not careful with the stuff entrusted to him. If he’d believed he might be fired for poor performance, I can’t help but think he would have performed better and been more careful with what was entrusted to him.

If you know you are about to lose your job next month or might lose your job next month, you are not going to go out and take out a loan on a new house, go out to eat every night, buy a new set of golf clubs or a big screen TV, or whatever. You are going to spend money only on what you must. You will live with a very real sense of what the future holds for you. If you are being evaluated, you will perform your job diligently so that you receive a good evaluation and don’t get fired. This steward was not thinking about the future until he got his pink slip.

I think the emphasis in our parable is on eternity and using money for eternity.

So, the question is: How can believers be shrewd in dealing with their money?

⁴ quoted from Wiersbe, *Be Courageous*, p. 35.

The Progression

Chronological and logical

The problem for the present (1-3)

The master heard that the steward was not performing properly and told him he was fired, but before he left, he was to prepare his books for an audit.

We've already mentioned that we don't know how the steward squandered the money. Suffice it to say that he was caught and in trouble.

Verse 3 - The steward said to himself, "What shall I do..." I think it is significant that this steward recognized his problem. He did not try to deny that it was happening, hope it would go away, hope the master would forget, etc. He is now looking to the future and he knows that the future holds trouble. And he doesn't procrastinate once he hears the bad news. It seems that animals have more sense than humans in this area. They go south or store up food for the winter, but most humans live for the present and don't worry about the future.

The unsaved people spend their lives denying that God exists, denying that there is a hell, denying their sin problem, etc. If they really believed there was a problem, that they were going to go to hell, I can't help but think that they would do something about it. That is why we sometimes say, "You have to get the unsaved person lost before you can get them saved." They deny reality and don't want to worry about the future.

The believers have a different problem. They know there is a heaven and hell. They worried about it enough to get their life insurance. But now they need to recognize that they are going to be held accountable for their stewardship of what God has given them.

The dishonest steward lived like he wouldn't ever be held accountable. Now he knows he is in trouble, so what does he do?

The plan for the future (4-7)

He prepares for the future. He decides to make some friends. He does this by going to those who owe his master money and giving them big discounts. Then, when he leaves his present employment, perhaps these business acquaintances will hire him.

Notice also that he acted immediately. He did not delay in making preparations for his future. We have a tendency to think that there is plenty of time to get right with God or put off giving what we should to the church. We think things like..."I'll just finish paying off that loan and then I'll start giving more ... or ... After I get the \$5000 in the bank for emergencies then I'll start giving more ... or ... After we replace the _____ then we can start giving more" If we get into that mode, there will always be something that we think we need NOW and never prepare for later.

The praise for the shrewdness (vs. 8)

Some have problems with the praise that is given to the steward because it seems Jesus is praising the steward for being dishonest. First, we can point out that it is the master in the parable and not Jesus doing the praising. Second, if you understand the culture, you know that he wasn't being dishonest by giving the discounts to the master's debtors.

How was he shrewd? Why was this not dishonest? Israelites were not to charge interest to their fellow citizens (Ex 22:25; Lev 25:36, Deut 15:8, 23:19). But they were charging interest. They did it by lending a person \$80 but making them sign an IOU for \$100. From Josephus we know that olive oil was a very volatile commodity and they charged 100% interest. The interest rate on wheat was 25%. That matches the figures Jesus used. Therefore, all the steward did was drop off the interest. He was shrewd because the master couldn't turn him in for anything illegal, because he wasn't supposed to charge interest in the first place. The master still fired him, but he certainly did the debtors a favor.

I've heard that this kind of stuff still happens today in Israel. In Israel it is illegal to milk a cow on the Sabbath unless you only do it for the cows benefit. How do you know if it is for the cows benefit? The elders have determined that

you can do it for the cows benefit by milking her and letting the milk fall onto the rocks. So, they made a law that you must milk a cow on the rocks on the Sabbath. Shrewd Israelites sterilize rocks, put them in the bottom of the bucket and milk the cow on the rocks. There are always ways to get around the law if you want to. They should have left the principle or spirit of the law in place rather than define a specific action as fulfilling the principle.

We do the same thing when we make a rule that you can't drink any alcohol. The Biblical principle is that we keep the Holy Spirit in control and not get drunk and be controlled by the alcohol. So we don't drink but substitute alcohol with something else.

Verse 8 - How are sons of this age more shrewd? Many people do plan for their earthly retirement. But most Christians are not planning for their heavenly retirement.

vs. 9 Jesus says, use your money to make heavenly friends. This is the point of the parable.

The Point

Christians ought to be shrewd in their stewardships and use earthly finances to make heavenly friends.

Do you realize that when your stewardship is finished here on earth, you will have to leave everything behind and go to a place where the only thing you can send ahead are people.

The Relationship of the Parable to the Kingdom Program of God

We derive our understanding of the relationship of the parable to the Kingdom of God from verses 10f.

In the kingdom, rewards and responsibilities will be given to those who demonstrated a faithfulness in their earthly entrustments. If you squandered your resources while on earth, you will not be given much responsibility in the kingdom.

We should invest our money in evangelistic purposes so that when we go from here to eternity, we will have friends there to welcome us.

The Particulars

vs. 11-12 - There are lots of people who have no respect for the property of their landlords and tear up the house. There are government project houses in which people live for free or next to free and they do the same thing. I've heard people say that the solution to this is to actually give them the houses and once they are their own, then they will take care of them. What does this parable say about that?

The Principles

- The money of this world should be used as a ministry for the next. Temporary fortune should be invested to secure eternal friends. You can't take it with you. The only thing that you can take with you is people. (vs. 9)
- Money management is not a little issue. It is loaded with implications. Money is the sight glass (on the coffee pot) of our lives. Let me see your checkbook and I'll tell you your priorities.
- Faithfulness in *stewardship* will be rewarded with true *ownership*.
- The worship of God and gold is mutually exclusive. Why is it mutually exclusive? If gold is your god, then your major motivation will be to get it for yourself. If God is your god, then your major motivation will be to give it.

This is a great parable about stewardship.

There is a story about a man crawling across the desert and he comes to a rusty old pump with a little glass jug of water with a lid on it and a piece of leather parchment. He grabs the jar of water and just before he drinks it, he reads the parchment which says, "Stop! Don't drink this. Use the

water in the jar to wet the leather gasket on the pump. Then you can pump as much water as you like for drinking. Then fill the jar up and leave it with this note for the next traveler.

That is a good illustration of how we often want to use our money for instant gratification but wise use of our money will reap far greater rewards.

I think the parable of the unfaithful steward is subtle, but significant. Some say that the servant was cutting out his commissions when he reduced the debts. That might be true. The master probably got most of the interest being charged, but I'm sure some of it went to the steward. Therefore, when the servant cut his commission out of the transactions, there was nothing in it for him in the short term. Everything went to the master. Perhaps we could make the application or analogy that we give our money to missionary or charitable causes, we might not see any benefits now, but it can reap rewards later.

What was the response of the Pharisees to this parable? They were laughing at Jesus. And Jesus condemns them for only worrying about the present and what men think rather than the future and what God thinks. This sets us up for the next parable.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

The Passage:

Luke 16:19-31

The Parameters:

Jesus had just given a parable about wealth and taught that you cannot serve both God and money. The Pharisees were lovers of money (Luke 16:14) and scoffed at Jesus. So He tells them another parable about trusting in money. He even begins it the same way he began the last parable - with the phrase, there was a certain rich man...

Jesus had also taught that while the Pharisees looked at the outside, God looks at the heart. (Luke 6:15)

Jesus made a comment in verse 16 about the law and the prophets being proclaimed until John.

Although most people think of future things when they think of the prophets, what the prophets primarily did was condemn Israel for oppressing the innocent and the poor. They proclaimed the importance of loving ones neighbor. This parable will portray one who does not do that.

Jesus also says he is preaching the gospel of the kingdom and makes a comment that everyone is forcing his way into it. This means that everyone is trying to get in. What we will see is examples of someone who gets in and someone who doesn't. Jesus condemns the wrongful love of money in the Pharisees who thought that riches were synonymous with righteousness.

The Problem

We always talk about the attitude and question that Jesus is dealing with in his parables. In this one the attitude he is dealing with is the Pharisees attitude towards their wealth. They thought wealth was a sign of spirituality and blessing from God. They also thought that poverty was a result of sinfulness and cursing from God. They were sure that poor people were not going to go to heaven.

What is Gods attitude towards the Pharisees who were devoted to money and took great pride that they had it? Would they enter the kingdom of God? What does it take to enter the kingdom (i.e. go to heaven)?

The Progression

Chronological or Logical - there are contrasts between the two characters in their earthly life and the after-life.

Earthly Life

Rich Man - Dressed nice, ate well, lived it up every day. He was on the inside.

Lazarus - dressed in rags, hungry, struggled to survive, oozing sores -- therefore unclean, too weak to fight off the dogs. He is on the outside.

After-Life

Lazarus - In Abraham's bosom - in heaven - happy - banqueting imagery (reclining next to Abraham at a banquet). He is on the inside.

Rich Man - In Hades - tormented - on the outside.

Note the reversal of the earthly situation. Notice also that the eternal situation is irreversible. There is no second chance. What does this say about the Catholic doctrine of purgatory? The rich man is in Hades which is a place of torment - a holding tank for hell. Death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire. Rev... But you can't get out.

Notice in vs. 24 that the rich man is still trying to order Lazarus around. He wants God to send the poor man to minister to him. His attitude hasn't changed. I wonder what that says about repentance after death? Will there be any? Or will people in hell also burn with anger?

The Point

Social status and material possessions are no guarantee of ones standing with God. The only thing that matters is a right response to the Word of God.

The Relation of the Parable to the Kingdom of God

Entrance into the kingdom is dependent on ones faith in Jesus to whom the Scriptures point, not on ones relationship to Abraham.

The Pharisee did not listen to what the prophets said about the coming Messiah nor about how to treat their neighbors. It was the lack of love that illustrated he had no regard for the prophets. He was counting on his relationship to Abraham.

The Particulars

- In present life there was no chasm between Lazarus and the rich man. In fact Lazarus was begging just outside the rich man's gate. The rich man could have gone out and helped Lazarus any time he felt like it. But in eternal life there is a great chasm separating heaven and hell. Jesus uses space to emphasize that this gap is uncrossable and permanent. Notice also that it prevents those who want to go from heaven to hell (to show mercy) can't.
- Lazarus "laid at the man's gate" which indicates he was crippled or lame. He was also poor. According to the Pharisees, people were poor, lame, sick, etc. because they were wicked. It proved not to be the case.
- The rich man was not with father Abraham in paradise like he thought he would be. Jews - and especially the Pharisees - thought they were guaranteed entrance into heaven because of their physical relationship to Abraham.
- The rich man did not listen to the law and the prophets which taught about how to love one's neighbor (Micah 6:8). He did not love his neighbor. We know from the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 that loving one's neighbor involved helping one who was down and out like Lazarus was.
- The prophets also predicted that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, be the friend of outcasts, etc. (cf. Micah 5:2f; 4:6, Isa 61:1-2). This was also emphasized in Luke 14: and 15:1. The rich man rejected that truth also. He was too good to be the friend of outcasts.
- The rich man knew his brothers weren't paying attention to the OT scriptures either and thought they would be convinced if Lazarus came back from the grave. In fact, there was a man named Lazarus who was raised from the dead in John's gospel. (This is the only parable in which a character is named and I'm certain Jesus did so because he knew he would raise Lazarus.⁵) It did not convince them. They wanted to kill him again. Jesus was also raised from the dead, and they were not convinced.
- Rich man knew Lazarus in real life (we know that because he knew his name in heaven) but he ignored him.
- Treatment of Lazarus on earth revealed the rich man's true relationship to God.

The Principles

Catholic principles

There is an immediate consciousness after death.

⁵ Some argue that this is not a parable because a character is named. But those who argue thus do not understand that minor variations from the literary motif do not mean it is not a parable. The variation is there to emphasize something. In this case it draws attention to Lazarus who was raised.

Post death destinies are irreversible. There is no purgatory where you wait until your relatives bail you out.

Charismatic principles:

Signs are never a guaranteed cure for unbelief. If your heart is not open to the word of God now, a supernatural experience won't help. That is what John Wimber and those in the signs and wonders movement are looking for - signs to make people believe. They have actually said, "If we can only get someone to come back from the dead..." My question is how many do we need? If it did happen, even true believers would be skeptical.

Faith comes by hearing and believing the word of God. Not from seeing miracles. Jesus said, "They have the law and the prophets..."

Christian Principles

- True religion demands social compassion. We need to evaluate our attitudes towards those in need. It reveals our status and relationship with God. The problem with most evangelicals is that they have over reacted against the liberal "social gospel."
- The realities of the after-life include torment and blessing. Not annihilation or neutrality. Some people today are teaching a doctrine of annihilation.
- Disappointment and disease are not necessarily a sign of God's displeasure.
- We need to evaluate our attitude towards wealth. What are we depending on? Do we think being rich means we are right with God? We need to worry more about eternity.
- God's word is our source of information. It is enough, don't look for supernatural signs.
- The decisions of this life are final and determinative. There are no second chances where heaven is concerned.
- Luke 16 is not just about money or wealth. That is what everyone labels it. But when you really understand the chapter the key element in both the parables is personal relationships. With the parable of the steward the issue was making friends for eternity which would fall under the heading of evangelism. With this philosophy one of the most worthwhile things you can give to is missions. When you give a donation to sending Bibles to India or China or sending missionaries out, you are making friends for eternity. I have to wonder if when we all get to heaven if people saved through the ministry of some missionary are going to find the ones who supported the missionaries financially and say thank you. Ray Boltz has a song entitled *Thank You* where this guy gets to heaven and all these people come up to him and thank him for the time he took to teach Sunday school where they first heard the gospel.... Maybe God will give us the knowledge of all who contributed to our salvation so we can thank those that allowed themselves to be used by God. Think of the joy that will bring to you when someone comes to you and says, I wouldn't be here without your help. Thank you so much!
- In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the rich man should have used his money to help Lazarus. But he only used his money for his own enjoyment. It says in vs. 19 that he dressed in the latest and best fashions and spent all his money on partying and buying expensive things for himself. Since Lazarus was the righteous one in the story, it is not about evangelism, it is about edification. It is about what the rich man should have done to build Lazarus up. He should have tried to help Lazarus.
- If you remember the summary of the parabolic sayings, the last two were about the dragnet and the householder. Those two parabolic sayings emphasized the disciple's responsibility for evangelism and edification. We see the same theme repeated here.
- Both stories are really about whether or not we love others. One of the barometers of how we love is how we spend our money. The question to ask ourselves is - Who do I love? The answer can be found by going through our check register.

The Unprofitable Servant

The Passage:

Luke 17:7-10

The Parameters

Preceding context - Offences and forgiveness (17:1-4)

Jesus has just told the disciples, if their brother sins against them seven times a day, they need to forgive him. Their response is “Increase our faith!” Jesus points out that faith is not the issue. If they had faith as big as a mustard seed, they could do anything. Jesus is not making a commentary on their faith or lack of faith. He is correcting their statement. He begins verse 7 with “but” which shows that in contrast to this being an issue of faith, it is an issue of something else.

Following context - Lepers cleansed with only a thankful Samaritan (17:11-19)

The point of this miracle and the response of the nine Israelites compared to the one Samaritan is that the Israelites thought that their healing was deserved and were not grateful while the Samaritan knew he was unworthy and therefore was grateful.

The Problem

Jesus is dealing with the attitude that believes forgiving one’s brother is above the call of duty and requires special faith.

The Progression

Logical: the expectation of the slave relationship.

The rhetorical question (expecting a negative response)

The regular expectation (expecting an affirmative response)

- Prepare the meal
- Clothe yourself
- Serve the master
- Eat after serving

The rhetorical question (expecting a negative response)

The revelational application (expecting an affirmative response)

When you do the things commanded of you:

- Recognize your unworthiness
 - Realize your obligation
 - Implied - Don’t expect extra rewards
-

The Point

A disciple acts in faith when he does not expect extra rewards for faithful service to the Lord as His master.

The Relation of the Parable to the Kingdom Program of God

As a disciple of the kingdom, one needs to understand that faith comes in obedience to the Word of God. To increase one's faith is not a quantitative consideration but qualitative commitment. Even a faith the size of a mustard seed will have extraordinary results. A disciple, like a slave, must recognize one's proper place in relationship to the King and serve out of loyalty to the relationship and not out of expectation for the reward. A relationship with Christ is the result of a relationship based on the grace of the Master and not on the worth of the servant.

The Principles

- Gratitude for the grace of God should outweigh all other motivations. If someone gave you \$10,000 as a gift because you were in a bind financially, and he saved you from foreclosure or some such fate, what would your attitude towards that person be? If he asked you to do him a favor, a month or so later, would you feel inconvenienced? or would you be glad to do it? I suspect if something that tangible happened, you would really feel the gratitude, etc. Why aren't we awestruck with God's gift to us?
- Faith ought to be demonstrated by obedience. If I believe God, I'll do what He wants me to do.
- Don't expect extra reward for expected service. The issue is my attitude. When I serve, is my motivation rewards? or gratitude? If it is primarily rewards, I am a mercenary. We need balance. Both motivations are valid.
- My submission to Christ should reflect His absolute Lordship over my life.
- True servanthood demands that I put the interests of Jesus Christ before my own.
- The time and skills of the servant should be at the disposal of the Master.
- Even rewards are a demonstration of God's graciousness and enablement.
- What follows this parable is an account of the healing of ten lepers. It is not a coincident that it follows this teaching. Jesus' miracles always illustrate what he has just taught or is about to teach. We discussed it in the introduction, but now maybe the miracle that follows will take on new significance. Jesus has just taught that obedience comes from the gratitude of an unworthy person. Now we see ten lepers healed and only one returns to say thank you. Why?

The Unjust Judge and the Persistent Widow

The Passage:

Luke 18:1-8

The Parameters

Instructions on the coming of the Son of Man (17:22-37)

The following parable on prayer (18:9-14)

In that day judges traveled around and held court in tents. They set their own agendas and about the only way to have your court case heard was to bribe one of the attendants to bring your case to the attention of the judge. This widow had a couple things working against her. She was a woman, and women were low on the social ladder. She also had no money to bribe the attendants, so her case was not heard.

The Problem

What is the relationship between praying and losing heart? I think this teaches that if we do *not* pray we *will* give up.

Therefore the problem is: How can we keep praying and not lose heart?

The Progression

Logical: What is the cause of answered prayer? What are two reasons why people give up too soon?

The Unjust Judge (the reason requests are not answered)

Secular

He did not fear God

Selfish

He did not respect men

This man is the exact opposite of what we know to be the two greatest commandments - loving God and loving your neighbor.

The Persistent Widow (the way requests are made)

Her coming

She is persistent. Imperfect tense in Greek. She keeps on coming.

Her case -

She just wants justice. She is not asking for the advantage. She is just asking for justice. We all want justice. We all want life to be fair. I can't count the number of times my daughter says that something is not fair when she sees her brother get a bigger pile of potato chips, a bigger piece of cake, one more of whatever.... It is an inborn desire for things to be fair.

The Unjust Judge (the reason requests are answered)

The judge does not answer because he cares about God, justice or the woman. Jesus is using boxing imagery here for wearing a person down by hitting him under the eye. The judge is not concerned with a knockout, but she is wearing him down. He answers because she is annoying him.

The Just Judge (The reason why requests are answered)

- “Now shall not God bring about justice” (vs. 7) -- The first reason is because of the character of God. He is just. Jesus used an example of an unjust judge as a contrast with God who is just. God can be trusted to be a just God--to make right decisions. Psa 145: God covers his acts with hesed (loyal-love).
- “for his elect who cry to Him day and night.” (vs. 7) -- Jesus used a widow as an example again to set up a contrast with us. He argues from the lesser to the greater. If an unjust judge (who is not like God) will hear the case of a widow and stranger (which we are not) then surely God will hear our prayers. God has graciously initiated a relationship with his children. He chooses who he wants in His family, and He will listen to His children.
- “and will He delay long over them?” (vs. 7) -- While He may delay, His answer comes speedily. This does not mean they will be answered immediately. It means that when it happens it will happen quickly. Like the coming of the Lord will happen suddenly. Remember that the context is the coming of the Lord in Luke 17.
- The justice that is going to come speedily is possibly the tribulation.

What is the point of the question at the end of verse 8? “... when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

The Point

Persistent prayer is the demonstration of faith in God who, while at times may delay His answers, will always act decisively and justly with respect to His people.

The Relation of the Parable to the Kingdom Program of God

God is just. The second advent will bring justice. Our part is to wait in faith for Him to deal with the world in justice.

The Principles

It is important to understand that this parable is one of contrasts. If you don't you will think God must be pestered, argued with and bribed in order to get your prayers answered. The parable is not teaching that. God *wants* to answer the prayers of his children.

We lose heart because we don't understand God's timing or purpose. We ask questions like, “When... or Why now... or How could you...?” We challenge the justice and goodness of God.

This parable deals with two issues: God's character and God's chronology.

Persistent prayer is the demonstration of faith in the character of God's attributes and the chronology of his actions.

This parable teaches that the only legitimate reason to stop praying for something is the return of Christ. (vs. 8) It says, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” The demonstration of that faith is persistent prayer. When you stop believing a prayer will be answered, you stop praying. You have given up hope. You have no faith.

What items have dropped off your prayer list that you need to put back on?

God is a loving father who wants His children to keep coming to Him. If you are a parent, you should be able to identify with that.

A Comparison of events in Matthew and Luke show much similarity in sequence and give a probable time when the parable was taught.

The Pharisee and the Publican

The Passage

Luke 18:9-14

The Parameters:

Jesus had just told a parable about prayer.

The Pharisees were self-righteous and viewed others with contempt.

The teaching concerning receiving the kingdom as a child (18:15-17).

The Problem:

The attitude: self-righteousness

The question: How do we approach God in prayer?

The Progression: Biographical

The Pharisee

His Status

You must understand the culture. The Pharisee was one of the most respected people in that society. Everyone thought the Pharisees were very righteous. We forget that because all we hear about the Pharisees is what the NT says and it's not very kind to them.

His Stance

He approached God with familiarity (he was standing when it would seem more appropriate to kneel or something).

His Soliloquy

He prayed "to himself." NIV says "about himself" but "to himself" is better. It is a better translation of the Greek and it better represents what is going on because God certainly was not listening.

His Self-importance

He compared himself to others and was very condemning of others. The Pharisee made the wrong conclusion in his comparison between himself and the tax gatherer. The Pharisee was unaware of his own sins, but very aware of other people's sins. This is very characteristic of a self-righteous person. We saw it in the parable of the lost sons. The older brother thought he was blameless and pointed to his brother's sins.

The Pharisee in our passage was depending on his works feeling that they gained him favor with God.

What he did not do

He was not a swindler, unjust, an adulterer and he did not commit treason like the tax-gatherer

What he did do

He fasted twice a week. How many fasts were dictated by the law? Only one per year - on the day of Atonement. And that is the day this man will miss.

He paid tithes on his gifts. He is double tithing. If it is a gift, someone else has already paid a tithe for it. If he gives another tithe, he is basically saying that your tithe was not good enough and I don't trust you. He covered all his bases.

PRINCIPLE: Righteousness is not the result of self-righteous activities one might perform.

Corollary: Righteousness is not the result of the things you don't do. If you have that attitude it is legalism. If you want to be a church member you have to agree not to do the nasty nine. If you want to be a leader in the church, you have to avoid the dirty dozen.

Righteousness is not the result of what you do or do not do.

If it is not what I don't do and it is not what I do, then "what is it?" becomes the question.

The publican gives us the answer.

The Publican

The Publican was probably the least respected member of society. He was a Jew who went to work for Rome collecting taxes. He was viewed as a traitor.

His position

He stood at a distance. He was afraid to approach God, knowing that he was unworthy.

His posture

He was unwilling to lift his eyes. This showed his humility.

His passion

He was beating his breast - which in that culture was the outward sign of an inward pain in one's soul. The day of Atonement was the day when you did this. You fasted and went around beating your breast because of the pain in your soul.

His plea

He asks for mercy from God. He says, "Be merciful to me, the sinner." He does not say "a" sinner because he does not compare himself to others. As far as he is concerned he's the only sinner before God. That is genuine humility. He literally says, "Be propitiated towards me." Propitiated means be satisfied. He knew that only God could help him be righteous. (Rom 3:23-25) Jesus Christ was the answer to this man's prayer.

This word for propitiation is the word used to describe the mercy seat - the lid on the ark of the covenant. The ark contained the ten commandments. All year long the people broke the law, and then on the day of atonement, blood was spread on the mercy seat to cover the sins of the people. It is Christ's blood that covers our sins. Jesus Christ is the propitiation for the world 1Jn 2:2.

Principle: Justification is that gracious work of God whereby He extends mercy to the repentant sinner who comes to Him in faith.

The Pharisee did not understand that only God could help him be righteous.

The Pronouncement

Jesus stated that the one who exalts himself will be humbled and vice versa. The Pharisee, who was socially acceptable, was not acceptable to God. The publican (who was a social outcast) was acceptable because of his humility.

Principle: Exaltation is the future promise of present humility.

The Point:

Entrance into the kingdom of God is granted only to those who humbly accept the gracious satisfaction of God which HE has made for sin.

The one who exalts himself will be humbled and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

The Program Of God:

Entrance into the kingdom of God is dependent on recognition of sin and dependence on the mercy of God, not dependence on one's own merit.

The Principles:

- Jesus told a parable in which the most respected member of society went away unjustified while the most despised member of society was justified before God. Why? In the parables Jesus deals with two groups of people - the religious and the rowdy. There is no sin too great that God can't forgive and there is no religiosity good enough to merit God's favor. Jesus deals with the issues of legalism and grace throughout the parables.
- Religious activity is not a sign of spirituality. Just because people pray does not mean they make contact with God. External rituals, giving, etc. do not earn merit with God.
- We need to guard against a self-righteous attitude.
- When we compare ourselves with others, we usually draw wrong conclusions.
- We need to humble ourselves now, or God will do it later.

Right after Jesus tells this parable, Luke relates how people were bringing their children to Jesus. And Jesus says, "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all." You enter the kingdom with humility and trust. Humility comes from recognition of unimportance and in that society children were insignificant. And children are typically very trusting. So Jesus is saying one needs to come to God with humility and trust.

Notice the disciples are telling people to get their children out of there. They had the same attitudes as everyone else.

Then Jesus meets the Rich Young Ruler who says, "Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" What did we just learn in the parable? It is not what you do or do not do. The young ruler thought he had kept the law all his life. He thought he could get to heaven by his works, so Jesus points him to his sin.

When the man leaves, Jesus says, "It is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a sewing needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom."

The disciples ask "then who can be saved?" because they are still flirting with the theology of their day which says rich guys are rich because they are righteous and so the rich have an advantage.

"With man it is impossible, but with God it is possible." This is first said by God concerning Sarah and the miraculous birth of Isaac. The next time it is mentioned is with Mary and the miraculous birth of Jesus. Now we have the same phrase. Why? are the birth of Isaac, Jesus and being born again all linked? Because they are all the miraculous work of God. Man can not do it.

There are two attitudes that keep people from coming to Christ. "I don't need it because of what I've done." or "I can't get it because of how bad I've been." Jesus goes after these two attitudes all through the gospels.

The parable of the Unjust Judge and the persistent widow teaches that we should keep going to God in prayer, trusting in His justice, love and timing. He will answer in the best way for us and in the best time.

This parable deals with our attitude in prayer. We are not to come to God proud, expecting God to answer quickly and when He doesn't we will become angry...

Instead we should go to God in humility - grateful for his mercy, expecting Him to answer but waiting on his timing - knowing that he knows best.

The Laborers in the Vineyard

The Passage

Matt 20:1-16

Matthew	Luke
18:Forgiveness	16:Divorce
19:Divorce	17:Forgiveness
	Obedience/Service
	18:Pharisee and Publican
Children brought	Children brought
Rich Ruler	Rich Ruler
Peter's Question	Peter's Question
20:Laborers in the Vineyard	Promise of rewards
Rank in the Kingdom	Teaching about Jesus' death
Healing of two blind men	Healing of two blind men
21:Triumphal Entry	19:Triumphal Entry

The Parameters:

Jesus meets the Rich Young Ruler who says, "Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" What did we just learn in the last parable? (Pharisee and Publican) It is not what you do or do not do that justifies you in God's eyes. The young ruler thought he had kept the law all his life. He thought he could get to heaven by his own works. Jesus ignores that question because the man can't get saved until he knows he is lost. So Jesus tells him that he must sell everything he has. The purpose of the demand was to point the man to his sinfulness and inability to earn eternal life so that he could then receive the free gift of eternal life from Jesus. The man can't bring himself to do that and leaves.

When the man leaves, Jesus says, "It is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a sewing needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom." The disciples ask "then who can be saved?" because they are still flirting with the theology of their day which says rich guys are rich because they are righteous and so the rich have an advantage.

So, after hearing Jesus' discussion with the rich man about giving away all his property, Peter says, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" The disciples have a mercenary ministry. They want to know what their reward will be. After all, Jesus had said there would be treasure in heaven (Mat 19:21). What does Jesus say? "Peter, shhhh, don't ask that question." No, Jesus tells them that they would be rewarded. They would sit on thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

But Jesus also warns them that the first would be last and the last would be first and begins the parable. And the phrase, The last shall be first and the first, last. concludes the parable.

The Problem:

What does it mean that the last will be first and vice versa? What will be the reward for those who give up everything and follow Jesus? Can I trust God to be fair in the distribution of rewards? If you are asking the question, then you really don't trust your employer.

The Progression:

Chronological - The parable emphasizes the times that the laborers were hired. Mark Bailey calls this parable, “A day on the job in the kingdom of God.” (because the work takes place throughout the day and the payroll is at the end of the day.)

The Landowner hired laborers early in the morning (6:00) and made an agreement with them to pay them a denarius for the day’s work. It says the *owner* agreed which makes me think the workers asked for the denarius and he agreed to it.

The Landowner went out again at 9:00, 12:00, 3:00 and 5:00 and asked others if they would like to come to work without indicating what they would earn, only that he would be fair (vs. 4). If the first guy is going to get 1 denarius for 12 hours work, what do you expect the 2nd group to get? 3/4, then 1/2 then 1/4 and then 1/12th respectively.

At the end of the day, the Landowner went to pay them and started with the last group. He gave them each 1 denarius. What do you expect the next group to get? Three denarii. The next group six, and the next nine and the first group that was hired expects to get 12 denarii. But he gave everyone the same amount - one denarius - regardless of whether they had worked one hour or twelve hours.

Those hired first complained and accused the owner of being unfair.

But the owner justifies his actions:

- on the basis of agreement - they agreed to work for a denarius. The owner calls him “friend” which in Matt is not a term of endearment.
- on the basis of ownership - can I do what I want with what is mine?
- on the basis of generosity - can I be gracious to whom I want to be gracious?

How much did those hired in the middle of the day or at the end of the day agree to work for?

None of those hired late made a deal concerning how much they would be paid. And all of them got more than they expected or deserved. But the ones who contracted for a denarius got exactly what they bargained for.

What should we conclude? If you want more than you contracted for, don’t contract. It is the same old issue of legalism versus grace. We think we want legalism or justice, but grace is so much better.

Jesus ends with the proverb - “the last shall be first and the first last.” Which means, if you are striving to be first, you won’t make it.

Perhaps the parable in Luke 17:7 is applicable here too. In that parable, the slave was expected to work and not worry about thanks or payment. Here too, the lesson seems to be to just work and not worry about rewards or payment.

The Point:

We are to serve God faithfully and let him worry about the reward.

The Program Of God:

Whether you come in early or late, you can still enter and enjoy the benefits of the kingdom of God. One’s faithfulness will determine one’s function in the future.

I think this parable also relates to the issue of Jews and Gentiles in the kingdom. The Jews had been working for God for over 2000 years already and it did not seem right that God would let these Gentiles in at such a late hour and give them all the blessings of the kingdom. The attitude of the Jews, was that they had earned all the blessings of the kingdom by keeping the law all those years.

The Principles:

The landowner represents God and thus we learn about God’s character.

Three characteristics of the consummate CEO:

- We see that God is just - He treats everyone fairly. We can trust God to be fair. But God is more than just.
- God is sovereign - He can do what He wants. He didn't need to go to that intersection to get those workers. He could have gone elsewhere. God chose Jacob over Esau while still in the womb. If we understand who owns everything and that he could have chosen others, that should bring appreciation for the opportunity to serve. It should also eliminate comparison and pride - it was grace that I was chosen.
- God is generous. That should eliminate pride. If one person has more than another, that doesn't necessarily mean that they deserve it.

How would you like to work for someone who was always fair, always in control and generous to boot? Guess what - We do!

Principles for the Payroll:

- We need to be faithful since merit is taken into account at the judgment. 1Co 3: says there will be rewards. We can't throw out rewards just because we have one parable in which all received equal amounts. This doesn't teach that there are no rewards, it teaches the grace and generosity of God. I've been a Christian about 30 years and have gone to seminary, taught Sunday school, and seminary classes, preached, been an elder, etc. But if someone comes to Christ today and one week from now, Jesus returns, and that person was faithful 100% of the time, he could receive more rewards than me. God will treat me fairly and I won't be able to say, "You didn't give me enough." He can be gracious to a latecomer, give them an hour of opportunity and reward them for 100% faithfulness and that is fair. Why would I want that to be true even when I'm 33 years old and have been a Christian for 30 years? If I die tomorrow, am I at a disadvantage to those that lived to be 100 and were Christians 95 years? No. It is not length of service that is important. It is one's attitude and motivation. 1Cor 4:5
- This doesn't just apply to time, it can also apply to ability. Jesus said some will produce 30,60 and 100 fold in Matt 13. If I don't have the brains nor skill of someone like Chuck Swindoll, but I'm faithful, I could receive as many or more rewards.
- There will be grace and I need to be thankful. We should serve and let God worry about the rewards.
- We should not despise those who are saved at the end because they are valuable too.
- I think too often we have the attitude that we obligate God by our actions - by our obedience - by our service, but we don't, and I think God's distribution of rewards will undoubtedly reverse many expectations.

At the beginning of the parable, Peter wanted to strike a bargain with Christ to find out what he would get. He wanted to know up front. "What's in it for us?" Jesus is telling him "You don't want to know" because if Peter had made a deal with Jesus, it wouldn't have been as much as if he had just served faithfully.

Do you think that the disciples understood what Jesus was teaching with this parable? Did they learn their lesson? Not at all. In the very next scene in Matt 20, The sons of Zebedee (James and John) came to Jesus with their mother to ask if they could sit at Jesus' left and right hand in the kingdom. What are they asking? If they can be first in the kingdom.

I think we can apply the principles from this parable to more than just length of service. It also applies to types of service - our spiritual gifts. 15 minutes in the nursery from 12:00 to 12:15 may earn more rewards than preaching for 50 minutes. Endurance earns more than eloquence.

The Ten Pounds

The Passage:

Luk 19:11-27

The Parameters

The triumphal entry into Jerusalem is about to happen. He is on the road to Jerusalem and is approaching the city.

When Herod the Great died, he left his reign in the hands of three people: Philip, Herod and Archelaus. Archelaus was to rule over Judea. There were a group of Jews that did not want Archelaus to rule because of his wickedness, ego, etc. Before Archelaus could take the throne, he had to be confirmed in Rome by Caesar that it was his right to rule in Judah, so he had to make a trip to Rome. There was a group of Jews that went to Rome to see Caesar to complain about Archelaus. Caesar let Archelaus go ahead and take his throne and when Archelaus went back to Judah, he killed all those who had complained. That is the historical background of this story.

The Problem

The disciples were under the impression that the kingdom of God was shortly to appear and Jesus was going to establish the kingdom on earth during his life. Jesus told this parable to correct their mistaken notion. (c.f. 19:11)

The Progression

The nobleman goes away to receive a kingdom. The NIV has translated this wrong. He is not “appointed” king. He already is king. He was born king. It is like the Archelaus story. Archelaus was already born king. He needed to be confirmed or approved by Caesar.

The nobleman gave each slave three months wages. Notice each one is given an equal amount. What they are told to do is “put it to work” until he returned. They will be held accountable when he came back.

In vs. 14 the citizens complained. Certainly the hearers of this parable would be able to identify with the Archelaus parallel.

vs. 15 The nobleman came back and wanted to see what his slaves had done.

The first slave

1000% return on his money. He receives a commendation and gets 10 cities to rule over.

The second slave

500% return. No commendation. He gets 5 cities. His reward is fair. Reward according to merit.

Third slave

Another slave (e{tero" another of a different kind) kept the pound hidden. He did not use it or invest it. He charged his master with greed and getting profit for what he didn't earn. The master judged the slave for not acting on his own conclusions. He tells the slave that he should have put it in the bank and then he would have drawn interest - which is what? ... earning profit without working... The slave is called worthless and his money is taken away from him and given to the one who earned ten pounds.

Mat 13:12; 25:29; Mar 4:25 and Luk 8:18 all say that to whomever has, will more be given and whoever does not have, what they have will be taken away. This parable helps explain those passages.

The third slave lacked understanding / faith - he did not act on what he knew. What you don't use, you lose. He lost the opportunity to do any more.

Those enemies of mine are the ones who outright rejected the king. They are judged more severely than the wicked slave.

I think the third slave represents Israel who thought that God was a hard master. They had this complicated legal system which was a burden to live under

The Point

The Messianic Kingdom has been postponed, but the responsibilities of the subjects has not.

The Relation of the Parable to the Kingdom Program of God

In light of the postponement of the Messianic Kingdom, each disciple has been given an equal entrustment to be invested in the Kingdom, knowing that the King will return to reward faithfulness and to remove the enemies of the kingdom. Those found to be faithful to their responsibilities are given more responsibilities in the kingdom.

The Particulars

Bema seat - strictly for rewards. At the Olympics, those that win get gold, silver and bronze medals. Those that don't win, don't get punished, they just don't get medals. What are we going to do with the rewards in heaven? Pentecost says we will cast them at the feet of Jesus. The more rewards we get, the better we will be able to worship.

The Principles

- How are we equal? All of us have one life and the gospel message that we need to share. All of us have spiritual gifts to use.
- Though the kingdom is delayed, its future is certain. So, don't blow off the kingdom - seek first the kingdom.
- Christ has delegated responsibilities for the present and we will be evaluated at his return.
- Faithfulness now, brings proportionate rewards later.
- Unfaithfulness will result in loss of rewards
- Open rejection merits severity of punishment. Somehow, there will be hotter places in hell.

The Two Sons

The Passage:

Matt 21:28-32

The Parameters

The Pharisees had just challenged Jesus' authority and He responded by asking them to identify John the Baptist's authority. They refused to say that JB's authority was from heaven because they didn't like JB nor what he preached. But verse 25 shows that they knew what John was proclaiming - that Jesus was the Messiah. They refused to say that John's authority was from Satan because they feared the crowds. So Jesus refused to answer them. But he tells a parable.

The Problem

What is the reason for the lack of response to JB in Israel?

How does one demonstrate that he is a son of the kingdom?

The Progression

Biographical -it's about two sons

What does it mean to be a son in this parable? Does being a son = being saved? No. Many think when they read a parable and see that someone is a son or a servant that that means he is a Christian. But in this one and the prodigal son, being a son does not equal salvation.

First Son

- Verbal commitment
- Actual disobedience

Who does the first son represent?

The first son represents the religious leaders who said "I will obey the law" but didn't. In fact, their claim was not that they will obey, but that they "did" obey it - all the time. That was the claim of the Pharisee in parable about the Pharisee and the publican praying.

But Jesus taught otherwise. The whole sermon on the mount and many of the controversies with Jesus showed that they were not obeying the law. The verbal commitment of the first son is not a statement of faith. It is representative of the Pharisees who by their actions were saying I don't need to do any more than I'm already doing. But what they were doing was following ritual. They had substituted ritual for righteousness. This is the message of the prophets (Micah 6:8). By the time of Jesus the religious leaders thought that eternal life came from studying the torah.

Second Son

- Verbal rejection
- Later repentance

Who does the second son represent?

He represents the sinners, harlots, tax gatherers, and all the outcasts. The outcasts initially were saying by their life style that they didn't want to follow God. But when confronted by their sin, they changed their mind (repented) and believed.

Jesus' Question

What is Jesus trying to do with his question?

When He says that tax collectors and harlots are going to get into the kingdom before the religious leaders, how should the religious leaders feel?

Jesus is trying to make the religious leaders jealous. (Rom 11:11) When the leaders saw these kinds of people repenting, changing their lifestyles, etc., it should have made them wake up. But they weren't convicted, they felt threatened. They didn't want the kind of kingdom Jesus was offering. The next parable will tell us what their motivation was.

The Point

Regardless of one's background, repentance and faith are what qualifies one to enter the kingdom of God.

The Relation of the Parable to the Kingdom Program of God

Same as above

The Particulars

It was God's purpose for the people to respond to JB but they rejected it. (Luke 7:30) There was a legitimate offer of the kingdom. They didn't accept, so God replaced them with the Gentiles (temporarily).

Is this parable teaching works salvation? If not, how do you explain that it does not? After all it was the son who went to work that got in. How do you get in? The parable is not teaching works salvation, vs. 32 says to believe. That is the "work" in this parable. The leaders would not believe the message.

"A son does not a believer make" in this parable. The scribes and Pharisees are one son and the other son is the harlots and tax gatherers. Both were sons. One entered the kingdom and the other didn't. Don't assume because the word servant or son is used in a parable that it is equal to believer.

The Principles

- Repentance, faith and obedience are more pleasing to God than self-righteous ritualism.
- Repentance and faith are demonstrated by obedience. John 15:14
- Past lifestyles of the repentant are no disqualification from the kingdom.
- God extends grace to down-and-outers to incite jealousy and faith.
- God honors faith rather than false profession. That is a controversial statement these days with the Lordship Salvation debate going on, but I think the false profession here is that the religious leaders said they followed God, but they wouldn't follow His Son. This will be elaborated on in the next parable.

The Rejected Son

The Passage:

Matt 21:33-44 (Mark 12:1-11, Luke 20:9-18)

The Parameters

- This parable is similar to Isa 5:1-5.
 - This is the passion week. Jesus, the Son of God, is about to be killed.
 - Jesus had just condemned the leaders for not believing John the Baptist while the tax gatherers and harlots had. That should have motivated the leaders to get with the program.
 - Jesus introduces the parable (in Mat) with the words, "Listen to another parable." Therefore, this parable is somehow connected to the preceding parable. It is connected in the following ways: It is a further indictment against the leaders who said they followed the Father, but didn't. This parable also gives more insight into the reason why the religious leaders didn't believe John and didn't receive Jesus.
-

The Problem

Why didn't the leaders accept Jesus?

To what extent did God appeal to Israel as His servants? How hard did God try to save Israel?

What will be the ultimate result of their rejection of their accountability.

What will God do to those who reject Messiah?

What will happen to the kingdom?

The Progression: Biographical

The characters in the story are representative of real people.

Landowner

I think Jesus is making an allusion to Isa 5:1-5. Therefore, the Landowner represents God. Some of the parallels that we can see between the landowner in the story and God:

- Details of vineyard preparation demonstrate the vineyard owner was generous and gave the vineyard keepers everything they needed to operate with.
- The wall and tower represent protection.
- The owner went on a journey. His going away gave them opportunity to produce, to be fruitful. This possibly represents God's setting Israel in the promised land and being less "visibly" involved than during the exodus. The leaders had the stewardship of the nation.
- The vineyard owner was trusting because he trusted the tenants to keep their end of the bargain and He sent a slave to collect what was due.
- Mat 21:34 says "when the harvest time approached..." This gives the impression of imminency. Israel was always anticipating the coming of the Messiah.

Vine-growers

Represent Israel's leaders who were the keepers of God's revelation and promises.

Servants

Represent God's prophets who were sent time and again with the message of repentance, but Israel did not listen and killed some of them. (e.g. Amos 7:10) John the Baptist is the last in a long line of prophets. The previous parable and discussion about the authority of John are relevant here. It is not possible to identify who the servants represent exactly (i.e. former prophets, latter prophets, etc.) The emphasis is on the repetition.

Son

Represents Christ, who came to do the same thing as the prophets which was to "collect the fruit" of repentance and gather those who would follow Him. Instead the vine-growers killed Him.

Notice the phrase, "afterward" or "Last of all." That has a ring of finality for which judgment is deserved (also cf. Heb 1:1-2).

Matthew emphasizes heirship. The father assumes they will respect the son because of their father/son relationship. Mark and Luke emphasize "beloved son." The unique relationship of Jesus to God expects good treatment.

The Rejection

The recognition of the heir (vs. 38). The vineyard keepers knew this was the son. The religious leaders knew who Jesus was. Pilate understood this. He knew they killed him out of jealousy. I think we usually think that the leaders didn't really know who Jesus was, but this parable indicates that they knew and wanted control of the nation for themselves. They weren't willing to submit to Jesus' leadership.

The resolve to kill him. It was planned.

The reason for their action. They wanted to have the inheritance. They wanted to control Israel. They probably also hated him for what he said at the Sermon on the Mount.

The result - They took him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. The order is not important. (Matthew and Mark are different) It is the imagery that is important. The killing is because of rejection.

The Response of the Owner

Jesus pulls a Nathan and they take the hook. He asks them what the owner will do and they get it right, because it is obvious. They should have known better. I think we often just assume the Jews didn't know who Jesus was, but this and other passages show that they did know and rejected him. Therefore, they really do deserve judgment.

Jesus gives them a little stab. He asks the teachers of the scriptures, "Have you ever read your Bible?" and quotes Ps 118:22f and Isa 8:14-15. He uses building imagery of builders (religious leaders) rejecting a stone (Christ). God would take what they rejected and build a whole new structure around it.

Therefore (vs. 43) the kingdom would be given to another nation. Who is the nation? It is not Israel because this word is never used of Israel. It is not Gentiles because it is singular. Cf. 1Pe 2:4-9 We are neither Jew nor Gentile. We are a new creation with a citizenship in heaven.

The Point

Those who reject Christ will be replaced by others. "Because of the rejection of Christ, Israel is doomed to judgment and is replaced in the Kingdom program of God (for the present) by those who will demonstrate the fruits of faith." (Bailey)

The Relation of the Parable to the Kingdom of God

The Jewish leadership and Israel who followed them, who rejected the Messiah, would be replaced, and the kingdom would be given to the Jewish outcasts and/or Gentiles who believed that Jesus was the Messiah.

Principles

The vineyard owner was patient and sent several slaves and finally his own son. He didn't come and destroy them after the first messenger was abused. But, the vineyard owner (God) is just and will punish the evil. Therefore, we can conclude that God is patient. He gave Israel many chances. But don't presume upon the patience of God.

Be careful not to abuse the privileges that God has given us. He might replace us with someone who will produce fruit.

Don't be proud that we are included. It only happened because the original group rejected. Rom 11:11? says if we get cocky, He might cut us off.

The quote from Ps 118: showed that the rejection was predicted. Jesus was not supposed to be a surprise to the nation. The prophets had been coming time and again to get the people ready, but they ignored, rejected or killed them.

The leaders were not convicted by this parable, they were infuriated. This shows their hardness.

This parable speaks of human privilege (all that God has provided for us to accomplish His work), of human freedom (He has left us the freedom to make our own choices of how we want to accomplish the tasks), of human responsibility (there comes a day when we will have to answer to God for what we have done.) and it tells of the deliberateness of human sin (sin doesn't just happen.) (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 263.)

The Marriage Feast

The Passage:

Matt 22:1-14

The Parameters

This parable is preceded by a parable about two sons - one who said he wouldn't work and then did afterward, and one who said he would go to work and then never did. We saw that the "work" was to "believe." This parable referred to the leader's rejection of the message of John the Baptist and their rejection of Christ.

It is also preceded by the parable of the vineyard owner. In that parable the vineyard keepers killed the owner's son. This was symbolic of the religious leaders rejection of Messiah. Consequently, the Kingdom would be withdrawn from Israel and given to a nation who would produce fruit. That nation is the church which is comprised of the outcasts and Gentiles.

Therefore, the context to our parable is salvation and entering the kingdom (cf. 21:31).

The Problem

Since Israel is rejecting her Messiah, what will happen to those who reject? What does it take to get in the kingdom? The Jews are missing the kingdom, how does one not miss it?

The Progression: Ideological or Chronological

The Invitations to the originally invited (1-8)

The First invitation (2-3)

The original guests refused to come because they were unwilling. In that culture, to reject the invitation of a king, was treason or a declaration of war. This is a serious offense.

The first invitation was actually not the first. An advance invitation went out telling of the coming feast. This is not pictured in the story. It is understood as part of the culture. Those who had received the advance invitation had ample time to prepare for the feast. They had no legitimate excuses. (This is symbolic of Israel having plenty of advanced warning that the Messiah was coming - i.e. the prophets). The first invitation in the story is really the one saying that dinner is served. (This is symbolic of JB and JC saying that Messiah and the kingdom are here.)

The Second Invitation (4-6)

The King gave second chances to the original guests. The original guests are representative of the nation of Israel. The King represents God who extended the invitation to enter the kingdom and partake of the feast. The fact that He makes another invitation shows his patience. It also shows the graciousness of the host who took care to explain that all was ready and how great the feast would be to entice them to attend.

They refused because of apathy. They did not care. The excuses:

- one to his farm
- another to his business
- the rest seized and killed the servants.

Having a farm or your own business is not bad. It is being preoccupied with these temporal things and forgetting about the eternal. They were guilty of materialism and apathy. Then they killed the messenger. They moved from apathy to antagonism. Mat 23:35, 2Ch 30:1-10.

The Reaction of the King (7-8)

His Anger

Sent his armies

Destroyed the murderers

Burned the city

This is the typical war or destruction motif of the Old Testament. What is the result of rejecting the invitation? Destruction. This did in fact happen to Jerusalem in 70 AD (about 40 years later).

His Attitude

Those who were invited were not worthy. What makes one worthy? To Matthew, worthiness comes through reception of the invitation. A right response to the message. In the parable about the two sons, we saw that belief was what was necessary, so faith is the key to becoming worthy. Who makes you worthy? The one who graciously invited you. Worthiness is not the result of merit. It is the result of faith.

The New Invitation (9-10)

The Evaluation by the King (11-13)

The lack of preparation (11)

Barclay says that the wedding clothes are the good works and pure heart and life that one leads after becoming a Christian. He says it is not these that get you into heaven, but it is the respect you show God after you believe. (Barclay, *Matthew*, p. 270-271.) I disagree. I think the wedding clothes are not something we bring to the banquet because wedding clothes were often provided by wealthy hosts. (Gower, *New Manners and Customs of the Bible*, p. 69) Certainly God would be considered to be the most gracious and wealthiest host. It may be that this man refused to wear the wedding clothes offered. Perhaps he thought his own clothes were good enough. What might the “clothes” symbolize? Good deeds?

2Ki 10:22 and Isa 61:10 also talk about the dress or robes provided by the host. If you showed up for a banquet and you weren't dressed properly it showed that you came inadequately on your own provision and that you rejected the host's provision. See Hendriksen *Matthew* p. 797-98. Cf. Rev 3:4,5 & 18

Isa 61:10 says, “I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”

The loss of participation (12-13)

The king sees someone not wearing wedding clothes. In verse 12 the king calls him “Friend.” In Matthew, this is a term of distancing and condemnation. It's like “Hey, Buddy” or “Hey, Lady.”

Notice that the man is speechless when the king confronts him. Rom 3:19 says that “every mouth will be closed” when people stand accountable before God. Perhaps that is what Jesus is referring to.

They threw him into the outer darkness. The question is where is the outer darkness?

Some teach that this is the suburbs in the millennium. Zane Hodges in his book, *Grace in Eclipse*, says that those who show up at the banquet all made it into heaven, but participating in the banquet is only the privilege of those who have carried out their obligations as Christians while on earth. He also thinks the wedding clothes are something believers bring with them to the banquet. He equates the King's observation of the guests at the banquet to the Bema seat where Christ judges the Believers for their good works. The guy made it to heaven but can't partake of the banquet because he wasn't a good enough Christian.

Others teach that “outer darkness” is hell. Which view is correct?

What is the Outer Darkness?

Ask class to suggest arguments

IN HEAVEN (but just barely and not participating in the banquet)

For this to be true:

Being at the banquet cannot be equal to being in heaven. It must be some special event/reward for the faithful Christians.

The visit by the host must be an evaluation of Christian deeds (Bema). It is not the Son who is judging? It is the King. No other scripture teaches that any member of the Church won't take part in the marriage feast. Perhaps this evaluation is the Great white throne judgment which purpose is to determine eternal destiny. Not eternal privilege.

Wedding clothes must equal good deeds as a Christian. Rev 19:7-8 would support this idea but that passage is dealing with the church - after the Bema. We've just seen that that is suspect.

"Outer darkness" must equal the "darkness outside" the banquet hall, not hell.

HELL

Context of the preceding parables is about salvation. The issue is being in or out of the kingdom, not receiving special privileges in the kingdom.

Banquet imagery always refers to the Kingdom / Heaven. Therefore, partaking of the Banquet equals being in the kingdom, and being kicked out of the banquet means kicked out of the Kingdom. The statement by the man in Luke 14:15 and the parable of the Great Banquet which Jesus told right after that was about getting into the kingdom. Therefore, this parable is about getting into the kingdom / heaven - not about attending special events in the kingdom.

The King called the man "Friend." This is never a good term in Matthew. Therefore the man is not a friend.

Wedding clothes were often provided by wealthy hosts. (Gower, *New Manners and Customs of the Bible*, p. 69) It may be that this man refused to wear them. He thought his own clothes (i.e. deeds) were good enough. This fits the context of the parable of the two sons. The son who said he would work and didn't was symbolic of the Pharisees who thought they were doing enough already. Therefore, the wedding clothes provided by host symbolize the righteousness of Christ provided by God for entrance to Heaven - as opposed to our garments/merit which are not good enough to get us into heaven/banquet.

There is no darkness in Heaven. Therefore, the outer darkness = hell, not the suburbs of the kingdom.

"Weeping and gnashing of teeth" doesn't sound like the joy we are to experience in heaven. It sounds too severe for those who are in heaven. Also, in inter-testamental literature this term "weeping and gnashing of teeth" was a common idiom for hell.

"Outer darkness" and "gnashing of teeth" only used by Matthew and it means hell in the other passages in which it is used. Matt 8:11; 13:42,50; 24:51; 25:30. For example, Matt 8:11 "And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline [at the table] with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; 12 but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. " In that one passage we see banqueting imagery used for participating in the kingdom and the outer darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth used for hell.

In Matt 13: the phrase is also used and the context is the parable of the tares, dragnet, etc. This is also a kingdom/salvation passage.

Conclusion: For this man to be saved,

the banquet has to represent something it doesn't normally represent,

the evaluation of Christians is being done by the king (not the son as scripture teaches)

outer darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth have to represent something they don't normally represent

and the wedding clothes must be our own which is against the cultural norm where the host provides them. Rev 19:8 supports this idea but that is Bema seat context.

Therefore, we can conclude that this man is not saved. And, if this man is not saved, then this parable is correctly identified as a salvation parable - about getting into the kingdom - not about works one does as a Christian.

The Principle:

Jesus concludes with the statement: "Many are called but few are chosen." How do you know if you are chosen? If you believe. Therefore, acceptance of the invitation is necessary for entrance into the kingdom of God.

The Relation of the Parable to the Kingdom of God

This parable also shows the rejection of Messiah by Israel and the turning of God to the Gentiles with the offer of the kingdom. It is the same theme as the preceding parable (cf. 21:43). Those who refuse the invitation (who do not believe) will be excluded from the kingdom.

Application

God is gracious and patient and keeps on offering the invitation.

God has made the offer to everyone.

Do not presume on the patience of God. A time will come when it will be too late.

Do not be caught unprepared (i.e. not believing) when the feast begins.

Reasons for not believing:

Indifference - 3-5 - too busy with family, business, hobbies, etc.

Rebellion - 6 - similar to last parable. Perhaps they are becoming convicted of their sin and are rejecting the conviction.

Self-righteousness - The guest wouldn't wear his robe. He was independent. This also fits context with the parable of the two sons.

Parables in the Olivet Discourse

In Matt 24:1 Jesus and the disciples are leaving the temple and Jesus tells them that the temple will be destroyed. A short time later they are sitting on the Mount of Olives and the disciples ask Jesus to tell them when all this would happen and when would He return, and what signs should they be looking for to announce His return. Jesus' explanation is often called the Olivet Discourse. In it He explained some of the events of the tribulation and the Second Advent.

There are several parables that Jesus told during the Olivet discourse. It is crucial to understand the context of these parables or you will try to make application to the church, but these do not apply to the church. They apply to those who will be living in the tribulation and awaiting the return of Christ after the tribulation.

Context	Tribulation and 2nd Coming
Parable of Fig Tree	When you see the signs, the 2nd Coming is soon to follow
Watchful Doorkeeper Watchful Owner	Don't be caught off guard - watch! Watchfulness = Faith
Wise Servant	Faithfulness will be rewarded
Ten Virgins	You must have your own faith
The Talents	Faithfulness will be rewarded
Sheep and Goats	Gentiles will be judged for treatment of Israel

The Parable of the Fig Tree

The Passage:

Matt. 24:32-34; Mark 13:28-32; Luke 21:29-33)

The Parameters:

Matt 24:29-31 says that the events occur “after the tribulation” or “at the end of the tribulation” so we are in a post-tribulation time frame.

Jesus says “learn a lesson from the fig tree.” This does not mean interpret what the fig tree is.

Luke 21:31 says when you see all these things happening (in the tribulation), know that the kingdom of God is near. The tribulation ushers in the kingdom. (We don’t know it is a millenium until Revelation.)

The Problem

The question: What do these signs mean? What should the response of those who will see the signs of the Second Advent be?

The Presentation

This follows a logical progression: what is the expectation from the appearance of leaves?

Matt 24:32 When you see the leaves sprouting, you know that summer is coming soon. In the same way, when you see the signs which Jesus has been talking about, you know the next events that you are expecting are near. What events were they expecting? The second coming (Matt 24:3)

vs. 33 Some people use the “you” to refer only to the disciples. They deny the possibility of an editorial or indefinite second person plural. They say “you” can’t refer to anybody other than the disciples. We do this all the time. We say something like, “When you ride your bike, you should wear a helmet.” We really mean, when anybody rides a bike, they should wear a helmet.” Paul said, “but we who are alive and remain ...” That does not mean the rapture had to have occurred because Paul had to be included... Therefore, the “you” is whoever might see these events.

“recognize that He is near..” NIV changes this to “it is near” (referring to the kingdom) but “He” is A better translation. But that is not a problem because when Messiah is near, so is the kingdom.

vs. 34 This generation is not the disciples. It is the generation that sees the signs. What signs? The events of the Tribulation. So, the generation that sees the events of the Tribulation will see the second coming of Christ.

Verses 34 and 35 give us the idea of imminency (it will take place soon - for that generation) and inerrancy (it is sure to happen.)

Heaven and earth will pass away after the Millenium. Then a new heaven and earth will be created.

The Point

The events of the tribulation will announce the imminency of the second coming and the fulfillment of the promises of the earthly kingdom on earth.

The Particulars

The fig tree does not have a direct correlation to anything -- like the nation of Israel. Jesus is just using the imagery that when the leaves sprout, you know that something else is right around the corner -- the fruit is about to appear.... (Although the fig tree represents Israel elsewhere, that doesn’t mean it has to represent Israel here. Notice that Jesus does not say, “When you see the fig tree planted, know....” He says, “When you see the leaves...know...”) Jesus could have used another type of tree for the analogy. It is not important that it is a fig tree.

The generation in its context. “This generation” does not refer to a 40 year period of time. Some have taken it that way (like Hal Lindsey who wrote a book called, *The Terminal Generation*. They start the countdown from some event like the founding of the nation of Israel in 1948 and countdown 40 years, thinking that the rapture and tribulation would happen by 1988. Now Hal Lindsey says he is sorry he wrote that.) Some guy wrote a book called *88 reasons for the rapture in 1988*. Then he revised it and changed the title to *89 reasons for the rapture in 1989*. Why is it that if the Son of Man doesn’t know the day or hour (Mk 13:32), some think they do know? The “Generation” is a group of people alive to see the events.

The Principles

The certainty of prophetic judgment should cause one to examine one’s faith. Are you ready for Christ’s return? This doesn’t mean you have to doubt your salvation. It is just nice to know that you know. It is a confidence factor.

The prophetic Word of God is as sure and secure as the rest of His message. (vs. 35)

Matt 3:2, 4:17, 10:1-23 are all talking about the nearness of the kingdom, but after the rejection in 13:, there are no more uses of engeken until the Olivet discourse in Mat 24. When you see the tribulation, then the kingdom of God is near.

That is why I see an offer, rejection, and postponement of the kingdom. This is in reference to the earthly kingdom. Not to deny that there are spiritual aspects of the kingdom in effect now.

After Jesus tells the parable of the fig tree, He gives several brief parables to show what the response one should have when he sees the signs.

The Watchful Doorkeeper

The Passage

Mark 13:32-37

The Parameters

The context is the same as the above parable. Jesus has just told them about the tribulation and the second coming.

The Problem

What should the response be to seeing the signs? “How can one avoid being caught off guard at the return of Christ?”

The Presentation

The time of the return is unknown, so be alert, watch and do not be caught sleeping. It is helpful to understand the cultural background here because anyone caught sleeping on guard was executed.

Watchfulness = belief or faith.

The Principles

The Olivet Discourse primarily concerned the return of the Lord at the Second Advent. Those who will be alive and to whom the signs of the heavens will appear are urged not to get caught off guard by the sudden return of the Son of Man.

The Biblical context demands a time frame at the end of the tribulation and not before the rapture for the interpretation of this parable, although the application may extend to those in the church expecting the rapture. If the second advent of Christ to the earth is imminent, how much more the rapture?

Faith in the soon return of the Lord will be demonstrated by watchfulness and alertness.

Knowing the judgment that awaits the unbeliever, I should be sure I am saved and seek to warn others so they can be saved.

The Watchful Owner and the Thief in the Night

The Passage

Matt. 24:42-44

The Parameters

Discussion about Tribulation, Second Coming of Christ, parable of the fig tree, then the discussion about the days of Noah. The days of Noah with the sudden judgment is used as the illustration of the danger of being caught off guard by the unexpected time of its arrival. Prior to the flood, it had never rained. So, when Noah said it was going to flood, they thought he was crazy. Then, after all were inside the ark and the door was shut, it started to rain for the first time in history. Everyone was caught off guard. As in the previous parable, watchfulness is the byword of belief. The time of arrival for the Son of Man is unknown as is likened to a thief arriving in the middle of the night.

The Problem

For those who are alive at the Second Advent of Christ to the earth, what will keep them from being surprised by the “thief-in-the-night” appearance of the Son of Man who will execute His judgment upon the unbelievers of that time?

The appearance of the thief in the night is to judge! - Not to deliver by means of the rapture.

“I wish we’d all been ready...” Larry Norman wrote a song about that for a the movie called *The Thief in the Night*, but he pulled the phrase out of context. People still get saved from the *The Thief in the Night* movie, but it is not biblically correct. Luke 17:37 shows that those that are taken will go where the vultures are - i.e. judgment. Phil 1 is a great passage to keep in mind. “Some people preach Christ out of pretense...” If God can use a donkey in the OT to spread the truth, He can use us. His word does not return void... God uses us in our maturing and learning process. It’s good we don’t have to wait until we are mature -- especially since we never arrive.

The Presentation

He makes a comparison to the unexpectedness of a thief who comes into your house at night and steals something. If you had known, you would have been sitting there with your gun or have the police sitting there with you.

Consequently, He gives a command: be ready: the Son of Man will come at an unexpected hour.

Believers are not caught off guard by the thief because we are not in the night-time period. Paul explains that later in 1Thess 5:4. He says we “are not of the darkness that the day should overtake you like a thief.” You have to understand the concept of the Jewish day. The Jewish day started with in the evening and then came the daylight. Tribulation comes before blessing. Therefore, when Thess says you are not of the night, it means they would not be in the tribulation. And if the thief comes in the night, he is coming in the tribulation.

Luke 17:37 The point of the Noah and Lot illustrations is the judgment. Those that were not ready for the flood were all destroyed. Same in Sodom and Gomorrah. Those that are not ready for the return of Christ will all be destroyed. You don’t want to be taken here, because the end is judgment.

The Point

Since no one knows the day nor the hour of the Lord’s return, watchful and readiness should characterize those who would be prepared for His coming.

The Relationship to the Kingdom

Those who are not prepared for the sudden and unexpected return of Christ, as manifested in their lack of watchfulness and readiness, will be taken away in the judgment which will immediately precede the establishment of the Messianic kingdom on earth for a millennium.

The Principles

Same as last parable.

If the Christ's return at the end of the tribulation will be as surprising as a thief in the night, then how much more so with the rapture which is not preceded by signs.

The Wise Servant

The Passage

Matt. 24:45-51

The Parameters

The previous parables were given in order to challenge the listener or reader who will be alive at the end of the tribulation to alertness and watchfulness in light of the “significant” events which will precede the imminent return of Christ. But I think this parable takes it one step further.

The Problem

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant ?” What should the proper response to the signs which will be given at the end of the age?

The Presentation

The sensible slave

He is the one who is faithful while the master is away. He carries out his responsibilities. He will not only be ready when the master returns, he will also be rewarded.

The evil slave.

Everyone knows the tendency to slack off when the boss is gone. That is what the evil slave does.

His attitude - It doesn't matter how I live as long as the master is away. He is rationalizing. 2Pe 3 says, “the world has remained unchanged since the beginning.”

His actions - cruelty and indulgence...In modern language, he is abusive and self destructive.

His judgment (50-51) is *unexpected*: “on a day when he does not expect and at an hour which he does not know” and it is *final*: “assign him to a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth.” Matt uses this phrase 5 times and always as a reference to hell. This is not the punishment for a disobedient believer.

The Point

Although the return of the Lord is certain as to its event and unknown as to its time, one should be faithful and sensible in light of the rewards and judgments which will be given at that time.

The Relationship to the Kingdom

Since wisdom and faithfulness are the demonstration of one's faith, the return of Christ will involve a judgment in which those who have demonstrated such faith will enter and assume greater responsibilities in the kingdom, while those who do not will be excluded from the kingdom to experience the wrath of Christ along with the hypocrites.

The Principles

While the last three parables emphasized the need for faith (readiness) for entering the kingdom, this parable also shows that there will be rewards for faithfulness (responsibility) in the tribulation.

The Ten Virgins

The Passage:

Matt. 25:1-13

The Parameters:

The Historical Setting

The Virgins:

The focus is not really on whether or not they had known a man, it is just that these are young unmarried girls.

The Marriage Customs

Marriage custom of that day was as follows: The Groom would prepare a place for his bride. It might be his own house or a place at his father's house. Then he would go to her father's house to get her. There might be a small party at her house, so there was a small delay. Then the Bride and Groom would return to his father's house for the marriage feast or banquet (which usually lasted for seven days).

The ten young ladies would be somewhere along the route between the bride's house and the groom's house. They are waiting for the bride and groom to return and they hope to join the procession and enter with them into the party. If they are with the crowd, they will be able to slip right in. If they aren't with the procession, then the door keepers will turn them away because they don't know them. They don't have an invitation.

The Literary Setting

It is crucial to understand the historical setting for the last three parables. You need to understand who the audience is. If you don't, you will be try to make direct application to the church. This parable is written to those (perhaps specifically to Jews) who will be alive during the Tribulation.

The Problem

What will determine whether a Jewish person will participate in the wedding feast of the Bridegroom in the kingdom of God?

The Progression: Biographical (Alternating contrasts)

There is debate about what kind of lamps these were. Were they the little clay lamps or torches? It seems that the clay ones fit the story better because they would be the kind that run out of oil and need to be refilled. What is important is that they were unprepared.

vs. 9 There was not enough oil for both. These ladies were not being selfish. The point is you need to make your own preparations. You may have heard the saying, "God has no grandchildren. He only has children." The point is you have to have your own faith. Someone else can't believe for you.

I think that all the Jews in the Tribulation will know that the King is coming, but they will not know exactly when he will return and will not be prepared.

What does being "unprepared" mean? Not believing. No faith.

The Point

Preparedness is the response of faith which will enable one to enter the kingdom at the time of the Bridegroom's unexpected arrival. The lack of proper preparation is the demonstration of unbelief which will disqualify one from the entrance and enjoyment in the kingdom.

Relationship to the Kingdom

The question of salvation or entrance into the kingdom is the subject of this parable where the subject of the next will detail the basis of rewards. Preparedness is the mark of faith which is the only prerequisite for entrance into the kingdom and the participation in the celebration of the wedding feast of the Bridegroom. In view are those people who will be alive at the end of the tribulation who have been witnesses to the events and warnings as to the nearness of the kingdom.

Some people stress the idea of “alertness,” but notice that all the ladies were asleep.

The Particulars

The cultural background of the wedding feast in the ANE

The imagery of the Bridegroom for Messiah and the wedding feast for His Kingdom.

The Principles

This passage does not have much direct application to us. It is directed toward Jewish people in the tribulation. But we can draw some general principles from it.

Faith is demonstrated in alert preparation for the Lord’s return.

Failure to prepare for the eternal future will result in the exclusion from eternity in the future.

Just because people have heard and been impressed by the truth, doesn’t mean they believed. Certainly there will be Jews who have heard of the rapture and will recognize it when it happens, but they will not believe. They will put it off and not be prepared when Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation.

What are we doing to evangelize those left after the rapture? Are there any tracts made up that can be distributed when all the Christians disappear? Who will distribute them? I don’t know any organization that is investing its money in witnessing to tribulation people.

This parable just shows that those that were not prepared will be shut out. The next parable goes a little further and shows that there will be judgment (cf. Mat 25:30).

The Talents

The Passage:

Matt. 25:14-30

It is unfortunate that this is called the parable of the talents because we think of spiritual gifts when we hear the word “talents,” but talents were just money. This is talking about money and responsibility in a general sense.

The Parameters

The previous Parable of the Ten Virgins has detailed what qualifies one to enter and enjoy the blessings of the kingdom of heaven (25:1-13). The emphasis was on being wise and being prepared. We concluded that that meant having faith. This parable will talk about being faithful.

The following context reveals the judgment of the nations (25:31-46).

The Problem

What will happen to those that do enter the kingdom? If we relate it back to the previous parable, were the five virgins who entered the feast treated the same? What about the judgments and rewards to be given at the return of Christ?

The Progression:

Logical and Ideological (c/e of rewards and judgments)

The 5-talent man (19-21)

The statement: “Well done good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.”

The 2-talent man (22-23)

The statement: “Well done good and faithful slave; you were faithful in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”

Is this man condemned for not making as much as the first? No. We don’t need to compare ourselves with others.

The 1 talent man (24-28)

He thought the master was hard. He doesn’t appear to be that way when he dealt with the first two.

The condemnation of the man by the master

You wicked, lazy servant. Is the master admitting to being terrible? The third servant didn’t really know the master. The other two knew the master and probably thought, “The master has given me this so I can try something. Even if I blow it, that is why he has given it to me.” The third guy doesn’t know or trust the master. He is afraid of him.

If you try, you get great commendation. If you don’t try, you won’t have any success.

Notice also that the master holds the slave accountable for what he thought--not what was true, but for what he thought was true. God holds us accountable for what we think. I don’t know how there can be Truth and we be held accountable for the truth and at the same time be held accountable for what we think is true and still have justice, but I think the Bible teaches that God does that somehow. How else can you explain that things will be worse for the generation that rejected Christ personally than for those in Sodom and Gomorrah and at the same time hold that Jesus is the only way to heaven.

The redistribution to the 10-talent man by the master

Luke 19 is similar to this. But there he gave them all equal trusts and there were unequal returns. There were different rewards. Here there are identical rewards.

The Point

For the variety of responsibilities which have been assigned in accordance to ability to be carried out during His absence, the Messiah will return to proportionately reward the faithful who will enter the kingdom and to judge the wicked who are excluded.

The Relationship to the Kingdom Program

“In this parable Christ was teaching that those who see the signs forewarning of Messiah’s approach will have the opportunity to prepare themselves and to prove themselves faithful servants of His; however, if such persons do not do so, they will be barred from the kingdom that Christ will establish at His second coming. The parable, then, shows both the rewards for faithfulness and the judgment for unfaithfulness that await those who are anticipating Messiah’s coming.” (J.D. Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 156.)

The Particulars

Talent = 6,000 days wages. About \$250,000 in modern terms at minimum wage.

Contrast and comparisons with the Parable of the Minas (Pounds):

The conclusion: the two parables which have similar themes were given on different occasions and give the balanced teaching that responsibilities are delegated with both equality (salvation) and diversity (abilities i.e. gifts).

The Principles

- One’s stewardship is a privileged responsibility for which he will be held accountable.
- Both the opportunity to work and be rewarded is a testimony to the grace of God.
- There is a danger of hoarding that which God wants me to invest for eternal priorities.
- During the absence of Christ believers should work diligently with the responsibilities with which each has been entrusted.
- The realities of future judgment ought to promote faithful efforts in the present.

The Sheep and the Goats

The Passage

Matt. 25:31-46

The Parameters

“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him” (25:3-32a). This passage is the fitting conclusion to the Olivet Discourse in which Jesus has revealed His coming at the end of the age at which time He will gather the elect and judge the wicked. Cf. Last Judgment: Zech. 14:5; Matt. 16:27; 19:28; 2 Thess. 1:7; Jude 14,15; Rev. 3:21; 20:11)

The Problem

What will be the basis on which Jesus will separate the righteous from the wicked of the nations for their eternal destinies and what will be the nature of those eternal experiences?

The Progression

Ideological: the basis of judgment

Presentation -Summarized:

The return of the Son of Man (31-33)

The glory

The gathering

The reward for the sheep (34-40)

Their identity: “blessed of My Father”

Their inheritance: “inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”

Their qualification: a right response to Christ as evidenced by their treatment of “these brothers of Mine, even the least of these”

The retribution for the goats (41-45)

Their identity: “accursed ones”

Their punishment: “depart from me ... into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”

Their qualification: a rejecting response to Christ as evidenced by their treatment of “one of the least of these”

The respective destinies (46)

goats - accursed ones: eternal punishment

sheep - righteous: eternal life

The Central Truth

When Christ returns to assume His glorious throne, all the nations of the earth will be gathered for a judgment which will result in either eternal life or to eternal fire, the basis of which will be their response to Jesus Christ as evidenced by their response to His “brothers”.

The Relationship to the Kingdom

This passage is very helpful in clarifying the perspective in the Gospels in that inheriting the kingdom is defined in this passage as entrance into eternal life. Only the righteous inherit the kingdom and enter into eternal life. All unrighteous are destined for the reality of an eternal punishment of fire.

The Particulars

The glorious throne

The identity of the “brothers” and when they are helped

Works as the basis of judgment

Eternal separation in Matthew: 3:12; 13:30, 49, 50; 25:2, 30

The Principles

- The good works which the righteous perform are not the root but the fruit of the grace.
- James 2:15-17
- The judgments of God are final and unalterable.
- One’s response to the Word of God even as expressed through others is viewed as synonymous with one’s response to God.

SUMMARY

These parables have often been mis-interpreted in the past because people do not look at the context. The context is the tribulation and the second coming of Christ.

The parable of the fig tree tells us that when people see the signs of the tribulation, they need to recognize that the Lord will return soon to judge the earth.

The parables of the watchful owner and the watchful doorkeeper teach that the proper response to recognizing these signs is to believe that the Lord is about to return. Those people who rejected Christ during the church age, or didn’t hear about Him will have a second chance to believe. (Some teach that there are no second chances for those that rejected in the church age. Only those who hear about Christ for the first time will have a chance. It is possible, but I’m not sure.)

The parable about the faithful servant shows that there will even be rewards given in eternity for those who not only believe but who also are faithful.

The parable of the Virgins shows that each person must have their own faith to enter the kingdom. Just like they couldn’t borrow oil from their friends, those in the tribulation must have their own faith.

The parable of the talents shows that faithfulness for those who believe will be rewarded and those with out knowledge of the Master (no faith) will be barred from the kingdom.

The parable of the sheep and the goats shows that one’s treatment of God’s people in the tribulation will be a demonstration of one’s faith in God which is the key to entrance into the kingdom.

APPLICATION

These parables don’t apply directly to us, but they do teach that even with all the signs of the tribulation, the second coming will be unexpected. If that is true, then how much more so with the Rapture.

We need to look to ourselves and see if we believe. I’m not saying we need to doubt our salvation. We just need to be sure. Have we just been going to church all our lives because our parents went and never placed our personal faith in Jesus Christ’s death on the cross for our sins?

Perhaps we need to think about making tracts and have plans for their distribution after we are raptured so that people will get the message during the tribulation. But we don’t need to wait until the tribulation to witness.